Food Fight

by Velvet95

Summary

Korra is a talented and carefree food truck proprietor with a huge love of cooking but no patience for what she considers the stuffy and overbearing culture of haute cuisine. Asami Sato is the brilliant executive chef of one of the top restaurants around and reveres the traditions of a well-run kitchen. When their paths cross, the heat rises in the kitchen in more ways than one...

Notes

This was inspired by an author's note from A_Fazey's excellent "What the Heart Wants" around a Korrasami catering story. I found myself thinking about it more and realized that while I had no ideas around catering, I was coming up with plenty around cooking, so decided to give it a shot. My first fic, having fun writing it so far. Hoping to get updates out weekly, rated Mature for future content...

- Inspired by What the Heart Wants by A_Fazey
Chapter 1

It was a crisp spring morning in San Francisco when the first of the delivery trucks started pulling up in front of an elegant building on California Street, home of Sato Grill, voted top restaurant in San Francisco two years running and a recent recipient of its second Michelin star. The front door was propped open by a young man in crisp chef’s whites, striped pants, and bright orange clogs. Door secured, he stepped back and a seemingly endless stream of crates, bags, and boxes began flooding into the kitchen. Standing in the center of the kitchen a second figure in chef’s whites stood at attention with a clipboard, carefully checking off each delivery against her list, occasionally murmuring friendly greetings to familiar faces as they deposited their loads onto counters or into the waiting hands of the prep cooks. The shelves of the walk-in cooler were swiftly filled, mounds of vegetables were carefully cleaned and piled on counters, and the sounds of knives slapping cutting boards soon filled the kitchen with a peaceful percussion.

The young woman with the clipboard retreated to the small office attached to the kitchen, hung the clipboard on its hook next to the door and pulled a fresh printout off the printer, double-checking the menu for the day.

“Opal?”

She looked up to see Kai standing in the doorway, looking anxious as he bounced on his orange clogs.

“Um, we’re having a situation with the beef stock. Just caught Wu near the pot.”

Opal sighed and stood up, thinking irritated thoughts about this latest batch of interns from the nearby cooking school.

“And why was Wu anywhere near the beef stock? I thought it was clear he was delegated to vegetable prep only?”

Kai grinned.

“I think he was hoping to redeem himself on the sly or some shit like that, but I caught him adding ingredients before he could get away. We are in the process of explaining the error of his ways.”

Opal gasped when she turned the corner and saw Wu, eyes bulging out of his head, his gray student chef’s toque stuffed into his mouth, his body bound tightly to a nearby support post with duct tape. Several prep cooks stood nearby, idly playing with cleavers and putting on quite the menacing act for the hapless culinary student. She bit her lip hard, trying desperately not to laugh. She glanced sideways, catching Kai’s eye. He shrugged, not bothering to hide his grin.

“Okay Wu,” said Opal wearily, “you were apparently caught messing with the beef stock. Which, I might add, is going to be an ingredient in two appetizers and an entree tonight. And I might also add, you had no business being anywhere near the beef stock because of last week’s little escapade. So, let me ask you this: after working so hard to even get this internship, are you now trying to get expelled from cooking school? You know better than to mess with anything without permission!”

Wu tried desperately to explain around his toque. Opal let him suffer for about twenty seconds before giving up and nodding at Kai to un-gag him.

“Oh god, please don’t tell Chef! I was trying to do it the right way and when I saw it on the list for tonight I thought I could do better and oh god I’m so gonna get expelled…”
Wu dropped his head miserably. Opal raised a meaningful eyebrow and the prep cooks rolled their eyes collectively and headed back to work. The pot of beef stock bubbled merrily as she approached it. She could see herbs floating haphazardly along the surface of the broth and mentally groaned.

“Wu,” she said, not looking at him, instead continuing to stare intently at the pot, “what am I looking at here?”

“Um, parsley and thyme and…” he trailed off.

Open took a spoon and carefully skimmed some green bits off and brought it to pale and shaking prisoner.

“And do you recall how such herbs are supposed to be added to a pot of stock? Maybe in a bouquet garni or sachet?” His eyes were fixed on the spoon, and he gulped. “Certainly not just dumped in loosely making it exceedingly annoying if not impossible to fully extract it from the stock later?”

Wu closed his eyes, beads of sweat visible on his forehead.

Opal tossed the spool into a nearby sink and rubbed her temples.

“Kai?”

Kai was at her side instantly.

“New batch, and make it fast.”

“You got it.”

Opal grabbed some kitchen shears and cut Wu loose from the tape.

“Wu? I’m going to do you a favor. I’m going to tell you to get out of the restaurant now, before Chef shows up. What she decides to report back to the school I can’t really say at this point, but I can guarantee that the safest course of action for you is to not be here when she arrives, because do you remember what she always says, Wu?”

Wu shrank back, a hunted look on his face as he whispered, “Order and discipline make for a good kitchen.”

Opal beamed at him.

“Exactly. Order and discipline, which you seemingly fail to appreciate on a regular basis. Honestly,” she continued, putting a hand on his shoulder and pushing him firmly through the main dining area towards the door, “do you really want to work in a restaurant like this? There are a whole lot of other types of places where you can make food that might be better suited to y-”

She abruptly ran into him as he stopped in his tracks, whimpering.

“Good morning Opal, Wu,” said a quiet voice.

Opal winced, and shook her head ruefully.

“Good morning, Chef. Um, Wu isn’t feeling so good so I’m sending him home. Say goodbye, Wu!”

Wu sprinted for the door and disappeared.

Opal looked up at the raised eyebrow of Asami Sato, executive chef of Sato Grill, one of the
youngest ever recipients of a James Beard award, and a notorious stickler for details.

“He did look ill, but he certainly ran fast,” Asami commented drily as she headed towards the kitchen. “Anything I should know about?”

“Beef stock.”

“Again?”

“Unfortunately. Kai caught on fast enough so there’s no problem recovering.”

They pushed through the swinging door into the kitchen, and Opal hid a smile at the sight of spines straightening everywhere. She looked over towards the stoves and caught Kai’s eye. He tilted his head towards the fresh pot and winked. Asami glanced around the bustling kitchen with a practiced eye, and nodded with approval at the careful choreography of food preparation.

“I really need to give Lin some grief for this. This is the third batch of interns she’s sent over that had at least one person utterly unsuited for this kitchen. Good morning, everyone!” she added more loudly.

An answering chorus of “Good morning, Chef!” followed her into her office. She sat down at her desk and powered up her computer. Opal appeared a few minutes later with two perfectly pulled shots of espresso. She handed one to Asami and then sank down into a second chair next to Asami’s desk.

Asami sipped carefully and sighed.

“You know, your espresso is one of the reasons I made you sous chef.”

Opal stuck her tongue out.

“Ha, you’re funny. So, any adjustments with the menu I should know about or should I just plan on being surprised? And by the way, I think the line cooks have a betting pool going on how long you can keep doing last minute switches before I kill you.”

Asami chuckled, taking a second sip of her espresso while she browsed her email. Two requests for interviews that she continued to avoid, another offer from Varrick to open a restaurant in his new hotel that she definitely was going to ignore, and then her hand froze, spotting a lone email sent late last night from someone she really didn’t want to talk to. She closed her eyes and took a deep breath. Then she turned brightly back to Opal.

“As it so happens, I found some good stuff at the farmer’s market this morning, but I’ll let you decide what you want to do with it. How’s that for generosity?”

She reached into her duffle bag and pulled out a package wrapped in paper. Opal unwrapped it curiously then gasped when it was revealed to be a large mason jar full of fresh golden honeycomb. She held it up to the light reverently and blushed as she caught Asami watching her affectionately.

“Is this the only jar you got?”

“Sadly yes. I managed to get the last one, and I almost caused a riot in the process. And honestly, this is a gift for you for your birthday.”

Opal leapt up to give her a hug. “You are the best boss ever! But you know what, I’ll let Kya know I have it in case we get a special customer that needs their world rocked tonight.”
Kya was Sato Grill’s pastry chef, and loved to do custom deserts on the fly for favored customers. She was the most seasoned chef in the kitchen and had owned several restaurants herself, but now considered herself happily semi-retired in Asami’s kitchen where she was allowed to do whatever she wanted when it came to deserts and not have to worry about anything else.

Asami laughed. “Well, it’s yours to do with as you will, or Kya’s will as the case may be, but I do hope you save yourself some. I know it’s your favorite.”

Opal downed the last of her espresso and stood up, cradling the jar of honeycomb carefully in the crook of her elbow.

“Okay, I’m back to terrorizing the interns and other important aspects of kitchen management. Thanks again for this lovely gift! Nobody will believe me when I tell them you actually got me a birthday present.”

“No need to tell anyone. I’d prefer to keep my reputation as a raging bitch intact, thank you. Nobody would take me seriously otherwise.”

Opal shook her head. “Asami, you’re one of the kindest people I know and that is no crime.”

“It is in the culinary world, I’m afraid.” Asami sighed, knowing she couldn’t put this next bit off any longer. “By the way, and speaking of raging bitchiness, did you see the article on Sato Grill in this week’s City Dining?” Asami asked, referring to San Francisco’s local restaurant-focused magazine.

Her sous chef paused at the door. “No, haven’t read it yet. Not good I take it?”

“It included a cute description of Sato Grill’s secret cocktail menu.”

There was a long pause. Opal pinched the bridge of her nose between thumb and forefinger. “I didn’t know… Do you want me to talk to him?” Opal finally asked, her face clearly dreading the prospect.

Asami waved the offer away. “No need. At least it was complimentary. You just know how much I like those kind of surprises.”

Opal sighed heavily and nodded, then quietly left.

Asami blew out a breath and turned back to her computer. She tapped her finger irritably on her desk, hesitating. She looked again at the glowing screen and the unread email that awaited her. Finally she cursed softly and shut down her email, bringing up her inventory spreadsheets instead. It was Friday and it was going to be a packed house and the last thing she needed to read was an awkward email from her father.

The high pitched screams of Back In Black were playing loudly from speakers propped on boxes as an olive-skinned woman with short brown hair stood working over piles of onions, garlic, peppers and fresh chilies. A pair of glitter encrusted googles protected her eyes from the fumes and she bounced slightly as she worked.

“Korra, I got the perfect thing for you!”

Korra lifted her head from where she was mid-dice of a jalapeño. She tossed her knife down on the table and peeled off a pair of bright purple latex gloves as she went to greet her friend, turning down AC/DC in passing.
“Hey Jinora, what did you get?”

Jinora glanced at the cutting board. “Sauce day I see.”

“Yeah, starting to get low. Come on, give. What did you get?”

Jinora looked around conspiratorially as she swung her backpack onto the counter next to the cutting board, then drew out what at first glance appeared to be a stale loaf of bread, but after a moment Korra realized it was covered with some kind of waxy textured substance.

“Your next secret ingredient!” Jinora handed Korra the strange item and beamed expectantly.

Korra turned it over in her hands, completely mystified. She took a cautious sniff and was rewarded by a hint of sour tanginess, and not a familiar one. Then she rubbed her thumb over the surface. It sort of felt like a cheese rind, but not one she’d ever seen or heard of…

“I give up. What the hell is this?”

Jinora laughed, pleased at Korra’s confusion.

“My friend Yaz just got back from trekking in the Himalayas and snuck a couple of these back for me. It’s some kind of cheese. Chirpy or Chim-chim-churree or hell, I don’t remember what the name is but he said it’s made from yak’s milk and it’s really good. He also had to sneak it past like a thousand customs people so you owe him.”

Korra rolled her eyes.

“I seriously don’t know what it is with you finding me new secret ingredients. It’s like you’re obsessed. Also, thanks for putting me into debt with a food smuggler named Yaz, you wench.”

Jinora moved her backpack from the table to a nearby chair before reaching in, pulling out a second log of himalayan yak cheese, a bright blue bandana, and her own set of googles. In her case they were dotted with multi-colored rhinestones. The bandana went over her long brown hair and the googles went over her beautiful dark eyes. She rubbed her hands together enthusiastically.

“Okay, so what am I prepping and where are we taking the Nagamobile today?”

Korra twirled her googles around her finger and looked at Jinora speculatively.

“Well, you could take over the stuff for the sauce or you could get the meat out of the cooler,” She paused for the inevitable and wasn’t disappointed when Jinora sprinted to the cutting board and grabbed an onion. “I seriously don’t know why you took this job when you’re a vegetarian. I make like, nothing vegetarian, ever.”

Jinora grimaced, her knife turning a large onion into tiny, precisely-sized chunks.

“I don’t mind it once it’s cooked, I swear. It’s just when it’s raw…” her voice trailed off and she visibly swallowed. “Anyway, that’s totally not true, you make vegetarian things. You just pretend you don’t to annoy me or something.”

Korra laughed and shook her head as she wrestled open the lid to her large camping cooler. Inside lay an assortment of carefully selected slabs of pork and beef sealed in plastic containers, each soaking in a deep red marinade. She grabbed a couple of containers and sloshed them around a bit, checking to see how much marinade had been absorbed.
“I’m going to go see if the grills are ready yet,” she announced. “These babies are ready to rock and roll. Also, we’re going to Fort Mason this afternoon. We got called to help feed some crazy event thing they’ve got going on — there’s going to be about six or eight food trucks I guess. The good news is that you don’t have to take payments, we’re getting a lump sum. The bad news is that it’s going to be a mob and we’ll have to work even faster than usual.”

Korra grabbed the handles on the cooler and gave a grunt as she lifted it up to carry outside.

Jinora looked over at her disapprovingly. “Korra, seriously? You’re going to kill yourself lifting that thing. I thought we agreed you were going to use the damn cart already?”

Korra groaned. “You’re too young to be my mom. It only weighs about a hundred pounds, sheesh.”

“Show off.” Jinora threw a piece of bell pepper at her as she passed. “Speaking of working hard, you said you were going to get somebody else to help you, what happened with that?” She raised her voice as Korra disappeared around the corner towards her grill pit. “Most of the other trucks have three people, and I can’t help you when I spend all the time taking orders.”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah,” Korra called back good naturedly. “Maybe you could spend some time finding somebody we would want to have help us instead of tracking down bizarro food items from the middle of bum fuck wherever.”

Korra grinned as she heard Jinora sigh heavily.
Korra peered critically at the thermometers on her two big grills. Perfect. She re-opened the cooler and started pulling glistening pork butts and tri-tips out of their containers and relishing the sizzle when they hit the grill, pork to the left, beef to the right. Once all the meat was placed she double-checked the temperatures one more time, then wound two old-fashioned egg timers so she wouldn’t forget to come out and turn things at the appropriate moment. She pulled herself a little straighter and took a deep breath of deliciously flavored smoke. She loved being able to cook outside on big steel grills, then drive her brightly painted food truck to different spots around the city and make people moan over her food. Her time in restaurant kitchens had almost broken her of the ability to cook with all the deadly seriousness and rigid hierarchies, not to mention the fact that every head chef she ever met seemed to be an asshole of the highest order. When she happened to meet a nice woman at a party with an old taco truck to sell, she and Korra had each downed a large shot of tequila and closed the deal, using most of her savings to do it. She then proceeded to destroy what was left of her savings and max out her credit cards to refurbish the truck into a polished chariot of culinary delight. It didn’t take long for the street food connoisseurs to discover that Korra made food like nobody’s business, and Korra settled in to a life of roving contentment, doing the cooking she loved without dealing with everything she hated about being in a professional kitchen. After six months of building her fan base, she realized she desperately needed another pair of hands. The following weekend at yet another party, she met Jinora and discovered she was a food truck groupie who happened to be looking for a new job. They collectively did five shots of tequila during negotiations and Jinora finally accepted Korra’s slightly slurred job offer, all the while loudly protesting she didn’t know anything about making food and that Korra was insane to want hire her for something as important as haute food truck cuisine.

Korra had just grinned. “I’ll teach you what you need to know, don’t worry. You just have to want to like to eat, which you seem to, and like to have fun, because that’s the most important thing, and you just did more shots than I did, which means you have nerves of steel.”

And Jinora did like to have fun, and was able to tell Korra loads of information about the other food trucks, where they would go, where to get the best ingredients, and what prices tended to get charged where.

More importantly, she had introduced Korra to a new passion, one she had never even known could exist: The Barbary Coast Food Fight. The Food Fight was an underground foodie paradise. Always held at a secret location, always strictly invitation only, the premise varied. Sometimes there would be head to head competitions between chefs with a panel of volunteer judges groaning their way through usually excellent but sometimes horrifying results. Other times there would be large banquets where different chefs were responsible for different courses, and the diners would vote for best course. Jinora was friends with one of the founders and hardly ever missed an event. One night she surprised Korra with a night out in a downtown parking garage, while hastily strung lights illuminated two chefs feverishly working over propane camp stoves while dozens of spectators called out encouragement. She managed to get a couple of mouthfuls of some of the best fish she had ever eaten before lights flashed and everyone was forced to disperse due to the arrival of security guards.

Korra was hooked, and through Jinora’s connection and her own growing reputation as a popular food truck chef, finally managed to score an invitation to compete. She became known for using the strange and unusual ingredients Jinora gleefully sourced for her, and while her win record wasn’t
perfect, she was having the time of her life.

She wandered back into the food prep area where Jinora was singing loudly along to Earth, Wind and Fire while mincing garlic. The strange logs of yak cheese sat where Jinora had left them on a large butcher block next to the refrigerator. She selected a new knife from her collection and grinned. With Jinora working away on the sauce prep and the meat roasting away outside, she had a little time to start figuring out what crazy tasty thing she could do with Himalayan Chim-chim-churree.

Opal stuck her head into Asami’s office.

“It’s four o clock, Chef,” Opal announced. Asami was frowning at her computer, which Opal took to mean she was working on her cookbook edits again.

Asami looked up from her computer with relief. She hated writing cookbooks but knew it was expected of a successful chef who wanted to stay that way. She stood up and stretched, closing her eyes and taking a couple of deep breathes to clear out the annoying visions of copy edits. Her apron hung on the back of her chair and she retrieved it before following Opal to the kitchen, tying it snugly around her waist as she walked.

The restaurant staff stood waiting quietly for instructions, chefs near the stoves and plating counters, and wait staff near the pickup counter. Prepared ingredients were everywhere, and stacks of clean pans and utensils were carefully placed near all the cooking stations.

“Okay everyone, welcome to Friday night. We’ve got two private parties in the wine room, one at 5:30 and one at 8. The second party includes the mayor and his favorite lobbyist, but I know you respect the work we do here too much to spit in the food.”

A chuckle rolled through the kitchen.

“There are no additions to the prepared menu for tonight,” Asami continued, quickly biting the inside of her cheek when she saw one of her line cooks nudge his neighbor and mouth “pay up!” She paused until she knew could continue without laughing. “Any questions?”

Kya leaned in from where she lounged near the dessert station.

“We know of anybody who might be worthy of extra attention tonight?” Kya’s eyes gleamed, which told Asami that Opal’s honeycomb had resulted in a good idea, and one which the neither the mayor nor his pet lobbyist were apparently going to get.

Asami smiled. “Sorry, Kya, nobody I’m aware of. But keep an eye on the dining room — somebody might stand out. And now, if there are no more questions, let’s get to it.”

There was a quiet flurry of white as the kitchen staff dispersed to their various stations to make a round of the menu items for tastings by Asami for quality control and for the waitstaff to better describe them to customers. Knowing she only had a few minutes, Asami made a beeline for the bar in the main dining area to have a word with her head bartender.

“Bolin!”

Asami saw Opal’s head jerk up in alarm, looking quickly over at Asami with wide eyes. Asami shook her head, and smiled slightly, trying to reassure her second-in-command with an amused look that there was no real danger of her boyfriend being fired.
Bolin had stopped halfway to the bar at Asami’s call, and stood waiting sheepishly for her to approach.

“Hey, Chef,” he mumbled, blushing. “I can guess why you wanted to talk to me.”

Asami waved him to one of the bar stools, and sat down next to him.

“And just when were you going to let me know you had an apparently famous secret cocktail menu?” Asami asked drily.

Bolin groaned. “You saw the article I take it.”

“I had no less than four emails about it last night, requesting confirmation.”

Bolin shook his head ruefully, rubbing his hand against the back of his neck. “I swear it just kind of happened. I had a friend come in to eat, and she asked me to make up a drink, so I did, and the woman she was with had a taste and then she asked me to make some changes to it, and they were really nice and it was a quiet night so I thought what the hell. Next thing I know there are these people coming in telling me they had heard about my specialty off menu cocktails and they wanted to try them, and then a lot of them had ideas about variations, and the next thing I know I’m getting requests a couple of times a week from the ‘secret menu’ and I kind of gave up after a while and just started keeping track of the ones that seem to go over well. I swear that’s it!”

Asami sighed. “Bolin, I promise I don’t mind that you’re making off menu drinks, that’s to be expected, but when something is happening that relates to the restaurant I really want to know about it, okay? It looks sort of bad when I get questions about my own restaurant that I don’t know the answer to.”

Bolin hung his head. “I’m really sorry for that, Chef.”

Asami laid a hand on his shoulder. “I’m going to take it easy on you, since apparently you didn’t tell Opal either. I suspect you’re in bit of trouble with her which is likely going to be punishment enough.”

Bolin eyes widened and he looked anxiously in the direction of the kitchen.

“Maybe you should go ahead and fire me, Asami,” he pleaded. “Then she might take pity upon me and kill me quickly rather than torturing me to death.”

Asami chuckled all the way back to the kitchen. As she strode through the swinging doors she breathed in the savory scents of the food, her food, and allowed herself to feel a tiny sense of pride in how far she had come from her first little hole in the wall restaurant she had opened six years ago to the gleaming dream she walked through now, past shallots being sautéed in bacon for the spinach salad and pork loins and steaks being seared before being put in the oven. The line cooks were periodically illuminated by bursts of flame as they swiftly shook a pan to stir the ingredients, and the heady aromas from the soup pots floated delectably throughout the kitchen. Then she frowned as she caught herself standing still, staring absently at the frantic action at the plating counter, and shook her head irritably. A distracted chef in a kitchen was bad news, especially if it was her. She rolled the sleeves up a little higher on her chef’s coat and started making the rounds.

Jinora stood on the grass like a runway worker, waving her arms to help Korra ease her truck into it’s designated space between the matte black of the Kung Pao Pizza truck and the shiny red and gold stripes of Hot Mama Love Kitchen. Jinora was already pulling the wheel chucks from the storage
bin at the back of the truck as Korra set the parking brake and hopped lightly down. She paused and
whistled softly. From the cab of the truck came a sleepy “woo woo”, and her dog Naga sat up,
stretched her whole body out into a shuddering shake, then clambered over the driver’s seat to join
Korra on the grass. Korra grabbed the end of the retractable leash line that was permanently hooked
to the front bumper and clipped Naga in. The large fluffy white malemute mix was a famous part of
Korra’s food truck persona, and she even had her own Twitter feed in addition to the portrait of her
painted on the truck’s hood.

“Korra, girl, where you been?” drawled a voice behind her. Korra turned around and grinned at
Alice, the stocky, coal-skinned and dreadlocked proprietor of Hot Mama.

“Hey Alice!” laughed Korra as she threw her arms around the woman in a huge hug. “I’ve been
trying some new spots lately. You should come with me down to the new University Hospital. I
think the food there is so bad even the comatose patients are sneaking out to try truck food.”

Alice laughed heartily.

“I just may at that. So, you done one of these before?”

Korra shook her head and wrestled the side panel of the truck up to expose the truck’s kitchen
windows. “Nah, just got the call a couple of days ago. Surprised when I got the call, to be honest.”

“Oh, that was my idea,” said Alice brightly as she gave Naga’s head a friendly pat. “Your food is
good and it’s always more fun when you’re around, so I may have dropped a few suggestions here
and there.”

Korra swatted Alice in the shoulder. “Such a shameless charmer, but I do appreciate the thought.
How much time do I have?”

“All done and ready for action!” Jinora chirped as she pulled her water bottle from behind its perch
about the cutting board and took a long swig. “Hope we don’t run out of food, I see a mass crowd
forming over there.”

Korra peered through the window and then shrugged. “Well, we’ve got all the food that will fit in
here. We run out when we run out.”

Three hours later Jinora was throwing Naga’s ball while Korra finished closing up the truck. As
usual, she had a handful of male admirers lingering nearby, offering not so subtle suggestions about
her need to join them in some additional socializing later that evening. Also as usual, Jinora ignored
them completely, and when one suitor got a little too close for comfort, Naga immediately dropped
her ball and stationed herself tensely against Jinora’s knees. Even at this distance Korra could hear
the low rumble of Naga’s warning growl, and grinned. Her fluffy beast had taken an instant liking to
Jinora, and did not mess around with unwanted company.

Jinora grinned knowingly at the young men and turned away with a flip of her pony tail, Naga
trotting happily alongside.

“Korra, you have the best dog ever.”

“Don’t inflate her already ridiculous ego,” Korra looked sternly over at her dog. “Come on, I’m done
and starving. I can’t believe those idiots actually cleaned us out! They practically licked the bins.”

Jinora opened the door for Naga and followed her into the cab. “Yeah, that was a pretty crazy mob.
But since we didn’t get any leftovers, let’s hit Sato Grill. Kai’s working tonight and maybe Bolin’s
got a new drink recipe!”

Korra groaned. “Seriously? You want to drag me to that stuffy place again, just so you can go drool
over your new boyfriend?”

“Oh come on, Korra! Even you admitted the food was good, and Bolin’s drinks are awesome! It’s
not like I’m going to make you put on a dress and get a table, which by the way is impossible with
the wait list that place has. We can just hang out at the end of the bar like before and get free
tastings.”

Korra eased the truck back onto the access road and headed back in the direction of her warehouse
loft. “First of all, I don’t own a dress and I certainly wouldn’t torture myself by stuffing myself into
one to go there. Secondly, fancy restaurants give me the heebie jeebies as you well know.”

“Yeah, but everybody I’ve met from Sato Grill is super awesome. I mean, come on, we met Kai at
the Food Fights, and you didn’t meet her but this other time Opal Beifong was there judging, and
she’s the sous chef! Do you think truly snooty chefs would do that sort of thing?” Jinora tugged off
her boots and propped her feet on the dashboard, wiggling her toes contentedly.

“I beat Kai at the Food Fights, you mean,” Korra guffawed. “And you were so quick to ‘console’
him. But you’re right, I will admit to being slightly impressed to find a chef from a Michelin rated
restaurant in a warehouse making street food.”

“For what it’s worth, Kai and Opal can’t say enough good things about Asami Sato. She might be
the one to prove you wrong about all head chefs being assholes.”

“Never happen.”

Chapter End Notes

Was gonna save this for the weekend, but since I unexpectedly got a good start on
Chapter 3 I thought what the hell and posted early. Also, now I’m really hungry...
Kya looked up from where she was drizzling a squiggle of dark chocolate over a slice of raspberry dulce de leche cake, having caught sight Kai from the corner of her eye barreling toward her from the kitchen door. He skidded to a stop next to her, a huge grin plastered to his face.

“Can I help you, Kai?”

“Oh, can you ever!” Kai looked back towards the door. “That amazing girl I was telling you about? She’s totally here. I’ve already sent out a couple of tastings, but I just remembered about the honeycomb and it’s almost closing time, so do you think you could hook her up?” His eyes were wide and pleading.

Kya laughed. “Show me your special girl, then.”

She followed his bouncing steps to the door and peered through the window into the dining room.

“Her name is Jinora. She’s over there at the end of the bar, talking to Bolin. The one with long dark hair and those crazy pretty eyes and she’s got the cutest smile...”

Kya popped Kai on the nose with amusement. “Down boy. And the lovely lady next to her? Also your friend?”

Kai deflated a bit, and rubbed the back of his neck.

“Oh, that’s Jinora’s boss. She, um,” Kai paused and turned bright red under Kya’s scrutiny. “She was the one who beat me that one time I was competing at the Food Fights.”

Kya burst out laughing and turned quickly away from the door, only to bump into Asami.

“Did we find a contender for tonight’s special dessert?” Asami asked, amused. “Also, what was that I heard about the Food Fights?”

Kai groaned. “Remember how I told you that I finally got a chance to cook and you so very graciously let me off early so I could go? Well, the chef who beat me is at the bar along with my girlfriend, and I’m only telling you this because otherwise Kya would have blackmail material on me.”

“And boy, would I use it, too,” Kya said, grinning. “Okay, young man, I will make them moan on your behalf.”

Asami shook her head. She was of two minds about the Food Fights; it didn’t feel right to have such a seemingly cavalier attitude about cooking. However, as much as she was uninterested in participating, she wouldn’t dream of imposing her distaste on her extremely loyal and talented staff. She glanced briefly through the window towards the bar, but only saw Bolin vigorously shaking a cocktail into icy perfection at one end of the bar, any guests sitting beyond him were blocked by his stocky form. She turned away, and instead walked over to peer over Kya’s shoulder as she placed a large piece of honeycomb onto her cutting board and carefully cut it into small cubes. She then pulled an assortment of cheeses from the cooler next to her workspace and spent a moment peering at her collection before selecting a deeply veined blue cheese, a soft goat cheese, and a little mound of
Using a small knife and a pair of tweezers, she delicately sliced tiny slivers of each cheese and inserted them into the cells of the honeycomb cubes, barely disturbing the golden honey pooled in each.

Asami felt herself smiling as she watched the older woman at her craft. Kya had been a close friend of Asami’s mother and had mentored Asami when she decided to make a career in the culinary world. Asami had worked at several of Kya’s restaurants while she attended cooking school, learning pretty much every position from waitress to dishwasher to line cook. Several years into her retirement when Asami was making plans for Sato Grill, Kya unexpectedly offered to come out of retirement to join Asami’s staff. Kya swore she was bored and needed something to do, but Asami occasionally wondered if there were other reasons why Kya decided she wanted to cook in Asami’s kitchen.

Kya’s hands continued to move swiftly and surely. Once each cube was filled with cheese, she pulled open a container of hazelnuts and pulled an extra fine grater from her utensil drawer, carefully grating hazelnut over the top of each cube. She then finished them off a sprinkle of sea salt and stepped back to admire her work.

“Yes, I believe these will be moan worthy,” she said at last, smiling happily. She picked up a small spatula and carefully started platting the cubes onto the platter, doing one final sprinkle of grated hazelnut and sea salt when she was done. “Go get Opal, I think this will end the evening nicely.”

“I’m here!” Opal said excitedly from behind them. “Are you kidding? Like I didn’t see you grab my jar.”

Kya picked up the platter with a flourish. “Come my young chefs! Let’s go impress Kai’s new lady, and maybe impress the woman who kicked Kai’s ass.”

Opal and Kai laughed and led the way out of the kitchen. Asami debated whether or not to join them until she saw Kya glaring at her, clearly waiting.

“Asami,” began Kya with a glint in her eye, “if you don’t come enjoy a little frivolity with us and sample my delectable honeycomb, I will accidentally drop your mother’s nickname for you in front of the entire staff.”

Asami threw up her hands in defeat. “Fine, I’m coming. Far be it for me to finish preparing the next supplies order.”

Kya nudged Asami with her elbow as they walked through the doors. “I happen to know you don’t need to submit it until Monday morning, so don’t give me any of your lip.”

“Remind me again why I hired you?”

Kya chucked and threaded her way though the now mostly empty restaurant on her way to the bar, Asami trailing along behind her. As they neared the bar Asami finally saw the two women who had been sitting there. Kai was sitting close to one woman already, her long dark hair loosely braided and her eyes sparkling as she looked at him. The other woman was taking a sip of the cocktail Bolin had placed in front of her, her eyes closed, apparently in appreciation. As Kya set her platter onto the bar top Jinora turned from Kai, and her eyes widened as she saw the approaching wall of chef’s whites. She started to grin, elbowing her companion gently.

“Hey Korra, I think this crew came out to rumble with us!” Jinora joked. The woman ignored her.

Bolin laughed delightedly. “No rumbles allowed at Sato Grill. I am pleased to introduce you to Opal
and Kya,” nodding at the two women sitting down at the bar. Then he turned to Asami who had joined him behind the bar. “And this is Asami Sato.”

“I’m Jinora!” said Jinora cheerfully as Opal nodded, “Opal and I have met, but great to meet you Kya, Miss Sato.”

Asami smiled. “Just Asami, please. Only food critics call me Miss Sato, and then only to annoy me.”

Korra sat up, clearly having missed everything going on around her, and swallowed the mouthful of cocktail she had been savoring.

“Oh Bolin,” she said, still not opening her eyes. “I think I got it. You added something infused with chili and maybe espresso?”

Bolin laughed delightedly. “I’m impressed, I didn’t think you’d be able to tell what it was! That’s my new hellfire bitters.”

Korra opened her eyes, giving him a baleful glare. “Did I not tell you my tongue is the most talented on the planet?”

There was an awkward pause while everyone digested this comment, then Bolin and Kai guffawed loudly. Korra blushed furiously when she realized her inadvertent innuendo. She dropped her eyes to the granite bar top, just now recognizing she was now surrounded with what looked like half of the restaurant’s kitchen staff all looking at her expectantly. “Uh, sorry everyone, I was a little distracted just now. I’m Korra.”

Jinora sniggered. “It’s okay, Korra. The fact that you’re a complete dork is one of your more charming traits.”

“You are so fired,” Korra growled irritably, but finally looked up to politely greet the people around her, still flushed with embarrassment. She nodded at Kai, and murmured “Nice to meet you,” at Kya and Opal. She then turned her gaze to the tall woman standing next to Bolin, saying “How’s it goi…”

Her breath caught as she found herself captured by sparkling emerald eyes and a stunning face framed in shining black hair. Dark lips were curled up slightly in greeting. After a long moment, Korra forced herself to look away, catching the elegantly stitched Sato over the right breast of the chef’s coat as she did so.

Shit, Korra thought to herself. Executive chef Asami fucking Sato herself. It figured that someone she had an instant inclination to dislike was the most beautiful woman she had ever seen. To her immense relief, Kya cleared her throat and everyone’s attention turned to the silver haired woman.

“Okay, everyone. Just brought a little something for everyone to try, in honor of new friends.”

Kai grinned broadly, relishing an opportunity to needle his former opponent. “Since you have the most talented tongue on the planet, Korra, perhaps you’ll tell us the ingredients.”

There was a round of muffled snickers at this this. Korra noticed Asami cross her arms and lean against the bar back, those damn distracting eyes watching her with an unreadable expression.

“You looking for another beat down, Kai?” Korra muttered in response, but grabbed a spoon and selected a piece of honeycomb. She closed her eyes again as she let it melt slowly across her tongue. She heard the clink of more spoons against the platter as the others started their own tasting, and the sounds faded in the face of her fierce concentration, but her thoughts were treacherous and new
distractions emerged. *Damn, I have never seen such beautiful eyes. Shit, concentrate, Korra.* At first she only tasted the earthy sweetness of the honey, then *geez the thought of those lips covered in honey. Dammit, don’t think about that!* She caught a gritty texture, no two gritty textures, definitely some sea salt. Nuttiness? *I doubt there’s anything gritty about Sato, she looks fucking perfect, oh shut up, shut up, shut up. Focus on the food!* Her taste buds absorbed the tangy cheeses, definitely more than one… *I wonder what she looks like without a chef’s coat, pretty sure it’s spectacular, crap this is killing me.* Korra whimpered softly, hands clenched in her lap as she carefully identified the final flavors in her mind. *There, got it.*

Her eyes snapped open, and she swallowed slowly, almost regretting that the exquisite mouthful was over, but relieved her mental tortures could also end. She resisted the urge to look at Asami’s delectable form and instead focused on Kya. “Did you make this?”

Kya nodded gravely, her eyes twinkling.

“Honeycomb, hazelnut, sea salt, blue cheese, chèvre, and I think ricotta, but I will reluctantly admit I’m not 100% sure on that one. The flavor was a little faint against everything else.”

Kya laughed. “Well done, Korra, I’m impressed.”

“I’m impressed by your dish. It was fabulous!”

Jinora had an ecstatic look on her face as she finished chewing. “Seriously, that was amazing, Kya. Thank you so much!”

Kya smiled gently at them both. “It was my pleasure.”

Opal stood up with a blissful smile. “You did my honeycomb proud, Kya, thanks. And now,” she said, giving Kai a direct look from where he sat shoulder to shoulder with Jinora, “time to go finish closing down the kitchen.”

Kai stood up reluctantly, giving Jinora’s hand a squeeze. “I’ll call you later, okay?”

“I’ll be up.”

Kya collected her platter and held it out to Korra. “Last bite?”

“You’re my new favorite person, Kya, thanks,” grinned Korra collected the last bite of honeycomb eagerly.

Kya smiled and followed Opal and Kai back to the kitchen. Bolin had gone to the other end of the bar to tend to some lingering customers. The restaurant’s dining room was now empty and bussers were clearing tables and stripping linens.

“Be right back, Korra, I got all sticky.” Jinora said, rubbing her fingers awkwardly before heading to the restroom.

“Sure.” Korra realizing she was now alone with Asami still standing behind the bar. She took a deep breath and turned to face her again, trying to think of something innocuous to say and trying hard not to stare into her eyes again. She finally settled on a very safe, “You’ve got a good staff here.”

Asami smiled, a look of pride on her face. “Thank you, I am very grateful for them.”

Korra blinked. This was not the answer she was expecting, and it must have showed on her face because Asami raised her eyebrow questioningly.
“Did I say something strange?”

“No!” Korra said quickly, “not at all. I’m sorry. I’m just… well, I guess I was expecting you to say something like ‘I trained them well’ or something like that. Most chefs would.”

Asami’s eyes flashed. “The implication being that I would take credit for their talents.”

Korra shrugged, not bothering to deny this.

“I will be the first to admit I hold myself and my staff to extremely high standards, but I would never be so thoughtlessly selfish as to assume my restaurant’s success was due to my efforts alone,” said Asami tensely.

“Then you would be the first head chef I’ve ever met to think that way.” Korra said quietly. “Sorry, bit of a touchy subject for me. I didn’t mean to offend you.”

She met Asami’s eyes again, no longer able to resist their pull. Asami for her part also seemed equally unwilling to look away, though there was a challenge in her eyes as she returned Korra’s gaze. Finally she said, “Your tasting palate is exceptional. Did you train at a culinary school?”

Korra sighed. “Yeah, I did. Worked at a couple of restaurants like this, too.”

Asami’s eyebrows went up, slightly. “But not anymore.”

“No,” said Korra with finality. “Not any more. Not ever again.”

She grabbed the half-full cocktail glass still in front of her and drained it, unable to meet Asami’s eyes any longer.

Jinora rejoined them, her face quizzical as she sensed the awkwardness between the two women.

“Everything okay?”

Korra shook her head and stood up, “Everything’s peachy.” She hesitated, then turned back to Asami, extending her hand in a sort of apology. “Thank you, Chef Sato. This has been an experience.”

Asami looked surprised, then extended her own hand over the bar to accept Korra’s proffered handshake. “Thank you Korra. Sounds like you’ve got an interesting story of your own. I’d think I’d like to hear it sometime.”

“Um, yeah,” Korra stuttered, “Maybe sometime. I gotta go!”

She turned quickly and hurried out of the restaurant before she embarrassed herself any further.

Jinora stayed quiet as she drove Korra back to her warehouse, the top down on her little Miata as they enjoyed a rare mild San Francisco night with no wind or fog. When they arrived she killed the motor and quickly hit the door lock button before Korra could exit the car.

“Okay, now I can give you my full attention. What the hell happened back there?”

Korra rubbed her eyes. “Nothing much, just made an ass of myself, as usual.”

“Boss lady, I know you have a thing about head chefs but I have never seen you behave that weird
before. Seriously, are you okay?"

Korra sighed. “Yeah, I’m okay. I promise. I should really get some sleep though.”

Jinora leaned over and gave her a quick hug. “Okay, if you say so. I’ll see you on Monday?”

“Yep. Food to make. People to feed. The usual.”

Asami sat at her desk, staring blankly at the pile of paperwork awaiting her attention, but unable to clear the memory of Korra’s brilliantly cerulean eyes and to wonder what made them so wary. She very much wanted to know more about this woman who apparently had a ridiculous talent for cooking but yet, according to Kai, worked out of a food truck. At the same time she wasn’t even sure why she was so curious and it was giving her a headache.

There was a quiet knock at her door and she turned around, expecting Opal to announce the kitchen was done and the staff was leaving. Instead Kya stood there, looking a little awkward.

“Kya?” said Asami, surprised. “I thought you left an hour ago.”

“I did leave, however I needed to come back. May I sit down?”

“Of course.”

Kya shut the door and sank down in the chair, looking seriously at Asami. “My dear, I know you’re not on the best of terms with your father,” she began.

“You mean my father who cheated on my mother? That father?” Asami said angrily. “And then asked for a divorce after he found out she was dying of cancer? Can’t imagine why you’d think I’d have difficulty with this.”

Kya closed her eyes and shook her head. “Asami, there is more to your mother’s story than you know, and I had desperately hoped that by now you would have given your father a chance to share it with you. I know he has been trying for some time to get in contact, but you have not responded. He called me tonight, very desperate.”

Asami’s jaw dropped, and she glared at the older woman. “I don’t believe this, Kya. My mother was your best friend. I can’t imagine why you would still even be in contact with him after what he did.”

Kya’s face fell, and she rubbed her hands nervously together in her lap. “It’s not my place to tell you that, Asami. You need to hear this from him, and you need to do it soon. I’m begging you.”

Asami felt fury growing within her, and she pushed herself away from her desk and stood up. “Forgive me for not being interested in anything he has to say, and I certainly don’t want to talk about this again, do you understand me?”

She grabbed her duffle bag and stalked out of the office. She looked around quickly and spotted Opal and the remaining chefs closing up the cooler.

“Opal,” she said loudly, ”please lock up tonight. I’m leaving now.”

Opal spun around at the irritated sound in Asami’s voice. “Asami, are you okay?”

But Asami was gone.
Well all of that could probably have gone a little better...
Chapter 4

Korra groaned as she heard frantic whining and felt heavy paws thudding against her mattress.

“Naga,” she mumbled irritably, “let me sleep!”

The whines suddenly escalated to loud barking and Korra shot up, squinting against the bright morning sun streaming in through the windows. Her gaze rose to the clock on the window sill near her bed, squinting to see that it was after ten in the morning. Oh shit, she thought, scrambling for clothes.

“I’m sorry, Naga, I’m up, I’m up!”

Korra flew down the stairs that led from her loft sleeping area to the main floor of the warehouse, Naga right at her heels. She skidded to a stop, shoving her feet into a battered pair of running shoes before grabbing a windbreaker and wrenching open the door. Naga pushed past her and sprinted down the street to the closest patch of dirt where she immediately squatted for a long tinkle. Korra followed after her in a slow jog. The big dog eyed her reproachfully.

“Sorry about that, girl,” apologized Korra, “I didn’t mean to make you hold it for so long.”

Korra yawned again. She had tossed and turned for hours before finally dropping off to sleep in the early morning, leading to her seriously overshooting her normal wakeup time and almost destroying her poor dog’s bladder in the process. She fumbled in the pocket of her windbreaker and pulled out a thin dog lead, but waited patiently for Naga to finish before hooking it on. “Come on, let’s go round up some breakfast.”

Korra’s neighborhood was a light industrial area near the bay, a mix of car repair shops, plumbing and electrical services, storage units, and the occasional converted live work lofts. Korra’s loft had once been the temporary storage area of a now bankrupt import/export shop, and she had managed to grab it auction for practically nothing since the living quarters were very spartan by most people’s standards and buyers weren’t exactly falling all over themselves for a serious fixer upper next to a graffiti covered plumbing supply. Korra didn’t care about the exposed steel beams, cracked brick, and stained concrete. She loved that she had a big indestructible space to house herself and her dog, a
large space in which to do her cooking, a place to sleep, and a place to park her big beautiful truck. Being walking distance to the water meant there was usually a sharp salty tang to the air that Korra loved, and better yet she was near a little marina that housed O’Shaughnessey’s Cafe, the best breakfast spot in the city as far as she and Naga were concerned.

Korra pushed through the gate that led to the back deck of the cafe. She saw Liam look up from where he was sorting receipts near the register and toss her a wave. Korra waved back and headed towards her favorite table, near the corner where she could look out over the boats, and with a nice big space for Naga to lie down without being in the way of anyone.

“A bit late this morning, are ya, love?” said Liam, his Dublin accent faded but not quite gone despite over thirty years in San Francisco. He set down a cup of coffee and a small pitcher of cream in front of her. “I hope that was due to a fun time last night.”

Korra dumped cream and took a large swallow of coffee. “Oh damn, I love your coffee. To tell you the truth I had a really weird night last night, and I definitely didn’t get enough sleep, so today is hangover menu day for me cause I feel like hell.”

Liam’s blue eyes crinkled affectionately at her and laid a warm weathered hand on her shoulder. “To say someone had a weird night in this mad city is making a strong statement indeed.”

“No that kind of weird,” Korra rolled her eyes. “It’s hard to explain.”

“Well, then, I’ll make sure Kevin keeps your cup full and I’ll have your breakfast out soon.” Liam looked down as Naga nudged him with her nose, her long pink tongue licking his pant cuff. “Hey there, Naga, we’ve talked about this. I’m a married man and you’ll mind your manners!”

Korra laughed. “She just wants her bacon, O’Shaughnessey. Don’t be creepy. Besides, I heard you Celtic types prefer sheep.”

Liam smacked her in the head with a menu.

“I’ll thank you to mind your sass, young lady, otherwise you won’t get any of my special Irish Eggs Benedict.”

Korra held up her hands in mock surrender. “You win, please just feed me.”

Liam hit her with the menu again for good measure then stalked back towards the kitchen. “Kevin!” he bellowed. “Korra is going to need a refill and take care to pour some in her lap while you’re at it!”

Asami looked up from where she was sitting on the deck of her boat, a half coiled rope in her hand. Did someone just say Korra? She looked around, then caught sight of a vaguely familiar figure sitting on the patio of the restaurant near her boat’s dock. She stood up to get a better look, and Korra took that moment to turn in her seat to look out over the marina, a cup of coffee raised to her lips. After a moment Korra clearly noticed the solo figure standing nearby and straightened up suddenly in recognition, putting her coffee cup down hurriedly. Asami felt herself blushing furiously, glad the distance meant Korra probably couldn’t see it. She dropped the line she was holding to the deck, then took a deep breath, jumped lightly to the dock, and walked towards the gangway below the patio. She paused as drew level with the pilings supporting the restaurant perch over the water and looked up at Korra, leaning over the railing to watch her approach. Those damn blue eyes...

“Good morning,” said Asami. “This is a pleasant surprise.”
Korra blinked at her, her brilliant blue eyes tinged red as if sleep-deprived, or hungover.

“Um, good morning,” she hesitated, clearly feeling awkward. “You… have a boat here, Chef Sato?”

“Only recently. I’d been on the waiting list for ages, and a slip opened up. And please, call me Asami. Frankly after last night I’m pretty sure you calling me Chef is probably an insult.”

Korra closed her eyes and groaned. “Fuck, I’m really, really sorry about that. I spent all night feeling guilty about it.” She looked back at Asami and gulped before saying, “Please, let me make it up to you. Join me for breakfast?”

Asami hesitated briefly, then nodded. “I’ll be right up.”

As she crossed the patio she slowed as she noticed Korra hunched over, and stopped suddenly when she saw her urging a huge white dog up from where she had been lying under the table.

“Come on, Naga, you need to get out of the way, girl.” Korra coaxed the dog to a new position behind her and the dog resettled herself before turning to look at Asami. Her tail thumped briefly in greeting, her tongue lolling out in a canine grin.

“Korra, that’s a really big dog.”

“Don’t worry, Naga is mostly harmless.” Korra secured Naga’s leash to the railing before jumping up to bring a second chair to the table.

“Mostly?”

“She doesn’t like strange guys who hit on my assistant.”

Asami chuckled. “Jinora, right? That’s hilarious. Has she met Kai yet?”

“No, oddly enough. Can’t wait for that day, actually.”

Asami smiled at that. “You’re terrible.”

“I know, I can’t help myself.” She smiled sheepishly at Asami, then leaned over a nearby table and swiped a menu, handing it to Asami. “Not sure if you’ve been here yet, but I come here all the time so I can answer any questions you may have before Liam notices you’re here.”

Asami scanned the menu briefly, saw something she wanted, then closed it again. “I haven’t had a chance to try this place out, actually. When I say, ‘only recently’, I really mean it’s been about three days. I take it you live nearby?”

Korra nodded, mid gulp of coffee. “I own a warehouse loft thing a couple of blocks a way. How about you?”

Asami pointed toward her boat. “I live there.”

“On your boat? Really?” Korra turned to peer at it more closely. “Wow, that’s a pretty boat. Kinda big. Oishii, is that what that says on the back?”

“Close enough. I bought it a couple of years ago when I couldn’t find an apartment I liked and I happened to see it for sale when I was taking a jog. It’s bigger than I really need but I fell in love with it and it’s very comfortable.”

“What does the name mean?”

“You’re kidding. Did it come with that name?”

“No, it started out life as the Party Hardy.”

Korra snorted. “A name well changed.”

Liam hustled up to their table. “Well, well. Who’s your beautiful friend, Korra?”

Korra glowered at him. “Careful there, Romeo. If Moira hears you she’ll carve out your tripes.” She caught Asami’s raised eyebrow and said, “His wife. A redheaded Irishwoman, with all that’s implied. Not a woman to be messed with.”

Liam cleared his throat, ignoring this. He then looked at Asami expectantly, pen poised over his notepad.

“A cup of coffee, a side of fruit, and some Irish soda bread. I assume you make it here.”

Liam scoffed. “You bet your pretty eyes we make it here. There’s not a soul on this earth who makes it better.”

As Liam retreated with Asami’s order, Kevin arrived with a steaming carafe and a second cup for Asami. Korra watched him pour out carefully, placing two fresh cream pitchers between them. She watched Asami take a hesitant sniff, then sip cautiously, no cream or sugar added. Her eyes lit up and she took a second sip eagerly.

“Oh my,” she said huskily. “Where does he get this?”

Korra laughed at her reaction. “I know right? I practically asked him to marry me after my first cup. He has some secret source for beans and he roasts them himself. Cures his own bacon, too, Irish style.”

Asami peered at her over the top of the cup as she continued drinking. “I’m surprised you add cream,” she said. “I would think someone with your sense of taste would appreciate this without additions.”

Korra frowned. “Did you just diss me, Chef Sato? Sorry. Um. Asami.” Korra stumbled on her name a bit, blushing, then shrugged. “The truth is that black coffee gives me a stomach ache, so I have to add a little fat to cut the acid. I’ve actually been bugging Liam to sell me some beans so I can take them home and grind them finer for lattes. No dice yet, though.” She paused. “So, um, can I ask you something?”

“Sure.”

Korra gestured around her. “Why would you want to park your boat here? This place is great, but let’s be honest, it’s kind of a dump. Somebody as successful as you, I’d think you’d want to dock at the yacht club or at least something with a little better facilities. Let’s face it, you’ve got a beautiful forty foot ketch in a marina full of old tugs and fishing boats.”

Asami just stared at her for a while. “You need to stop doing that,” she said after a moment.

“What did I do?”

“Surprising the hell out of me.” Her gaze met Korra’s again, her green eyes intent. “But apparently in
addition to a palate I envy, you know boats. Most people don’t even know the word ketch.”

“My dad was a fisherman for forever, then got tired of that and discovered he could make a better living as a charter boat captain. So, I kind of grew up on boats. He started with only power boats, but as his charter business did better he decided that sailboats were better. Quieter, easier to get close to the wildlife, and frankly sexier to potential customers. He’s got a seventy foot schooner now, and I will admit to you that I used to always get schooners and ketches backwards, could never remember which mast setup went with which boat type.”

Asami laughed out loud. “Oh my god, me too. I didn’t actually know anything at all about boats when I bought mine. I had to take a ton of lessons, and then I had to add new electronics to the boat so it would be safe for me to sail it by myself. And to be honest, I did have it at the yacht club for a while. I couldn’t stand the people there and all the pompous social requirements. One of my suppliers has his boat here and assured me it was quiet and people were generally nice and would respect my privacy.”

Korra raised her eyebrows. “You bought a big sailboat when you didn’t even know how to sail it?”

Asami shrugged sheepishly. “It seemed like a good idea at the time. Looking back, I can admit how insane it was to do.”

“It’s pretty awesome, actually,” said Korra warmly. “I’m all for spontaneity in life.”

“Why doesn’t that surprise me to hear?” said Asami, giving Korra a direct look. Korra’s breath caught, and her heart thudded. Dammit she needs to stop looking at me like that. Korra cleared her throat and tore her gaze away, focusing instead on her rapidly diminishing coffee levels.

To her immense relief Liam and Kevin arrived, laden with plates of food. Asami watched with increasing amusement as Eggs Benedict, hash browns, extra bacon, fruit, and a stack of fluffy pancakes were arranged in front of Korra. Her much smaller order was placed daintily in front of her.

“It’s a good thing I didn’t order much food. You’re not leaving me any table space.”

Korra paused, a large forkful of food halfway to her mouth. “Sorry, I have a crazy fast metabolism and I’m an exercise fiend. My breakfasts tend to be epic.” She chewed and swallowed. “Oh man, I needed this. Oh man, I needed this. So, you don’t like to have other people on your boat?”

Asami took a bite of her soda bread before answering. “I don’t actually have that many friends, and most of them don’t really like the water. I tried taking Opal out once, and the poor thing spent most of the trip bright green hanging off the back of the boat. The only one who really goes out with me at all is Kya, and that’s rarely.”

“Kya is the one who made the dessert last night right?”

“Yes,” Asami frowned, and speared a piece of strawberry, then put her fork down, and sat back, sighing.

Korra cocked her head, picking up the change in mood. “Are you okay?”

“Sorry about that. It’s just that Kya and I had a bit of a run in last night, and it’s still sort of bothering me.”

“I have been told I’m an excellent listener if you want to talk about it.”

Asami hesitated.
“But I know you just met me, and it’s not like our first meeting was any fun for you or anything.” Korra said, grinning. “My pain in the ass factor can also be high, as Jinora will tell anyone loudly and repeatedly.”

“You are easy to talk to,” said Asami quietly. “And thanks for your offer.”

Korra looked at her, seeing a faint blush on Asami’s cheeks, and her heart lurched a little. She wanted to reach out and squeeze Asami’s hand reassuringly, make her smile again. She gripped her fork more tightly and took another bite of her Benedict before she did anything embarrassing.

Asami shook her head and resumed eating, catching Korra’s eye and smiling shyly. “Anyway, I’d rather hear why you hate restaurants and think I eat the young of my cooking staff.”

Korra returned the smile. “I’ll trade you. I’ll tell you the story on two conditions.”

“Okay,” agreed Asami cautiously. “Let’s hear them.”

“You need to try some of my breakfast, because it’s killing me that you’re barely eating anything. Besides, I like to share.”

“Alright, I will try some of your breakfast,” said Asami agreeably. “And the second condition?”

“You give me a tour of your boat.”

Asami chuckled. “You’ve got a deal. But it better be a good story.”

“No promises. And let’s start with some of this bacon. I’m going to make you moan.”

Asami dropped her fork and blushed hard. Korra stared at her, mentally replayed the last ten seconds of the conversation, and choked. Shit.

“The bacon,” she croaked, “the bacon is going to make you moan.”

Asami’s head was bowed and her shoulders shook. Korra realized she was struggling to hold back her laughter.

“I would tell you that you’re not seeing me at my best,” she said mournfully, “but that would be a lie. I’m pretty much this big of a disaster all the time.”

“Oh my,” gasped Asami eventually. “I truly can’t wait to hear your story now.”

“Just shut up and eat your bacon already.”

“Yes, ma’am.”
Chapter 5

Great White Fluff @FoodTruckMasterNaga 3h
Trying to decide who we’re feeding on Monday. Where should we go? First reply wins!
#FoodTrucks4Life

Steve The Man @FortMasonStud15 3h
@FoodTruckMasterNaga YOU HAVE TO COME BACK TO FORT MASON

Skoochy Skooch @Skoochy 3h
You are so coming to 3 rd and Park St, don’t make me beg Naga!
#NagaForPresident

Great White Fluff @FoodTruckMasterNaga 2h
@Skoochy 3 rd and Park St it is, see you there Skoochy!
#FoodTrucks4Life

Steve The Man @FortMasonStud15 1h
@FoodTruckMasterNaga YOU CAN RUN BUT YOU CAN’T HIDE @NagaMinionTwo

“Are you sure it’s okay that I bring Naga down here?” Korra asked as Asami led the way down to
the ramp to the boat dock. She was trying extremely hard to not notice how perfectly filled out
Asami’s cargo shorts were from the back but it was becoming a struggle. She take a firmer group on
Naga’s leash, and focused her gaze firmly over Asami’s shoulder as they made their way along the
row of parked boats.

Asami looked back over her shoulder. “She might have a little trouble on my actual boat deck, but
I’m in the last slip so she should be okay hanging out on the dock, won’t she? She won’t be in the
way or anything.”

Korra eyes her dog skeptically. “We’ll see. She’s an expert at being high maintenance when she
wants to be.”

Asami turned and gracefully leaped onto the deck of her ketch, looking thoughtful. “Hrm. Like dog,
like dog owner?”

“Oh, shaddup.” Korra rolled her eyes and stuck her tongue out.

Asami laughed. “Hang on a sec, okay? Just had an idea.”

“Naga, sit,” Korra said firmly, seeing the dog eye the water with interest and having terrifying
visions of her thick haired dog and dirty harbor water. The dog huffed at her irritably but sank
obediently to her haunches as Asami disappeared into the cabin, only to emerge a minute later
holding a roll of what turned out to be a small remnant of carpet. She deftly unrolled it so that it
draped over the deck near the dock and onto the floor of cockpit.

“There we go, almost forgot I had this. She can come aboard now without slipping.”
“Wow, that’s awesome, Asami, thanks.” said Korra gratefully. “She’s much more likely to behave herself if she can be close to us.” She turned back to her dog. “Okay, Naga, up!”

Naga looked deeply suspicious, raised herself up partially, sniffing at the carpet, her front paws against the edge of the deck. She whined and sank back down again.

“You are kidding me, dog,” growled Korra irritably. “Come on, up!”

Naga backed away, clearly nervous at how the boat rocked slightly in the water. She dropped her head and barked.

“Korra, I could go find some steps for her,” Asami began.

Korra waved her off. “No, it’s okay. I got this. “She tightened her windbreaker where she had it wrapped around her waist and bent down. “Come here, mutt. You are the biggest baby…” She scooped Naga into her arms and lifted her up to the deck. Asami’s eyes widened as she saw Korra’s muscles flex gracefully under her tanned skin, though Korra seemed to be lifting the big dog with no discernible struggle. She climbed up after her, nudged the hesitant dog down into the cockpit, and hooked her leash on a nearby cleat. “There we go. Here, saved you the last piece of bacon. Just stay there, okay?”

Dog finally settled, Korra turned to Asami, smiling widely. “Gosh, it’s been ages since I’ve been on a boat. Thanks for the tour!”

Asami stood utterly bemused at the reactions she was having to this woman, whom she barely knew, and had so aggravated her the night before. She realized Korra was still watching her expectantly and mentally shook herself back to down to Earth. “It’s nice to have company actually, though I just realized I don’t have that much time before I have to head to the restaurant. Anyway, nothing too exciting up here, except for maybe this…”

She led the way to the stern of the boat to what Korra had originally taken for a large storage box. Asami popped the latches and raised the lid to what turned out to be two burners and a large grill. Korra’s jaw dropped.

“Oh god, you have an outdoor kitchen. On a boat. Girl, I have to sort of hate you now. Like, a lot.”

Asami laughed delightedly. “Come on, I’ll show you something else you’ll like.” She led the way down the ladder into the dim interior, then flipped on the cabin lights to expose a neatly kept interior, red and black cushions against the darkly stained teak creating a cozy cavelike feel. A small sink and butcher block counter were nestled underneath a large porthole, and a long row of cupboards stretched away along the bulkhead.

“Kind of a small galley for you, isn’t it?” asked Korra curiously. “Do you always just cook outside or something?”

Asami grinned and started pushing on the cupboard doors. They slid easily to one side revealing much more counter space supporting a miniature gourmet kitchen, appliances carefully strapped into place including a three burner stove, food processor and mixer. Asami moved a couple more cupboard doors below the counter revealing two small ovens and a wine cooler. Korra clasped her hands in front of her mouth and let out a small squeal.

“This didn’t come with the boat, did it?”

“Of course not. Totally custom, and you’ll never get me to admit what it cost because it’s embarrassing.”
Korra ran her hand reverently along the counter, and poking delightedly at the assortment of spice containers and utensils stuck to magnetic strips along the wall. Her eye fell on a collection of knives also resting on the strip, and found herself pulling one off. The blade had the distinctive fold pattern of damascus steel and a dark wooden handle. There was no manufacturing stamp or logo anywhere she could see. The rounded blade was wide but the steel itself was beaten thin, perfect for chopping ingredients and easily scooping them into a pan. She gripped the handle, feeling the texture of the wood fitting comfortably into her hand. She ran a finger carefully down the blade, then looked up and found Asami watching her, a small smile playing around her lips. Korra blushed.

“Sorry, this is an amazing knife. I have kind of a thing about good knives, but I don’t think I’ve ever seen one like this before,” she finished awkwardly.

“Thank you. It took me a long time to get it right,” said Asami.

“Wait,” Korra looked at Asami in shock. “You… made this?”

Asami blushed and nodded. “I make all my own knives.”

“That is the coolest thing ever!” Korra began excitedly. “How…”

“Oh no,” Asami laughed. “You’ll have to earn that story. You first. I’m keeping my part of the bargain after all.”

Korra sighed. “Fine.”

Korra followed Asami back up the ladder and into the cockpit where they settled comfortably onto the cushions padding the bench seats. Naga, to Korra’s shock, rolled over and snuggled against Asami’s foot. Asami’s eyes widened slightly, and she reached down and tentatively patted Naga’s shoulder. Naga let out a soft "woo" and huffed softly.

“Wow,” said Korra softly. “She sure likes you. You must smell good.”

Asami’s eyebrow raised at this, and Korra slumped back, hands over her face.

“Dammit!” she muttered. “Can I embarrass myself anymore in front of you? I meant, like the bacon I gave you, or anything else she likes to eat. Shit. Stop waggling those eyebrows at me or I won’t tell you my story.”

Asami laughed delightedly. “Korra,” she started, then stopped, shaking her head, eyes sparkling with laughter. “Please, it’s fine. Story. Now.”

Korra ran her hand through her hair, and took a deep breath.

“Okay, so, I went to cooking school, as you guessed. Started at the CIA in New York, but transferred to the new campus in California when it opened. Have you seen that place? It’s a friggin’ castle, I love it, and I loved living up in Napa. I started my first internship at Costantino’s in Napa City.”

“You mean Mario Costantino’s restaurant?” interrupted Asami, eyes widening.

Korra grimaced. “You’ve heard of him, I take it.”

Asami nodded soberly. “I remember hearing about the trial.”

“Yeah I was there with the first batch of students out of the new school. At first I was really proud of
the fact that he ended up selecting all women for his intern positions because we had all been
working so hard, and you know what a boy’s club kitchens can be, and man did the guys in my class
bitch and moan about it.” Korra hesitated. “And then we found out it was because he was a complete
misogynist who liked bossing the ladies around. He pulled us all aside at one point and said he only
had one permanent position open and he’d give it to the intern who gave him the best blow job. It
was the end of the night and he’d clearly been drinking, but still, what the hell, right?”

Korra paused, then took a deep breath before continuing.

“My friend Lily was also interning. She was a sweet girl, amazing chef. She was so shocked and
scared at what he said, she backed into the stove and knocked a pan with her elbow. Hot oil went
over her hand and down her leg. He yelled at her for making a mess and walked away. We got her to
the hospital and she was mostly better eventually. Had permanent scars though, and never worked in
a restaurant again, as far as I know. I tried to stay in touch but after she had to testify at the trial and
when he got basically a slap on the wrist and her settlement didn’t even cover all her medical costs,
she stopped responding.”

Korra found herself fiddling with the hem of her shirt and made herself rest her hands on her knees.

“After a couple of months, I tried my hand at another internship. The school had tried to be helpful.
They changed the way they vetted restaurants for their students so they wouldn’t send us to any more
psychopaths, but the next place I went to was its own form of hell. They took three interns, and we
were only allowed to cut produce for the salads. That’s it. For four months. The head chef there said
interns were pointless, and the only reason we were allowed in the kitchen at all was because the
owner was on the board of the school for PR purposes.”

“Jesus, Korra,” breathed Asami.

Korra reached down and rubbed Naga’s belly. She huffed and let out another soft woo.

“Nothing was that bad afterwards, and I still really loved cooking, and being challenged, and the
feeling of knowing I had made people happy with what I made, but I swear every place I went, the
head chef was threatened by anybody who expressed any creative interest of their own, or refused to
pay decent wages because the restaurant ‘wasn’t doing well’ when every damn night we’d be
packed and working 18 hour days on the weekends. It got to the point where I was starting to hate
the sight of food, when all I had ever wanted to do was be a chef. Honestly if it wasn’t for
accidentally discovering I could do things with food trucks I’d probably be working at a gas station
or something by now.”

Korra took a deep shuddering breath and looked out over the breakwater of the marina. The fog was
still twirling around the silver span of the Bay Bridge but the sun was breaking through in the East,
and Korra closed her eyes for a moment, enjoying the warmth on her face. Her eyes shot open as she
felt a hand on hers and she turned to see Asami looking at her earnestly, her green eyes intent.

“I’m sorry about all of that, Korra. I really and truly am. I hope you believe me when I say not all
restaurants are like that, and I swear to you mine is not. But I also know that just yesterday I made a
joke to Opal about how I needed to maintain my bitchy reputation in order to be taken seriously, and
now it makes me ill to think of it, hearing what you went through. Like you, there’s a lot of things
about the restaurant industry I really hate, but I also think I’ve been really sheltered from most of it,
and I feel grateful and a little guilty about it.”

Korra looked down at the pale hand clenching hers and swallowed. She could feel a tremor in
Asami’s grip and looked up to meet her gaze again, seeing now a faint shimmer from unshed tears.
“Asami! Hey, it’s okay. None of that is your fault, and you still didn’t deserve me throwing my angst at you last night.”

Asami realized she was still holding Korra’s hand. She pulled back nervously and blushed, then caught sight of the time on her watch.

“Damn! Korra,” she began reluctantly.

Korra smiled brightly at her and stood up. “I know, you need to get to work. I understand. I…” she hesitated, then reached out and grabbed Asami into a hug. “I haven’t told me many people that story. Thank you for listening.”

Asami stiffened in shock then gingerly returned the embrace. Korra felt her discomfort and stepped back quickly.

“Sorry! I’m a little too spontaneous sometimes.”

“No, it’s okay,” Asami stuttered. “I’m just not very used to hugs, and now I’ve had two in twenty-four hours. I think that’s a record for me. But thank you, Korra. I’m glad you were able to tell me your story. And now yes, I do have to go to work, and I also really need to talk to Kya. I owe her a lot because I used to work for her restaurants and she’s mentored me my whole career, and now that I’ve heard your story I feel like I owe her even more, because I didn’t realize how protected I’ve been compared to so many others.”

“That’s kind of cool. You worked for her and now she works for you. It’s like a family thing.”

Asami chuckled. “More like, she uses my kitchen how she pleases and graciously accepts a paycheck. But yes, I now know that I’ve been very fortunate. And despite last night,” Asami paused, then shook her head. “Despite last night, she is like family to me, and I need to remember that too.”

Korra nodded, the turned to rouse her sleepy dog and get them down to the dock. She looked back at Asami, still standing on the deck of her boat, and smiled again.

“Guess I’ll see you around?” she said hopefully.

Asami returned her smile warmly. “I’d really like that.”

Chapter End Notes

This was harder to write than I thought it would be, and not totally satisfied with the result, but in the end decided it was better to post than keep poking at it. Any comments welcome!
Asami pushed her way through the swinging doors into the kitchen and paused, taking in the scene. She saw Opal walking along the rows, occasionally chatting with one of the staff over some item on the menu. Kai was taking a taste out of one of the pots on the stove, brow furrowed in concentration as he tested the flavor. All over the kitchen her staff was hard at work, getting ready for Saturday night’s dinner seating. She was reminded of her resolve after talking to Korra at breakfast and headed for the pastry station. To her surprise Kya’s assistant was working there alone.

“Did Kya leave you to do all the prep work this morning, Michael?”

Michael looked up, startled. “Good morning, Chef! Um, Kya called Opal and said she couldn’t come in today. I’m going to steal Melanie to help make the fillings and maybe some plating. She’s got good hands.” He nodded in the direction of the interns, and Asami nodded as she picked out Melanie’s petite form following Opal out of the cooler, her arms full of cartons of cream and containers of mascarpone.

“She does indeed. Let Opal or I know if you need anything.”

“Sure thing, Chef.”
Opal saw Asami approaching her and the smile fell from her face. She jerked her head toward’s Asami’s office and shut the door behind them as they stepped inside.

“Something’s up, Asami,” she said seriously.


“I’m not sure,” Opal’s face showed her worry. “She said something about having to go to the hospital, but she wouldn’t tell me why. She sounded pretty upset.”

Asami sat down heavily in her chair. “Do you know what hospital?”

Opal shook her head. “No, and she seemed like she was sort of in a hurry.” She sat down in the second chair, and looked at Asami, her concern evident. “This isn’t like her. I’m a little freaked out. Asami…”

Asami raised her eyes to meet Opal’s earnest gaze. “This isn’t any of my business, but after you left last night, Kya looked really upset. She was trying to hide it but I’m pretty sure she was crying.”

“Dammit,” Asami whispered. “I was really angry at her. She was trying to get me to talk to my father and I lost my temper. I was going to apologize today when I saw her.”

Opal reached out and touched Asami’s arm tentatively. “I know it’s Saturday and it’s going to be packed, but I swear you can trust me to keep things going if you want to try and see her.”

Asami felt tears threatening, and she clasped Opal’s hand in gratitude at the offer. “Opal, I trust you completely with my kitchen, but if I go that will leave you two chefs short.”

Opal waved this away. “The interns are ready to step up a bit. Melanie’s helping with desserts, and Rich and Carlos can do the salads and help with plating. Kai can help supervise them. And besides, tonight we don’t have to worry about Wu.”

Asami laughed softly. “That poor boy. I hope we didn’t break him.”

“We would have broken him if he’d stayed.” Opal stood up, pulling Asami up with her. “Now, go find Kya.”

Asami squeezed Opal’s hand, then quickly unbuttoned her chef’s coat, hanging it neatly on its hook behind the door. “I’ll call you as soon as I know something.” She grabbed her bag and headed out.

As she exited the restaurant a red Miata pulled up in front of the restaurant, and Jinora jumped out holding a bright orange pair of clogs. She slowed when she saw Asami standing in front of the restaurant, cell phone in hand.

“Hi Miss Sato! Kai, um, forgot his work shoes this morning and he’s running around the kitchen in his tennis shoes right now.”

Kai burst through the door, ran to Jinora and kissed her passionately before grabbing the clogs and running back through the door, completely failing to notice Asami still standing there.

Jinora blushed furiously as Asami coughed delicately.

“So, anyway,” squeaked Jinora. “You sort of look like you’re going somewhere. Can I give you a lift for not making complete fun of us just now?”

Asami shook her head. “That won’t be necessary, I was just about to call a cab.”
“I am offering you a ride in a fabulously sexy convertible and you want to sit in a smelly cab.” Jinora said, acting offended. “Please, Miss Sato, I honestly have nothing going on today and would be honored to chauffeur you wherever you need to go.” She hesitated, then blurted, “I realize I’m probably being a bit pushy about this, but I think Korra has been rubbing off on me. She’s sort of an unstoppable force when it comes to helping people she thinks are in need.”

Asami smiled despite herself. “First of all, for the love of all that’s holy, it’s Asami. Secondly, I’m not sure where I’m going yet. I was hoping to figure that out by the time the cab got here.”

Jinora ran to the passenger side of the car and opened the door with a flourish. “I will gladly wait. Honestly, Kai thinks you’re wonderful, and last night you were really great about me and Korra invading. This is the least I can do.”

At that moment, Asami’s cell phone buzzed briefly, reporting an incoming text message. Kya.

**St. Ingrid’s Hospital. Room 2314. Please come.**

Asami looked at Jinora’s hopeful face and found herself glad of the girl’s offer. “Thank you, Jinora. I would really appreciate a ride. And I will consider myself warned when it comes to Korra.”

Jinora seemed to sense Asami’s desire for reticence, and after getting her destination left Asami alone with her thoughts, though Asami could feel the occasional glance come her way. The Miata came to a stop outside the front entrance of Saint Ingrid’s hospital and Jinora squeezed Asami’s shoulder briefly.

“I hope everything turns out okay, whatever it is.”

Asami nodded. “Thanks. Me too.”

Jinora hesitated, then rummaged quickly in her purse, pulling out a brightly colored business card with a large paw print on the back. “This is my number. And this one is Korra’s, in case you can’t get a hold of me.”

“And Naga’s paw print?” asked Asami, her thumb brushing the image softly.

Jinora’s looked surprised. “Um, how did you know about Naga? You know what, never mind, you need to go. Anyway, just in case you need anything, okay? Don’t call a cab. I’ll come get you, take you back to the restaurant or home or whatever.”

“You are very kind. Kai is a fortunate young man.”

Jinora’s cheeks turned bright pink, and she smiled shyly, tossing Asami a little wave as she left the car.

Asami took a deep breath, and stepped cautiously into the hospital lobby, squinting at the large directory with arrows pointing to **Radiology, Surgery, Emergency Services, Cafeteria**, and ah, room number ranges. She followed the indicated direction to a large bank of elevators and hit the button for the twenty-fourth floor when one arrived. Beside her two men in scrubs stood quietly on either side of an elderly woman sleeping in a wheelchair, an IV bag hanging from a hook attached to the chair, the woman looking very small and fragile in her hospital gown, her face pale and dark circles shadowing her eyes. The elevator door dinged open at the fifteenth floor and the orderlies gingerly pushed the wheelchair out and turned left, the arrows on the wall indicating they were on their way to cardiology. Asami stared after them until the doors closed to block her view, then her eyes shifted to watch the floor numbers continue to climb slowly until the elevator released her with another soft ding. She stepped out, looking around to get her bearings, then saw Kya sitting stiffly in a chair in
the hallway, next to large double doors painted with the words “Intensive Care Unit” in large black letters.

Kya looked up, an apprehensive look on her face as Asami approached.

“Are you okay?” Asami sank to the chair next to her, peering at Kya anxiously.

Kya swallowed visibly. “I wasn’t sure you would come.” Tears streaked the older woman’s face.

“Of course I would come for you,” said Asami firmly.

“There’s something you really need to know, that I really need you to know.” She paused, and her gaze dropped to the floor. Asami saw that her hands were shaking, and she reached out quickly to grab them.

“Kya, I’m so sorry about last night. I promise I will listen to whatever you need to say, but,” Asami gestured around them. “Why are we here?”

Kya’s hands gripped Asami’s firmly. “Your father is here, honey. I’m not sure for how much longer.”

Asami’s eyes widened. “You mean, you don’t know how long until he’s discharged?”

“No, sweetie,” said Kya softly. “I don’t know how much longer he’s going to live.”

“Oh my god,” breathed Asami. “What happened? Is that why he’s been trying to get in touch with me?”

Kya stood up shakily, and held out her hand. “In part. Also, because I had asked him to.” She held up her hand to forestall any additional questions she could see Asami struggling to ask. “Will you please see him now? With me?”

Asami rose to her feet, confused thoughts screaming inside her skull and her feet so very reluctantly following Kya down the hall.

Korra sat back from her laptop, grinning broadly as she closed her Twitter feed. She had been hoping to get an invitation for weeks, and now that Jinora had actually provided her with a fabulously unusual ingredient that she has investigated thoroughly (including the fact that it was called Churpi and not Chim-chim-churree) she was itching to have a chance to use it. Her laptop beeped to alert her of a new email, and she eagerly leaned forward again to read it.

Tuesday night. 11:30pm. Basement of the old Examiner building. The rear loading dock will be open between 10:45 and 11:15 only. You are allowed one guest. “First Rule About Food Fight…”

Korra stared at the email. It was basically the same structure as the previous ones she’d gotten, but she’d previously always ignored the comment about one guest. Jinora had her own standing invitation, and in fact she’d often gone as Jinora’s guest when she want as a spectator rather than the other way around. There wasn’t really anyone else Korra had ever considered taking. She swung herself away from her desk space and walked slowly into her kitchen area, pulling open the refrigerator door and staring blankly at the various food stuffs jammed into the shelves. She caught sight of a lone bottle of beer behind a huge bag of greens and snagged it. Then her eye fell on the boxes of butter in the door and she grabbed one thoughtfully. She flipped the bottle cap off the beer expertly then started pulling down more ingredients from cupboards and shelves.
She was going to invite a guest to the next Food Fight, and she knew exactly who she wanted it to be.

“Naga, it’s time to do some damage.”

Mixing bowls were plunked unceremoniously onto the counter, dry goods were measured out in white puffs. On the stove a mound of dark chocolate shavings was melting down in a small bowl propped over a pot of boiling water, while a copper sauce pan one burner over simmered with homemade butterscotch. Korra breathed in the delectable steam with deep satisfaction as she poured walnuts, pecans, and cashews into the food processor along with a generous pour of high grade peanut oil. Freshly washed raspberries dripped dry in a nearby colander.

She was making her Happy Cupcakes. They took ages to prepare and forever to cleanup afterwards, so she rarely made them. But she was going to make a big batch of them for Asami Sato, to use as an invitation to be her guest at the next Food Fight. Besides, she couldn’t let those Sato Grill chefs think she was at all intimidated by that glorious honeycomb.

She cocked her head and she heard the rattle of her front door being opened.

“Korra?”

“In the kitchen!”

Jinora poked her head around the corner and took in the state of the kitchen, with a flour coated Korra leaning sheepishly against her sink.

“Hey, something weird just happened and I wanted to — oh my god, you are not making Happy Cupcakes. What the hell is going on with you? Happy Cupcakes? Seriously? I can’t keep up. Last night I dropped you off in a total funk and now you look like it’s Christmas and your birthday rolled into one.”

Jinora stalked over, then stopped dead when she saw a mound of fondant warming up on the counter.

“YOU’RE GOING TO DECORATE THEM?” she screamed. She whirled around, laughing. “Okay, you need to tell me what the hell is going on. Did you get laid last night or something?”

Korra blushed. “Shut up already, geez. It’s not like I never make these.”

“You’ve made them exactly twice in the entire time I’ve known you, once as a auction item for the children’s hospital and once for the party where you were trying to impress that bartender chick, who was totally not worth it I might add. And you only used fondant for the auction.”

Korra rolled her eyes and started kneading the fondant. “What can I say, I was inspired. Are you going to Sato Grill again tonight?”

“Yeah, going to pick up Kai and we’re going — waaaaait. Why did you ask me that?”

“Maybe you could drop these off for me.”

Jinora’s eyes widened. “You want me to drop off your cupcakes at Sato Grill.”

“Yeah, as a favor.”

“And who am I delivering these to, specifically?”
Korra faltered, then ducked her head as she felt her cheeks grow even hotter.

“Oh my god,” breathed Jinora. “These are for Asami aren’t they? I knew you thought she was hot!”

Korra coughed.

“I ran into her this morning and we ended up having breakfast.” Korra said awkwardly. “And I got a competition invite today, and thought maybe she’d like to be my guest.”

Jinora’s jaw dropped. “They sent out the Food Fight invites already? I didn’t think that was going to happen for another week. Whatever. I have to process this. You want to take Asami Sato, a head chef, out on a date.”

Korra punched her in the shoulder before grabbing a rolling pin. “It is not a date. I just think she’s sort of cool. Also, she might not want to come anyway.”

“Ow! It is totally a date. I seriously need a moment to just revel in this before I go deal with the flying pigs throwing burning snowballs.” Jinora started dancing around the kitchen gleefully, then stopped suddenly. “Oh shit.”

Korra looked up from where she was busily rolling out the fondant. “What’s wrong?”

“Your infernal cupcakes distracted me from why I’m here. I just took Asami to Saint Ingrid’s.”

The rolling pin hit the floor. “Is she okay? What happened?”

“No, no, she was fine. I mean, she was upset, but I think she was going to see somebody else. I’m not sure she’s going back to the restaurant tonight. But I told her to call me for a ride if she needed one, and you live closer to the hospital than I do so I came here to hang out.”

Korra leaned over to pick up the fallen rolling pin and tossed it in the sink. Jinora grabbed another one from a nearby drawer and handed it over.

“How did you end up giving her a ride anyway?”

Jinora grinned wickedly. “Kai forgot his kitchen clogs at my place last night and I was dropping them off for him when she happened to be out front calling a cab.”

Korra blinked. “Dang girl, you don’t wait around.”

“What? It’s been plenty long enough. A girl has needs.”

Asami approaches the door fearfully. Her parents’ angry voices had been becoming steadily harder to ignore, but when she hears her name being spoken she can no longer stay away. She pauses, her hand hesitating on the door knob.

“We had an agreement, Hiroshi. Do you remember? And we need to keep it for our daughter. You remember her don’t you?”

“Yasuko, it doesn’t have to be like this anymore! Asami will understand!”

“Asami will understand nothing about this, do you hear me? You will tell her nothing. And I will thank you to not be seen in public like that again. What happened to the concept of discretion?”
There is a long pause.

“Is it so wrong to want to be happy, Yasuko? Don’t we both deserve that? Kya…”

“Don’t say her name! She is not part of this!”

Asami can’t help herself, and pushes the door open.

“Mom? Dad? What’s going on?”

Her parents whirl to face her, their faces betraying their shock.

“Oh, my darling,” says her mother quickly. “I’m sorry if we disturbed you. It’s all right.”

Her father crosses his arms. “It’s not alright, Yasuko. I will not lie to her anymore!”

“Dad, what’s going on? What will I understand?” Asami asks fearfully. She hugs herself tightly, not used to seeing her parents act in any way other than very polite and controlled, and she’s certainly never seen such fear on her mother’s face.

Hiroshi takes a deep breath. “Honey, I want you to know that you and your mother are very important to me,” he begins.

“Hiroshi,” Yasuko says warningly.

“Yasuko,” he pleads. “It’s time.”

She pales, and her eyes narrow. “I will not be part of this. I don’t care what you and Kya have discussed. My daughter will have a normal life and not be surrounded by, by…”

“By what, Yasuko?” he says quietly. “People who don’t hide who they are, who have the right to love and be loved?”

“Are you guys getting divorced?” Asami manages to squeak out.

Her mother turns around and quickly grabs Asami’s hand. “No, no, of course not. Your father just has some things he needs to fix.”

Asami looks at her, then looks at her father, confused. Then her face filled with horror. ”You’re having an affair!” she cries furiously. “You…”

Yasuko grabs her around the shoulders and pulls her out of the room. “Shh, my darling. It’s all going to be fine.”

Asami allows herself to be pulled away, still sputtering angrily. As she passes through the door, she sees a look of despair on her father’s face.

Asami pauses as she stands in front of room 2314, her eyes on the doorknob, remembering. She feels Kya’s hand on her shoulder and she flinches.

“Kya,” she says slowly. “I remember my parents arguing, the night I found out he was having affairs. They… they mentioned your name.”

She turns to face the older woman, her face drawn and pale. A thought occurs to her, an impossible thought, one she prays is not true. Kya’s soft blue eyes are clouded with tears, but she meets Asami’s gaze steadily, almost as if she’s anticipating Asami’s next words.
“Were you having an affair with my father?” she asked tensely, waiting in dread for the answer.

Kya’s face goes blank.

“No, Asami,” she said carefully. “I was not having an affair with your father.”

The door in front of them opened suddenly, revealing two young men in scrubs pushing a hospital bed. Behind them followed another man in a long white doctor’s coat.

“Excuse us,” they murmured.

Asami gasped to see her father’s wasted form huddled under the thin covers, an oxygen mask over his face, a central IV line and a portable EKG machine attached to a profusion of leads draped over his torso. “Where are you taking him?”

The doctor paused, while waving the orderlies on.

“I’m Doctor Gonzales. And you are?”

Asami swallowed hard. “I’m Asami Sato. That man is my father.” She felt Kya step closer to her.

“I’m a family friend — I was here earlier.”

The doctor nodded briefly. “We’re sending him to radiology now to get an MRI. We gave him some good drugs so he’s going to be asleep for a while. You can wait, but honestly I’d go home at this point. He’s stable, but I don’t think he’s going to be really conscious until tomorrow. You can call the nurses station for updates.”

He nodded at the two women and turned to walk quickly down the hall.

“Kya, what happened to him?”

Kya drew a trembling breath. “I’m not entirely positive. He collapsed at home yesterday. They thought maybe he had a stroke, or maybe a heart attack, but it’s not clear and they’re still working on figuring it out. I got the call this morning to come in.”

Asami rubbed her temples and sighed. “Did you know he was sick?”

Kya nodded soberly. “He’s not been well, but I don’t think any of us were expecting this.” She turned and grasped Asami’s arms in strong hands. “Thank you for coming, even if you didn’t get to talk to him. I have some phone calls to make, so I’ll stay here for a bit to take care of that. We should go back to the restaurant. It’s Saturday night after all…”

Asami shook her head. “Opal is running the Grill for the night and Melanie is assisting Michael for you. She’ll call if there’s an emergency. I feel like I should stay, and maybe we could talk.”

“You heard what the doctor said,” Kya said softly. “There’s no point in you staying here now. I still really want you to be able to talk to him. Maybe we could try again tomorrow, when he’s awake?”

Asami slid her arms out from Kya’s grip and clasped the older woman’s hands instead, and nodded. “Okay, I’ll go. You sure you’re okay? And you’ll call me?”

“I’m okay. And yes, I promise.” Kya paused, then pulled Asami into a fierce hug. “I love you, little Asami-monster.”

Asami fought to hold back her tears. “I love you to, Auntie Ky-Ky.”
Despite Jinora’s previous insistence, Asami hailed a cab from the taxi stand at the hospital and had it take her back to her boat. She rummaged in her bag for her marina key, and made her way past the heavy metal gate and onto the dock. She felt drained, and was looking forward to collapsing into her bunk. She had texted Opal during the drive over to get a status, and gotten back a cheerful selfie of her second-in-command in front of the plating counter, the interns hard at work plating behind her, a picture of a Michael putting cream on Melanie’s nose, and a final picture of a peacefully full dining room.

Opal: Everything is fine here. Are you okay? Did you find Kya

Asami: I’m okay, and so is Kya, but things are a little complicated. I’ll probably be a little late tomorrow.

Opal: We’ve got you covered, boss.

Asami pulled herself onto her boat’s deck, then stopped. Perched carefully on a bench in her cockpit was a large bakery box with a bright blue bow stuck on top. A folded piece of paper was tucked underneath. Asami looked around, and saw her neighbor Pete lounging on the deck of his fishing boat, inevitable bottle of beer in hand. He gave her a lazy wave.

“Pretty lady left that for you, hope it’s okay I let her in the gate. She practically threatened to throw me into the water if I didn’t.”

“It’s fine, thank you, Pete.”

“If that’s what I think it is, I won’t mind you sharing some with me, seeing as how I look out for your boat.”

Asami smiled at the grizzled old fisherman, despite herself. “I’ll keep that in mind.”

She slid the paper from under the box and unfolded it carefully.

Hey Asami. These are a gift for many reasons. Reason one, as thanks for being very patient with me and my issues, and being somebody to remind me that even head chefs have souls. Oh, and letting me feed you bacon. Though really you should thank ME for that. But anyway, reason two, I heard your day wasn’t necessarily the best and these are guaranteed to brighten your day. They have never failed in this. And finally, reason three, as a bribe, to consider being my guest as I compete in next Tuesday’s Food Fight. It would be my honor and privilege to have you there for moral support (which also means you have to promise to not make fun of me if I lose). Anyway, enjoy. Hopefully your friend, Korra. PS - I really hope you’re okay. PPS - I really, really hope you don’t have any unfortunate food allergies.

Asami gaped as she opened the box and was presented with a dozen beautifully crafted cupcakes, delicately topped with fondant dog paws. She pulled one out and examined it closely, then finally took a tentative bite.

Her taste buds exploded.

She closed her eyes as layers of incredible flavors flowed over her tongue, salt and sweet alternating delectably, the rich chocolate almost caressing her.

Oh my god.
“Looks like you’re enjoying that there cupcake,” called Pete eagerly. “You gonna throw one over here or what?”

“Pete?”

“Yeah?”

“You are so not getting any of these.”
Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

Just wanted to say how much I appreciate all the kind encouragement you guys have been giving. It means a lot!

They Call Me J-No @NagaMinionTwo 2h
@FoodTruckMasterNaga Who thinks we need to add desserts to the menu? Show of hands, please…

Skoochy Skooch @Skoochy 2h
@NagaMinionTwo ME!

This Is Alice @HotMamaLoveTrucker 2h
@FoodTruckMasterNaga @NagaMinionTwo What kind of desserts we talking about? Regardless, that would be HELL YES

Steve The Man @FortMasonStud15 2h
@NagaMinionTwo Desserts are good but nothing is sweeter than your fine self

Great White Fluff @FoodTruckMasterNaga 1h
Um, the menu is not selected by democratic process @NagaMinionTwo

They Call Me J-No @NagaMinionTwo 1h
@FoodTruckMasterNaga Give it up, you’re already outnumbered

They Call Me J-No @NagaMinionTwo 1h
@FortMasonStud15 I’m starting to suspect that not only were you not hugged as a child, but you had really bad acne as a teenager.

Asami swung slowly back and forth in her hammock in the growing darkness, staring up at the swirling fog and listening to the never ending sounds of the surrounding boats; the quiet clanks of lined against masts, the low groaning of the rubber bumpers getting squeezed between boat and dock, the whisper of the breeze through cable stays and shrouds. Occasionally she heard the muffled excitement of the announcer of whatever sports broadcast her neighbor happened to be watching. She pressed her palms against her eyelids and breathed deep breaths of salty air, trying to quiet the turmoil in her mind and fighting the prickle of tears that threatened to fall.

“It’s kind of cool how you rigged a hammock between your masts like that. Looks cozy.”

The hammock rocked dangerously as Asami jumped. She turned quickly to see Korra standing on the dock, her hands raised in apology.

“Shit, sorry! I didn’t mean to scare you.”

Asami rolled carefully off the hammock and sat down on the cabin roof deck, her knees slung over the grabrail. “This is a surprise. Did you threaten another resident with violence in order to sneak
onto the dock tonight?”

Korra’s grin flashed white in the darkness. “Actually, I have a key to the docks. I keep a kayak on the racks on the opposite side, but I forgot it earlier today and wasn’t going to go all the way home to get it while carrying my present, and I didn’t trust that old dude to not eat them all before delivering them.”

Asami’s lips curled upward slightly. “I guess I should take this opportunity to thank you for your gift, though I was hoping to thank you more appropriately.”

Korra’s eyebrows shot up, and she smirked. “Oh? And how did you want to thank me, Chef Sato?”

“Something written on fine stationary with a good pen. Possibly delivered with flowers.”

Korra chuckled. “I guess I could accept that.” She paused. “I, um, hope you don’t think I’m stalking you or something. I was just wondering if you’d like to go for a walk with me. I know you probably had a rough day and even with my cupcakes I just felt bad that you might be sitting here by yourself.”

Asami stared at her. “Jinora warned me about you, you know.”

“Sounds like I might need to fire her.”

“She said you were an unstoppable force of do-goodness.”

Korra waved this off in mock scorn. “She lies. I’ve actually made prior arrangements to sell you off to government operatives so I could steal your boat. One way or another I have to get you to Pier Thirty Two by midnight in order to get my money.”

“I see. I suppose this might be a bad time to mention that I’m proficient in a fairly violent form of martial arts that discourages having a sense of humor.”

“Might be fun to spar with you some time then, though having a sense of humor is encouraged in my training.” Korra held her hand out. “Come on. Hammocks are for reading books on nice days while drinking cold beers. Or naps on nice days. Anyway, nice days are key. The only time you should be in a hammock on a cold night is if there are cuddles involved. There’s a passable cafe with a really nice view about a twenty minute stroll from here, let’s go.”

Asami shook her head. “Korra this is very sweet of you, stalking implications aside. I’m just not feeling very social right now, though.”

“Don’t make me come up there and get you. You probably don’t weigh any more than Naga and I won’t hesitate to throw you over my shoulder.”

Asami stared at Korra’s hand, then slid her gaze up to meet those brilliant blue eyes and gave in. She reached out and grabbed the proffered hand with a sigh, letting Korra help her down to the dock.

“Unstoppable force?”

“You better believe it.”

They meandered along the waterfront, Korra asking the occasional question about Asami’s culinary training, or sharing a particularly funny mishap involving her food truck. Asami found herself
starting to relax in the warmth of Korra’s comfortable presence. They settled side by side on a wooden booth at the Java Joe’s Cafe, overlooking the cool dark water of the bay, drinking hot chocolate. The lights of the Bay Bridge and Treasure Island twinkled merrily against the encroaching fog, while closer to them the heavy swirls wrapped wetly around street lamps. The air grew colder and damper, and Asami shivered. Instantly Korra shrugged off her sweatshirt and draped it over Asami’s shoulders like a shawl.

“Korra, you’re going to freeze,” Asami began, trying to give the sweatshirt back.

Korra smirked, waving her off. “Actually I was about to just take it off anyway. The hot chocolate warmed me up. This is nothing. Where I grew up it was a whole lot colder than this.”

“Oh really? Where’s that?”

“Kodiak.”

Asami stared at Korra blankly.

“Alaska. It’s an island sort of south of Anchorage. I assume you’ve heard of Anchorage?”

“Yes, thank you, I’ve heard of Anchorage. But please don’t ask me to find it on a map.”

Korra chuckled. “Anyway, my mom’s a bush pilot and as I mentioned before my dad has his charter business. It’s admittedly a pretty isolated place, which is why I never moved back home — there’s all of two diners on the entire island and no food trucks. Despite that I like visiting though. I try to get up there about once a year or so.”

“I imagine it’s very beautiful,” said Asami after a moment.

“It’s amazing,” agreed Korra warmly. “My favorite thing is to go kayaking. I’ve seen just about every animal you can think of, and usually they don’t try to eat me.”

Asami’s brows went up. “You’re joking.”

“Weeeelll, one time I got a little too close to a bear and I had to hit him in the nose with my paddle. Another time a couple of orcas came over to check me out, and they were totally giving me some scary eye. And actually the worst time was when this old walrus came over and tried to hump the back of my kayak—” Korra broke off laughing as Asami swatted her in the arm. “Sorry, sorry, I couldn’t help myself.”

Asami groaned. “Damn, you had me going there for a minute. You’re worse than Bolin. He tells a great story but he can’t keep a straight face to save his life.”

“Ahh, Mister Bartender. He pours some excellent drinks.”

Asami glanced at her before turning back to her mug. “I’m starting to think you were the one who got him started on his secret menu.”

“I may have encouraged his creativity a bit,” Korra dropped her gaze to her own mug. “I hope that’s okay.”

Korra felt Asami’s hand on her wrist, and startled, she looked up into warm green eyes. Her breath caught, blood pounding in her ears.

“It’s absolutely okay, I promise.”
Asami realized she was still holding Korra’s arm and quickly drew back her hand. They were silent for a while, finishing their hot chocolate and listening to the soft gurgles of the bay sloshing against the pilings of the pier. Asami gave up and finally pulled Korra’s sweatshirt over her windbreaker against the chill, avoiding Korra’s knowing glance.

“So, did you want to talk about today?” said Korra finally.

Asami shook her head. “I don’t think I even know where to begin. I’m grateful for your offer though.”

“Anytime.”

They sat in companionable silence for a while, then Asami cleared her throat. “About those cupcakes.”

“I hope you liked them,” said Korra bashfully.

“I didn’t like them.”

Korra’s face fell.

“I thought they were the most superb dessert I’ve ever had, and don’t ever tell Kya I said that.”

Korra beamed and shoved Asami with her elbow. “Now who’s messing with who?”

Asami smiled. “Okay, so let me guess what you put in them. Hopefully my tasting palate isn’t completely incompetent compared to yours.”

Korra leaned back and crossed her arms, waiting.

“The chocolate and raspberry in the cake was pretty obvious. The nut paste filling definitely had multiple nuts in it, I’m going to go with walnuts, cashews and peanuts?”

“Close. Walnuts, pecans, and cashews blended with peanut oil.”

“Curses.”

Korra waved her along.

“There was one unusual flavor I had a really hard time placing, it was sort of like an extra buttery, slightly smoky toffee, but…”

“But a softer texture, yeah.”

Asami struggled for a moment. “Butterscotch?”

Korra’s grin flashed white.

“I don’t think I’ve ever actually had it before. It was strangely complimentary to the other flavors.”

“My mother’s special recipe, involves a bit of bourbon, hence the smoky bit. Won’t get it at a fancy cooking school. Way too plebian.”

Asami laughs. “Then I will say it’s a sad gap in the curriculum. My compliments to your mother.”

“I will definitely pass along your regards.” Korra grinned as she pushed herself up from the bench.
and held out her hand. Asami allowed herself to be pulled to her feet and they made their way through the crowded café back out to the sidewalk. Korra took a deep breath, then tilted her head, regarding Asami for a moment. Then she turned slightly, holding out her elbow in invitation. Asami blushed, but after a moment slid her arm into Korra’s.

“Are you always this dashing?” asked Asami softly.

“Only for the best girls,” Korra teased.

They walked in silence for a while. After a while, Korra said hesitantly, “Do you not have someone who is dashing at you on a regular basis?”

“I don’t date,” said Asami seriously.

Korra looks over at her. “You mean, like never?”

“No.”

“Really? Like never, ever?”

Asami huffed a little impatiently. “What part of ‘no dating’ is unclear?”

“I’m sorry!” blurted Korra. “It’s just, you’re so amazing, and so ridiculously beautiful, I can’t believe you’ve nev—”

Korra caught herself and clamped her jaw shut, not daring to look over at Asami. Then she shook her head and laughed ruefully, and in her best radio announcer voice said, “See the wild Korra in her native environment, the world’s expert in putting feet in mouth.”

Asami’s heart had stuttered at Korra’s comment, but she found herself smiling tentatively. To her surprise she also found that she still held Korra’s arm. After a moment, she decided to leave it there.

“My parents weren’t super affectionate with me or each other growing up, and in fact physical contact always felt pretty awkward. That… stayed with me, I guess. It didn’t help that in college I had my one and only attempt at a relationship and it ended really, really badly. I pretty much gave up after that. I can’t believe I’m telling you this.”

“I did tell you that I was easy to talk to.”

“So you did. Apparently I should have been better prepared.”

“Wouldn’t have helped,” said Korra cheerfully. “My ears are irresistible.”

“I would say there’s a whole lot more than your ears that are irresistible,” said Asami unthinkingly, before blushing furiously.

“Why, Chef Sato,” said Korra, amused. “Did you just flirt with me?”

“I was referring to your cupcakes.”

Korra made scoffing noises, but let it pass. Ahead of them loomed the darkened hulk of O’Shaughnessy’s Cafe and beyond it the entrance to the docks. Korra turned, letting Asami’s arm slide along hers until her fingers caught Asami’s palm.

“You never gave me an answer, by the way,” she said softly.
Asami stared at her hand clasped warmly in Korra’s, and felt a panic start to swell. She fought it down.

“How about we try again?” she managed finally.

“Will you be my guest at Tuesday’s Food Fight? It’s late enough that you shouldn’t have to play hooky at the restaurant, and I’d really like it if you came.” Korra met Asami’s gaze, blue eyes wide and hopeful.

Those damn blue eyes...

“Yes,” she said hoarsely after a moment, then cleared her throat. “Yes, I would love to be your guest. I make no promises on mockery levels should you lose however.”

Korra laughed delightedly, then bowed, raising Asami’s hand to her lips for a chaste kiss. “I will fight in your name, my lady!” She gave Asami’s hand a final squeeze, then released her with obvious reluctance as she stepped back. Then she noticed the look of shock on Asami’s face and dropped her head in embarrassment, rubbing the back of her neck.

“The wild Korra strikes again,” she muttered. “I’ll leave now before I humiliate myself any further. Good night!”

She turned and hurriedly trotted away, leaving Asami in slack jawed bewilderment behind her.

———

J-No: Hey, where are you?

Korra: Pondering death by liver failure but I’m out of beer and I don’t want to waste the bourbon. Where are you?

J-No: Swamp Bottoms. I picked up a stray, and I think I need your help. I will contribute towards your untimely death as incentive.

Korra: Oh yeah, this can’t miss.

Korra shouldered her way into the dark interior of Swamp Bottoms bar, Naga close on her heels. She caught the eye of Madison the bartender and tossed a wave. Madison smiled and immediately started pulling Bass ale into a large glass, to be followed by a careful pour of Guinness. Jinora was sitting at the far end of the bar next to a pathetically slouched lump. She saw Korra and waved desperately. Korra perched herself onto the barstool next to the lump and gestured for Naga to lie down, hooking her leash onto the coat hook under the counter.

“What do we have here, doctor?” joked Korra, looking at the assortment of glasses in front of the lump.

“I think he said his name was Wu. When I got here he was sort of crying about beef stock.”


Jinora nodded. “He also said something about Sato Grill.”

“You’re kidding.” Korra stared at the huddled figure, seeing mostly dark hair and olive skin. She patted him awkwardly on the back. He raised his head slowly, eyes glazed and unfocused.
There was a quiet thump as Madison plopped a large Black and Tan in front of Korra, the stout floating deliciously over the golden ale below.

“Put that on my tab, okay?” Jinora said to Madison. “And maybe some coffee for this guy?”

Madison nodded, smiling faintly. “He was already cut off, don’t worry. Probably should have cut him off a couple of drinks ago, so coffee’s on me. I’ll bring some aspirin and vitamin B from the emergency hangover kit. Little lightweight.”

Wu stared at the coffee cup. Jinora and Korra stared at Wu.

“Do you think he’ll be able to drink it?” Jinora asked in a loud whisper. “He’s been looking at it for like ten minutes.”

Korra grumbled and picked up the cup of cooling coffee. She grabbed Wu by the scruff of his neck and tilted his head back slightly before pressing the lip of the cup to his lips. “Dude, open up and swallow.”

Out of the corner of her eye she saw Jinora start choking with laughter, covering her mouth with her hands. Wu’s lips parted slightly and Korra tipped the coffee into his mouth. He swallowed reflexively before his head leaned back further and he slumped against Korra’s hand. Korra dropped the cup onto the bar, sloshing coffee everywhere in an effort to prevent him from falling off the stool. Madison’s bar back hurried over with some towels to mop up the mess.

“Madison, is he paid up? I need to get him out of here.”

Madison waved her away. “He opened a tab with a hundred dollar bill. I probably owe him about fifty in change.”

“Make sure to give yourself a good tip then give the change to Jinora.” With a quick heave she hauled the unconscious Wu onto her shoulder, then looked over at Jinora. “Can you bring Naga back to the warehouse for me? I’m going to take him home to sleep it off.”

Jinora grabbed Naga’s leash, and the big dog stood up happily, rubbing her head against Jinora’s knee and wooing softly.

“Hope he doesn’t throw up in the sidecar.”

“I’m going prop him carefully and pray.”

Jinora emerged from the bar a few minutes later with Naga in tow, and she immediately came over to where Korra was attempting to strap her extra helmet onto Wu’s head. He had collapsed in a heap against the side of Korra’s battered sidecar, primarily used for hauling Naga and groceries but now acting as ambulance to the hapless man.

“I hate to offer this, but should we put him in the Miata instead?”

Korra grunted, tugging the helmet strap tight under Wu’s chin. “Do you really want to have to clean out your car if he hurls? The sidecar can at least be hosed out.”

“You make a convincing argument.” Jinora opened her passenger door for Naga. “I still don’t get why he was muttering about Sato Grill.”

“Did you call Kai?”
“Left him a text but didn’t really want to bug him by calling while he’s working, especially since they were short staffed tonight.”

Korra pulled on her own helmet. “I’m sure Kai will call when he’s done, then we can figure out what to do with him.”

Jinora “Meet you back at the bat cave.”

Korra rolled her eyes and kick-started her old BMW to life. “Okay, drunk dude. You’re now a Korra special delivery. Do me a solid and do not throw up on anything, okay?”

Wu responded with a loud snore.

“I’ll take that as a yes.”

“What if he hurls on your couch?”

“You mean the couch that’s really Naga’s bed that I got for thirty bucks off of Craigslist? I’ll be heartbroken.”

Korra slid a five gallon bucket to near Wu’s head, hoping that if the deed was to be done, he’d at least have good aim. Jinora pulled a thin blanket over his crumpled form after tugging off his shoes. The two women retreated to the kitchen where they paused as Jinora’s cell phone beeped. She peered at the incoming message.

“Kai says Wu is a long story and thanks us for taking care of him. He and Opal will be by to pick him up tomorrow.”

“Must be some story,” commented Korra as she filled two glasses with water, handing one over to her friend. “That guy is so drunk I feel the need to sympathy hydrate. Also, you should go ahead and go. I can take care of this guy for one night, and now that I know you’re sleeping with the enemy it feels weird to let you crash with me in my bed.”

Jinora laughed and punched Korra playfully in the arm. “You ass. You know you want me.”

“I so don’t do straight girls.”

“You better hope Asami’s not straight then.”

“Oh, you did not just go there.”

“I so did, and you deserved it.” Jinora finished her water with a satisfied sigh. “Are you sure you don’t need help?”

“I’ve got it. Go find your boyfriend. One of us should have a good night at least. If you want to be helpful, bring me one of those glorious breakfast burritos from Tomasina’s.”

“Only if you’re lucky.” Jinora made a smoochy face at Korra before laughing her way out of the kitchen.

Korra heard the click of the front door closing behind her friend and shook her head, smiling. She wandered back into the main living area with a fresh glass of water and stood looking at Wu. He hadn’t moved, and a faint sheen of sweat covered his face.

“You are going to wish for death tomorrow, young man,” she said sternly. She put the glass of water on a nearby table and climbed up to her bedroom loft, yawning hugely. The lack of sleep the night
before combined with a very involved day left her feeling exhausted. She struggled out of her pants and shoes before collapsing gratefully onto her bed. As she drifted off she smiled at the memory of bright green eyes.
A think blanket of fog lay over the city, muting sounds and leeching away colors in the gray dampness. Asami sat slumped in her cockpit, legs stretched out along the bench, sipping coffee. The emotional drain of the hospital and a confusing evening with Korra left her feeling exhausted after another poor night’s sleep. She watched idly as patrons of the sport fishing boats the next dock over clomped their way to the day’s adventure, coolers full of beer and expensive fishing gear slung over their shoulders. Her pocket buzzed quietly and she pulled out her cell phone. Kya.

“Good morning.”

“T’m nearby, can I offer you a ride? If you’re still up for this…”

“No course, I’ll come out and meet you.” Asami swung her legs around and headed back down into the cabin. She grabbed her bag and her keys, then paused by the bakery box that sat on her narrow table. She gritted her teeth and walked away, then stopped irritably, went back and grabbed the box. Asami muttered darkly at the absent Korra. Her cupcakes were an irresistible menace.

Kya pulled up in her little car and Asami slid inside. Kya’s gaze dropped to the box in Asami’s lap.

“Dare I ask?”

“Korra made these for me. Despite my best efforts to resist, I’m about to eat one for breakfast and I’m grudgingly going to share one with you.”

Kya chuckled. “Korra? Didn’t we just meet her? How is it she’s making you cupcakes?”

Asami handed one over before biting into one herself with a sigh. “I’m not entirely sure, to be honest. She claims it was a bribe.”

“Oh my,” groaned Kya. “I was about to say, since when do you eat cupcakes at all, let alone for breakfast. But these…” she trailed off. “I may need to retire again if this is what the young bucks are coming up with.”

Asami grinned, and popped a frosting-caked dog paw into her mouth.

“Korra did say they’ll cheer you up.”

Kya finished her cupcake and smiled. “I am feeling some positivity, yes.”
with you. It might help.”

Asami sighed and rubbed at her temple. “Kya, I won’t lie to you, I’m still very angry. But you mean a lot to me, and if you think this is important I want to try and honor that. And if he’s truly dying,” her voice trailed off and she looked away. “I don’t want to have those kind of regrets.”

Asami felt the older woman’s hand squeeze her shoulder briefly before they exited the car.

Kya paused at the door to Hiroshi Sato’s room. Asami shifted the box of cupcakes and reached out to grasp Kya’s hand. Together they stepped through the doorway. The lights in the room were off and the blinds were closed, leaving the room in dim shadows. The quiet beeps of the monitoring equipment and the hiss of a pump were the only sounds. Kya approached the side of the bed, and took up the limp hand resting on the sheets.

“Hiroshi?” she said softly.

Asami stayed near the wall, holding her breath. She felt confused, seeing her father in this state. In her mind, he was a tall, distinguished man, impeccably dressed and extremely reserved. Now his hair was thinly mussed across his forehead and his face was wasted and unshaven. His eyes fluttered at Kya’s touch.

“My friend,” he rasped. “It’s good to see you.”

Kya brushed the hair away from his forehead. “I brought someone to see you, Hiroshi.”

She found the controller for the bed and pushed a button, raising him up slightly, then picked up his glasses from a nearby table and handed them to him. He fumbled them onto his face, gasping slightly at the effort. Then his eyes widened in shock as he finally saw Asami standing uncomfortably in front of him.

“Asami,” he whispered, tears falling down wrinkled cheeks. “My beautiful daughter.”

Her own eyes stung and she felt herself moving closer.

“Hi, Dad,” she said softly, uncertainly.

He raised a trembling hand towards her, and she hesitated, then grasped it firmly in her own. Her own tears now fell freely. Here was the man for whom she had held so much anger for so long, and now she felt only sadness and loss.

“My child,” he began. “I know you blame me for so many things, and I accept this. But so much has been kept from you, and I know you deserve to know it all, and I want to make sure you know before…”

He trailed off, then fell silent for a moment, his eyes seeking out Kya. She nodded almost imperceptibly. His gaze returned to Asami and he swallowed before continuing. “Before I lose any remaining opportunity.”

“Dad, what’s wrong with you?” Asami managed.

Hiroshi winced. “They found a brain tumor in my MRI last night. I’ve been having headaches for a while, and apparently that’s why.”

Asami’s stomach clenched. “Is it malignant?”
“Unknown, and difficult to determine as its location makes a biopsy somewhat aggravating for my oncologist.”

A flash of the father she remembered; the wry, understated humor that always caused her mother to shake her head and smile.

“The doctor will come by later today to tell me the plan, so I’m glad you here now. I’m not sure how much free time I’ll have for the next couple of days.”

Asami nodded dumbly. Hiroshi patted her hand awkwardly, then appeared to brace himself.

“You know that your mother and I met in college and we became great friends. She was in fact my best friend, and remained so until the day she died.”

Asami gritted her teeth at this and forced the familiar anger back down, but not before her father saw it flash across her face, and he sighed sadly.

“You are thinking, how could I betray my best friend? It is understandable you think this.” His voice shook and he paused again. Asami saw Kya squeeze his hand, and tears shimmered in the older woman’s eyes. “I have kept the truth from you at your mother’s request, but Kya has convinced me that this has done you harm, and for that I beg your forgiveness.”

Hiroshi’s voice trembled again and he gasped against a sob. His chest heaved as he struggled to catch his breath, before he was finally able to continue.

“What you don’t know is that we met in a therapy group for students who had been diagnosed as having mental illness. If we did not successfully complete this program, we faced being expelled from school and disowned from our families. It was my second time attempting the program, and my parents made it very clear what would happen if I failed again. Your mother is the only reason I stayed sane.”

Asami’s jaw dropped.

“Mental illness? What mental illness?” Asami looked across at Kya but her eyes were now closed and her head bowed, her own pain evident.

Hiroshi’s voice dropped even further, and Asami had to lean forward to hear him.

“For… deviancy.”

Asami sat down abruptly in a nearby chair.

Her father began to weep in earnest.

“Good morning, my darling friend Hiroshi!” said Yasuko with false cheerfulness. “Allow me to serve you your morning tea like a perfectly good little woman.”

Hiroshi snorted.

“But does it make you feel more complete as a woman when you serve me?” he asked sarcastically.

Yasuko snorted derisively. “I swear if I had been at all interested in men before this, Doctor Holier-Than-Thou Richards would send me screaming into the arms of the fairer sex.”
Hiroshi grinned but waved at her frantically to lower her voice.

“Please, the others are starting to arrive. Don’t say anything risky. You know what could happen.”

Yasuko looked rebellious but withheld further comment. Hiroshi took a sip of his tea and sighed happily. “I don’t know what you do that’s different, but your tea always seems to taste better than mine.”

He paused and looked at his friend. She was watching him thoughtfully with her head cocked to one side.

“What?” he asked curiously.

“Let’s get married.”

Hiroshi sputtered into his tea. “Are you serious?”

“I’m completely serious. Look, you know this so-called ‘therapy’ is ludicrous. You said it yourself.”

Hiroshi gaped at her. “Of course it is, but I hope we can at least learn enough to fake it successfully. It’s not like we have any choice.”

Yasuko raised one eyebrow and sipped her own tea before answering. “What better way for you to fake it than to marry a nice girl? The therapy worked, we fell in love as we fixed each other of our sick tendencies. Tell me our parents wouldn’t be ecstatic.”

“I, uh,” Hiroshi stuttered, his face red.

“And no one,” Yasuko leaned forward to say in a low voice,”would ever have to know what sorts of ‘friends’ we might also have. We would finally be free to live our lives as we saw fit.” She leaned back and gave him a sly smile. “And for whatever reason, you’re the best friend I’ve ever had. I could do worse.”

He stared at her. Then he started to grin.

“Give me a few weeks to arrange things properly, as befits my manly role. Will you allow me to select your ring?”

She gave him a gracious nod, eyes twinkling. “I’m sure your taste in jewelry is better than mine, so yes, please. You should probably select my dress too, while you’re at it.”

“Shut up.” Hiroshi huffed. “I’ll have you know I’ve never worn a dress, thank you very much. I’d much rather wear Armani. It flatters my figure.”

“You’re such a girl.”

“Yes, but apparently I’m going to be your girl.”

Yasuko laughed delightedly and pulled him into a tight hug.

“You’re the best girl ever,” she whispered happily.

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Korra stood holding a hose aimed carefully at a five gallon bucket turned on its side, its contents tipped carefully down the storm drain. Inside the sounds of Wu’s retching had finally abated after a
solid thirty minutes of groaning heaves. Korra was shocked that he hadn’t thrown up all of his internal organs. Opal had showed up with Bolin, Kai, and Jinora in tow just as Korra finished cleaning up the evidence of Wu’s painful wakeup call. However they came bearing a pile of deliciously greasy breakfast burritos and extra large coffees as well as a change of clothes for the hapless man so Korra was in a forgiving mood.

Korra eyed the bucket carefully and decided it looked clean enough. She’d bleach it out later. Naga gave her a soft woo from her blanket, relegated to the patio lest she decide that Kai or Bolin were a menace, and Korra paused to scrub behind her fuzzy ears apologetically. As she entered the kitchen Jinora handed her a large foil wrapped burrito and one of the coffees.

“Here, eat. I think we might be here a while.”

Korra leaned forward and caught sight of Opal and Bolin sitting on either side of Wu on the couch, Opal’s hand on Wu’s knee and Bolin’s on his back. He was sobbing quietly as they comforted him.

“So what’s his story, anyway?” Korra asked as she took a huge bite of burrito. “He works for you guys?”

Kai grimaced. “Not anymore. He was one of the interns we got from the Academy but he was a complete disaster and we had to kick him out of the kitchen.”

Korra instantly bristled. Jinora immediately scooted herself closer, cutting off the angle of attack between her and Kai.

“Hey Korra, take a breath and hear the whole story before you lose it okay?”

Korra glared at her, then carefully put down her burrito, picking up her coffee instead.

Kai eyed her nervously and licked his lips. “I swear it was for his own good! He kept screwing stuff up, couldn’t seem to do what he was supposed to do to save his life.”

“Oh, woe to the poor sap who isn’t perfectly obedient in the kitchen.” Korra snarled sarcastically.

“Korra,” warned Jinora, eyeing a suddenly angry Kai.

“You don’t know what you’re talking about!” he snapped. “I swear this kid was so desperate to show Chef that he was some kind of prodigy that he kept messing up other people’s work. He caused us to waste time and food and for no good reason!”

Korra’s scowl deepened.

“Look, you can think whatever you want, but if we didn’t give a shit we wouldn’t be here trying to help him.”

“Help him do what?” Korra burst out. “His internship was terminated. Tell me that doesn’t mean he’s going to be kicked out of the Academy for not being a perfect little minion.”

Kai stood up quickly, face flushed.

“Kai.”

Korra whirled to see Opal standing in the doorway, Bolin hovering anxiously behind her. Kai shook his head irritably and stalked out of the kitchen. Opal looked at Korra sadly and turned to follow him, pulling Bolin along.
Jinora stared at Korra.

“Wow,” she whispered. “Are you really that ready to think the worst of everyone just because of where they work? Of people we’ve gotten to know? Of people I care about?”

Korra stared at the coffee cup, not answering.

“You listen to me, Korra,” said Jinora through clenched teeth, her face pale. “Opal told me on the way over here that she and Asami agreed they weren’t going to tell the school, because they didn’t want to risk him being expelled. Asami was going to try and help place him elsewhere quietly, but she’s dealing with her father being in the hospital right now. Not that you are likely to care about any of that. You’d clearly rather just think they’re all like that fucker from Napa and be mad at everyone.”

Jinora grabbed her backpack and turned to Korra. “I’m taking tomorrow off. I’ll let you know if I’m going to be back on Tuesday. Or you can decide to fire me. Up to you.”

The sound of the door shutting behind her echoed loudly in the sudden silence.

Asami sat in stunned silence. Her father’s nurse had come in earlier to give him more pain medication and his eyes kept drifting shut as the narcotic effects took hold.

“Kya,” he finally managed, “please tell her the rest.”

The older woman looked surprised. “Are you sure?”

“Yes. She should hear everything, but I don’t think I can manage it now,” his voice trailed off and his eyes shut. Kya leaned over and pressed a kiss against his forehead. Then she turned to Asami.

“Let’s let him rest.”

Asami rose on shaky legs to follow Kya out the door and down the hall. They descended to the ground floor in silence before Kya led Asami down the hall and out a side door, into a beautiful courtyard garden. She sank down onto a stone bench and beckoned for Asami to join her.

“You must have questions,” she said matter-of-factly.

Asami nodded slowly.

Kya looked at her shrewdly. “You really are their daughter. I can see those cogs turning, but you know this to be true. You’re a perfect blend of both of them.”

Asami shuddered and closed her eyes. “I did start to wonder. How—“ she broke off, not sure how to ask.

Kya chuckled.

“Their wedding was huge. Both families were very prosperous and overjoyed that their children were once again normal and no longer shaming them. But there was also suspicion. There needed to be proof that the wedding was consummated. So I and Simon, as maid of honor and best man, made sure to get them both extremely tipsy and convinced them they could do this one last act, so that they could complete their escape from their parents control.”

Kya closed her eyes and shook her head, a faint smile on her face. Asami looked horrified.
“People were watching?”

“Oh no! Nothing like that!” Kya said hurriedly. “But there were family members right outside the room waiting, and probably listening. And I’m pretty sure the sheets were collected afterwards.”

The bitterness in her voice was palpable.

“But ultimately, when three months later when your parents announced that Yasuko was expecting, well, clearly all was well.”

Asami felt herself smile. “It only took one time?”

Kya chuckled. “I guess you were meant to be. Certainly you were treasured as a gift. An unexpected one, but loved all the more for it.”

“Who was Simon?” Asami asked after a moment.

Kya sighed. “Your father’s lover, though of course no one but Yasuko and myself knew that. He was a good man.”

Asami touched Kya’s arm hesitantly.

“And you?” she asked, already knowing the answer.

Kya met her gaze unflinchingly. “I was Yasuko’s lover. I never loved anyone the way I loved her. When I met her, she was the bravest, kindest, most loyal person I had ever met. When she told me of the plan she had hatched with Hiroshi I was delighted to see her mischief and rebellion at work. There was nothing I wouldn’t do to help her, to be deserving of all the love she gave me. It was harder for Simon, I think, to see Hiroshi marry someone else. He supported it initially, but it broke his heart in the end.”

Kya clasped her hands together, clearly uncomfortable with what she was about to say next.

“When you were twelve, Hiroshi’s father died.”

Asami nodded. She had never been very close to any of her grandparents so she hadn’t felt particularly sad, but she remembered the funeral and the somber tone that permeated the house.

“He was the last parent to pass, and Hiroshi felt that finally he and Yasuko could now live their lives openly and not pretend anymore.”

Kya took a deep breath before continuing, her eyes once again shiny with tears.

“Yasuko refused to consider it. She was terrified of hurting you, of how you would react. Her whole life she had never been able to ever truly be herself, and couldn’t bring herself to believe it was even possible. Hiroshi tied to understand, to be patient. His loyalty to her was strong, almost as strong as mine. But it was hard for him. He had already lost Simon and didn’t want to repeat that mistake. He became increasingly obvious with his new boyfriend, and they started to fight about it.”

Asami closed her eyes. “I remember the fights. I thought he was cheating on her.”

Kya nodded somberly.

“You must understand, he was not being unfaithful in the way you thought. Yasuko still had me after all. But his increasing lack of discretion infuriated Yasuko.” Kya’s voice started to shake. “After all her bravery and efforts to live on her own terms as best as she could, she had finally succumbed to
self-hatred. She let herself believe that her life was shameful, that she could never have your love if you knew. It terrified her so much, she even started to pull away from me, treating me more and more like her merely her dear friend, and not the woman who had loved her more than anything in the world, for so long.”

Kya slumped over, no longer able to hold back her sobs.

“Oh, Kya,” murmured Asami brokenly, pulling the older woman into her arms. “I’m so sorry.”

They sat together for a long while. Finally Kya sat back, wiping her face with her sleeve. She grasped Asami’s hands.

“There is one more thing you should know,” she managed, her voice still shuddering with emotion.

Asami’s stomach dropped. She wasn’t sure how much more of this story she could handle.

“When your mother got sick,” Kya paused, steeling herself. “And when we knew there was nothing to be done, that she was dying, your father tried to give Yasuko and I one last gift. He wanted—”

Kya’s voice broke, and her body shook with emotion.

“Hiroshi offered to step aside, so that Yasuko and I could be together, for real, at the very end. That’s what the divorce request was all about.”

Asami covered her face with her hands. “She refused. Because of me. Didn’t she?”

“She loved you so much, Asami.”

“How can you say that?” Asami cried. “If she couldn’t even trust me with who she really was? How could she think I would love her any less?” Her hands clenched into fists, and she felt dizzy with despair, but that soon turned to anger. “How could she let me believe that my father had wronged her so badly?”

She stood up and started to stalk away before whirling to face Kya again.

“Kya — my mother died years ago! How could you and my father let me believe a lie this whole time?”

Korra didn’t know how long she had been sitting at her counter, playing idly with her empty coffee cup. Finally she rubbed a hand over her face and pushed herself up. She let in Naga then decided that a shower was necessary. When she entered her main living area on her way to the bathroom she stopped, surprised.

“Didn’t think I’d still see you here.”

Wu looked up from where he was slouched against one end of the couch. He still looked like hell, but he appeared to be emerging from the deeper circles.

“I heard what you said,” he said quietly. “I just wanted you to know that I was grateful. But I also wanted you to know that it wasn’t like that.”

Korra threw herself down against the other end of the couch. Naga trotted over and gave both humans a disgusted look for sitting on her bed, then jumped up and squeezed herself between them.
“So tell me what happened so I can feel even shittier about how I was a complete asshole to people who probably didn’t deserve it?”

Wu winced.

“Kai was right. I kept fucking everything up. I couldn’t help myself.” Wu sighed, then said. “My mother is Hou-Ting Wong.”

Korra’s eyes opened wide in surprise.

“Seriously?”

Wu nodded miserably.

Korra knew of Hou-Ting Wong. Anybody in the culinary world would know. She oversaw a restaurant empire that stretched from Hong Kong to New York and was utterly ruthless, the epitome of everything Korra hated.

“She told me that I had to earn the right to take over things when she was gone, and she wasn’t going to help me. I had to do it all on my own. And if I didn’t, she’d disown me, give everything to my cousin. The kiss-ass bastard.”

Korra’s eyes narrowed. Finally, a real bad guy to loathe.

“So what does this have to do with how you screwed up your internship?”

Wu pinched the bridge of his nose and groaned.

“My whole life, she told me she was successful because she took charge, never let anybody stand in her way, did what she thought and to hell with everybody else. She loved telling stories about how she took over her first restaurant by starting as a dishwasher and just forced her way into taking over everything.”

“What do you mean, ‘took over her first restaurant’?” asked Korra suspiciously.

“She makes amazing food, don’t get me wrong. But I eventually found out she slept with the head chef then used that to blackmail him into giving her more control in the kitchen. Eventually she replaced him. Then she made a deal with a local triad and managed to force out the restaurant’s owners. With the triad backing her she ran rampant.”

Korra was in shock.

“You have got to be fucking kidding me. What is this, a bad cable TV movie?”

“I know, it’s awful.”

“Is she still involved with organized crime?”

“Sort of, I guess. I think she convinced them that they needed a ‘legit’ front, some sort of legal respectability and she could provide it for them. Still does as far as I know.” Wu let his head fall back against the back of the couch and closed his eyes. “You want to know the worst thing? I hate being chef, doing all the crazy work in a restaurant. I mean some parts of it are okay. I mean some parts of it are okay. I realized I don’t want to run her fucking restaurant empire, I was just doing what I was expected to be doing. But I’m a coward at heart, so I think I tried to do what she did in a way, just take over the kitchen.”

“Knowing you’d fail,” Korra finished.
“Not really cognizant of that at the time, but yeah. Last night I finally came to some damning conclusions about myself before I pickled myself into oblivion.”

Wu sat up again, and groaned, fingers rubbing aching temples.

“And I swear to you, other than taping me to a pole as a sort of punishment after I ruined the beef stock again, they were always really nice to me.”

Korra barked out a laugh.

“They taped you to a pole?”

“Yeah, at the time I was sort of terrified, but now I think it was fucking hilarious.” Wu grinned ruefully. “So now I’m not sure what I’m going to do. But I’m going to withdraw from that damn school and start figuring it out.”

Korra rose to her feet. “Come on, I need more coffee. And I need to figure out how to make some really big apologies. Maybe we could figure out how to not be stupid idiots together.”

Wu looked at her sharply, then nodded slowly. “Thanks, by the way. For helping me when you didn’t even know me. No one’s ever really stuck up for me like that.”

Korra felt her smile start to come back.

“Well, I’ve been told I’m an unstoppable force about things like that.”

Chapter End Notes

Is it weird to feel like an asshole for putting fictional characters through the ringer? Cause, I sort of do right now...
They stood side by side, facing the entrance of Sato Grill. “You ready for this?” Wu looked over his shoulder at Korra.

She gritted her teeth, but nodded. In one hand was a small duffle bag, in her other hand was her cell phone.

“Am I ready for this?” he asked plaintively.

Korra scoffed at him. “I think between the two of us, you have the far easier job. So shut up already and let’s get this over with.”

Wu smiled nervously, but nodded.

“Okay, I’ll be right back.”

He quickly pushed his way through the front door and disappeared. Korra took a deep breath and typed out the text she’d been putting off.

**Korra:** Hey, I just wanted to let you know you were totally right and I was utterly wrong. I am now trying to make things right. But you still don’t have to come to work tomorrow if you don’t want to. You are totally not fired. In fact I’m giving you a raise. Not a big one, but still. Also I’ve hired you an assistant.

Korra squinted at the door, wondering how Wu was doing in there. She hoped he wasn’t getting taped to a pole again.

After a few minutes, her phone beeped.

**J-No:** WTF. Are you drunk?

Korra: Not yet, but give me time.
J-No: Okay, you are sort of scaring me. Where the hell are you?

Korra looked up as the door opened, revealing a beaming Wu. Behind him followed Opal and Kai. Wu came over to hover at Korra’s elbow, patting her on the back. Opal and Kai were decked out in their full chef’s regalia and stood with their arms crossed, waiting. Korra dropped her gaze and hit ‘send’ on her phone before putting it into her pocket.

“I am an asshole,” she blurted. “I let a deep-seated prejudice get in the way of common decency and I am here to beg your forgiveness and to make amends.”

Opal and Kai blinked.

Korra turned to Wu, putting the keys to her loft in his hand.

“Like we agreed?”

Wu nodded eagerly. “I’m totally on it.”

Wu then bowed to Opal and Kai. “Thanks for everything, guys. I mean it. Please give my thanks to Chef Sato, and extend my regrets that I was the lousiest intern ever.” With a cheerful wave, he trotted off down the street. The Sato Grill chefs gaped as they watched him leave, before swiveling back to stare at Korra.

The food truck chef bit her lip nervously, then bent and rummaged in her duffle bag. Out came her old chef’s coat and a carefully wrapped bundle of her favorite knives. *Time to rock and roll…*

“Okay, I’m ready,” she announced cheerfully. “I know you’re down an intern, so I’m here for you to put me to work. If you want me to spend the rest of the day chopping vegetables, I am happy to do so. And don’t even think about paying me, by the way, in case you were worried about that.”

Opal finally found her voice.

“Korra, I’m glad you realized that we had Wu’s best interests at heart,” she began, “but it’s not necessary for you to work off some kind of imaginary debt.”

Shaking her head, Korra grinned at Opal. “No, seriously. My honor will not allow me anything less, because I threw some seriously epic levels of douche-baggery at you guys. If I don’t make it up to you with the only thing I can really offer, which is my labor, I’m going to have bad karma and reincarnate as a slug or something. Besides, I’m sure Kai would love the chance to boss me around.”

Kai burst out laughing. “I won’t lie. I’m kind of digging this idea.”

Opal shook her head, her expression bewildered. “I really don’t think—“

“Please, Opal,” pleaded Korra. “I’ll even do a tryout. If you don’t think my skills are up to your standards, then I will wash dishes. But I have to work for you today!”

Kai elbowed Opal playfully. “Come on, a free slave to abuse? How could we possibly turn down this opportunity?”

Korra and Opal both raised their eyebrows.

“I’m kidding, I’m kidding!”
Korra looked around the bustling kitchen and allowed herself to feel slightly impressed. Everyone was working hard but there was a warm camaraderie she was unaccustomed to feeling in this setting. Still, she was there to do a job, so she pulled her attention back to the task at hand, unrolling her knife pouch and flipping back the cover so that all her knives were ready for Opal to review.

Opal selected a couple of the knives, testing their sharpness and balance. “These are quite nice, well used but clearly cared for,” she finally said approvingly.

“Thank you, Chef,” Korra’s quiet response surprised herself. She may have rejected a traditional culinary career with a vengeance, but her old training in kitchen courtesies still kicked in hard.

Opal looked at Korra for a moment, but saw nothing but sincerity in Korra’s gaze. She shrugged and placed an onion, a carrot, and a potato on Korra’s cutting board. “Okay, then. Let’s see you chop. Batonnet for the potato, julienne for the carrot, brunoise for the onion.”

Korra selected her favorite chopping knife, a seven inch santoku, and got to work. Her sure hands made quick work of Opal’s request, and the resulting neat piles of exactly-sized produce made the sous chef smile. Kai leaned over and selected a piece of onion, holding up a tiny, perfect cube. “Not bad, food truck girl,” he said mockingly, but his face showed his respect. “Not bad at all.”

Korra winked at him, then looked at Opal. “So, do I pass?”

Opal regarded her for a moment, then looked over her shoulder. “Carlos, Rich!”

“Yes, Chef!” The nearby student chefs stopped what they were doing and immediately hurried over to them.

Opal gestured at Korra. “Meet your new buddy, guys. This is Korra. She’s going to help out today. Give her whatever job you like.”

The two interns nodded, eyeing her curiously, then looked at each other and started grinning. Rich nodded at Carlos, who spun back to Korra. “Hope you like chopping onions, Korra,” said Carlos enthusiastically. “We have a whole new pile we haven’t started on yet.”

Korra laughed delightedly. She reached into one pocket of her chef’s coat and pulled out a tie-dyed bandana that she slid over her hair. She then reached into the other pocket and retrieved her glitter-covered goggles, snapping them in place with relish. “Oh, yeah. Me and onions are like this!” she declared, holding up her tightly crossed fingers. “Let me at ‘em.”

Every one in the kitchen stopped what they were doing and stared incredulously at Korra. Rich looked sideways at Opal who shrugged helplessly, unable to hold back a small giggle. “Uh, okay. Right this way, then.”

Kai couldn’t hold it in any longer and he guffawed loudly. “Oh god, I can’t wait until Asami sees this!”

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Kya waited while the nurse replaced the saline bag feeding the IV line then grabbed Yakuko’s wrist to take her pulse. She heard a soft tap at the door and turned as Hiroshi walked into the room. The nurse made a note on her clipboard then quietly left, and Kya returned to her post, sinking back onto the chair next to the bed. She carefully took Yasuko’s hand in her own, her thumb rubbing gently over the knuckles. The skin seemed paper thin, stretched tautly over delicate bones.

“How is she?” he asked softly.

“She was awake earlier,” said Kya. “But her pain has been increasing, so they’ve upped the morphine dosage and it’s making her sleep more.”

Hiroshi’s face fell, and he pulled up another chair on the opposite side of the bed.

“I’m sorry she said no,” Hiroshi began haltingly. “I had really hoped—“

Kya shook her head quickly and closed her eyes, hating the sting of tears that instantly threatened.

“Hiroshi, it’s okay. I didn’t really expect anything to be different at this point.” She took a deep shuddering breath and pressed a kiss onto the top of the frail hand she held. “Where’s Asami?”

Hiroshi sighed. “She won’t leave her room and she won’t talk to me. She apparently overheard at least part of me talking with Yasuko about the idea of the divorce and took it very badly.”

“Oh no,” breathed Kya, her face stricken. “I’m so sorry. I’ll go talk to her.”

Hiroshi waved this off. “There will be time to talk to her. You need to be here.

Yasuko shifted restlessly and her eyes fluttered open.

“I’m sorry, Hiroshi” she whispered. “I’m so sorry for everything. You must hate me.”

Hiroshi choked back a sob. “You saved me, Yasuko. You gave us a chance for our own lives. And you gave me a priceless gift, a beautiful daughter. I could never hate you.”

“My gift to you is bitter now, Hiroshi, and I know it’s my fault that she’s so angry.” Yasuko gasped, trying to catch her breath. Finally she managed to choke out, “I so desperately wanted everything around her to be normal, as if I could even understand what that truly meant.”

Her eyes clenched shut against a spasm of pain.

“I was a fool, and I was a coward.” Her hand gripped Kya’s, her eyes beseeching. “You deserved better, my darling. And now I won’t be able to make it up to you.”

The wall Kya had carefully raised, keeping her emotions in check, collapsed.

“My sweet girl,” she sobbed. “I never wanted you to have to choose between me and Asami. I love you both too much for that.”

Yasuko’s eyes glittered, and she raised a trembling hand to Kya’s face. Kya closed her eyes at the touch, felt the faintest trace of a finger across her lips. She pressed Yasuko’s hand against her, tears streaming unashamedly down her face. Yasuko’s breath rattled harshly in her throat, her own anguished cries stuttering due to her shortness of breath.

“Take care of her for me, Kya,” she rasped. “Take care of them both for me.”

“Of course I will,” Kya whispered brokenly. “But I’m not ready for you to go. Please don’t go. We
need you. I need you. I’m begging you…” Her voice caught, and she cradled Yasuko against her, cheek against cheek.

“Koibito,” she heard Yasuko breathe faintly into her ear. “Beloved. I love you. Forgive me.”

Sunlight filled the hospital courtyard, and the quiet voices of patients and their guests provided a soothing backdrop. Asami clenched her hands in her lap. Her cheeks were damp with tears. Beside her Kya shifted, lost in memories, the older woman’s face raised to catch the warmth of the sun.

“Sometimes it’s hard to remember things about her,” Asami finally said. “It’s like looking through a fog. And I can barely remember when she died.”

Kya’s eyes were unfocused, her voice soft. “When your mother died, you were so devastated. You didn’t eat for days, wouldn’t speak. Hiroshi came close to having to hospitalize you. It was not the time to have a frank discussion about the unusual relationships of the adults around you. By the time you were feeling better, Hiroshi and I had succumbed to our own set of fears with you — fear that the truth would send you back into a depression, fear of you rejecting us both, but even more than that, a fear that the truth would somehow taint your memory of her. Neither Hiroshi nor I could bear the thought of that. I had hoped that eventually everything would come out, and we could lay down that burden of secrecy, but it’s taken far longer than I had ever dreamed to finally lay these ghosts to rest. I’m so sorry, Asami. None of the grownups in your life have done very well by you.”

Asami suddenly reached out and hugged the older woman to her, shocking them both. “Please don’t think that, Kya! I wish I could have known the truth all along, but I will always be grateful to you. You kept your promise — you took care of me.” Asami squeezed tighter, and she felt Kya return the embrace. “You still take care of me,” she murmured.

They held each other for a long moment, then Asami let her go and stood up.

“I’d like to see my dad again, and then I’d like to go back to the restaurant. I’ve been gone a lot the last couple of days and I feel the need to put my apron on.”

Kya wiped her face and followed her, smiling.

“Oh course. I feel the same. Heaven only knows what Michael has been doing without me.”

Asami stepped into the main entrance of Sato Grill and instantly felt her shoulders start to unclench. She desperately wanted a return to some semblance of normalcy and she desired nothing more than to be surrounded by the comforting familiarity of her kitchen. The sound of Bolin chortling caused her to veer towards the bar, where she saw him convulsing with laughter while Opal and Kai smirked, looking on.

“Chef!”

Bolin’s joyful shout caused her to jump, but she found herself smiling despite herself as she moved to join them. Opal hurried over and grabbed Asami in a fierce hug before pulling back and looking at her closely, her face showing her concern.

“Are you okay?”

Asami swallowed hard in the face of Opal’s obvious affection, and nodded briefly.
“My dad is getting tests done. I’m going to swing by tomorrow to hear the latest test results and we’ll go from there. Kya’s been helping both of us with all of this.”

Opal nodded, her expression sympathetic. “Is Kya still at the hospital?”

“No, she had to run home, but she should be back soon.” Asami looked longingly at the coffee station on the back counter of the bar. “I don’t suppose…”

Opal laughed, then ducked into the bar and pushed Bolin away from the espresso machine to drop fresh grounds into the portafilter.

“So what was the joke?” Asami asked as Opal placed the tiny porcelain cup in front of her.

Kai snickered. “You should take that into the kitchen and see for yourself, Chef.”

Asami’s eyebrows shot up, but she tools a deliberate sip of the bitter liquid before standing up and heading for the kitchen. As she entered the kitchen she looked around and initially saw nothing amiss. Final preparations were ramping down and the cooking staff were starting to take their breaks before the dinner service started. She shook her head and wondered at Opal and Kai. As she took a step towards her office she felt a hand on her shoulder and turned to meet Kya’s gaze. The older woman’s eyes shimmered damply and her smile was tentative. Asami gripped Kya’s hand firmly and returned the smile. Relief washed across Kya’s face and she nodded before turning towards the pastry station. Then she stopped, her eyes widening and her mouth falling open. Asami whirled to follow her gaze.

In the rear of the kitchen Carlos and Rich hovered near the cleaning station and watching as a colorful figure danced in front of the sinks, hands moving rhythmically as dirty dishes were racked into the industrial dishwashers at the rear of the kitchen.

“Are you sure we can’t help you?” Rich reached out to pull an ear bud out of the ear of the dancing figure next to him, “Normally this is a job for more than a one person, and I’m pretty sure using headphones is against kitchen policy.”

The figure glanced up, a small sauté pan spinning in one hand. Asami was completely stunned to recognize Korra.

“There’s no way to do this without tunes, student chef Rich, “ said Korra indignantly. “You gotta have a cadence going to rack properly!”

“Korra!” said Asami loudly, walking quickly towards her. She paused, taking in more of Korra’s outfit. “Are those… goggles?”

“Yes, Chef!” said Korra cheerfully. “I always have them handy if I’m doing onions or chilies.”

“Carlos, Rich, please take over,” she grabbed Korra’s arm and hustled her into the office. “I’m honestly starting to wonder if you’re some kind of stalker. What are you doing here?”

Korra’s face fell, and she pulled the goggles and bandana off and twisted them in her hands nervously. “I’m sorry, I sort of— I sort of lost my temper at Opal and Kai earlier and was trying to make it up to them. I’m not stalking you, I swear!”

Asami blinked, still trying to process the fact that Korra was in her kitchen.

“Anyway,” said Korra anxiously, her face reddening. “I wasn’t going to stay during dinner service, because that’s different than just doing prep and cleaning. And I really hope everything is okay with
you, and it’s nice to see you but it’s looking like you don’t share that view — Look, I’m rambling and I’m really sorry to bother you and I’ll just be going now, okay?”

Before Asami could collect herself and respond, Korra sidled hurriedly past her and was gone.
Welcome back to the Korrasami Foodiverse, Act I is just about wrapped up, and Act II will shortly be Getting Real (tm).

I can’t say enough about how awesome @MidnightLion is as a beta reader (and grammar nazi, poker of plot holes, slayer of adverbs, friend to the Oxford comma, and inspirer of necessary rewrites). Sending a ton of grateful love your way!

Swamp Bottom Bar was almost empty, which pleased Korra to no end. She had fed enough quarters for a couple of hours worth of music into the jukebox and had commandeered one of the pool tables. She periodically wandered over to the bar for a fresh beer before returning to stare at the worn green felt. After the scene at Sato Grill, the pangs of embarrassment and regret that she had somehow screwed up a budding friendship with Asami so badly (and so quickly) lingered.

"With a look like that on your face you probably shouldn’t bother with beer,” someone behind her teased.

Korra turned to look. Madison, the bartender, sat at one of the bar stools next to the wall with two shot glasses and a bottle of whiskey.

"Not a clue as to what you’re talking about," growled Korra defensively.

Madison snorted and poured out.

"Don’t be an ass. You’ve been playing the same game for almost two hours and you still have half the balls on the table. Something is going on inside that luscious head of yours.”

They clinked glasses and downed the shots. The bartender poured out again.

"Are you trying to get me drunk?” Korra asked, giving the blond woman a pointed stare.

Madison laughed. “You mean, am I trying, once again, to get you to come home with me? Maybe. Your expression says girl trouble to me. I’m always happy to help take the edge off.”

Korra groaned. “You’re incorrigible.”

“So I like doing naughty things with hot women. Sue me. Why the hell else would I run a bar?”

“I’m pretty sure you would break me in half.”

Madison smirked. “You’ll never know until you try.”

“I’m flattered, but sadly the answer remains no.”

Madison downed her second shot with a flourish. “Welp, if you still won’t let me give you a
therapeutic fuck, then at least let me hear what put you into such a piss poor mood.”

“Jesus, Madison, really?” Korra tossed her pool cue onto the table, giving up on the game and grabbing the full shot glass.

Madison merely raised her eyebrow.

“Okay, fine. I met the most amazing and beautiful woman, and I can’t get her out of my head, and in the space of a couple of days I’ve managed to both insult her and make her fear for her safety. And by the way, she’s so out of my league I think I’m going to get a nosebleed from the altitude differential. I had also managed to insult a bunch of other people I like because I jumped to some really erroneous and fucked up conclusions, in the process totally pissing off Jinora who may or may not have quit in disgust. Basically, I’m just not feeling like a decent human being right now.” Korra took a deep breath, then let out a shuddering exhale. “There, are you happy? Just your typical Korra fuckup…”

The bartender’s sardonic gaze softened. “Babe, we’ve known each other a long time, right?”

Korra gulped another shot of whiskey and nodded miserably.

Madison reached over and squeezed her forearm.

“You’re a good person, Korra. One of the best. As far as I’m concerned, anybody who can’t see how big your heart is, well, they don’t deserve to know you.”

“Shit,” Korra muttered softly. The tears she’d been holding back finally started to fall but she wiped them quickly and angrily. “Oh, hell no; I’m not going there. Pour me another one, Mad, and get a stick. I’m going to beat your ass at pool while drinking whiskey until dawn.”

“Oh, hell no, back at you. I’m kicking you out at the normal end of my business day, and your shitty pool playing skills are about to get a beat down. However, feel free to drink as much whiskey as you like in the meantime.”

Sato Grill was closed. The kitchen and dining areas were impeccably clean, and the restaurant should have been locked up and dark. Instead, Bolin placed two tumblers on the bar before reaching for his hidden stash under the counter. A moment later he pulled out a small hand-blown glass bottle filled with a dark amber liquid. He pulled the cork and was engulfed by a sweetly smoky scent before pouring out a generous measure into each tumbler. He then nodded to the two women sitting in front of him, waiting expectantly.

“Salud.”

“Kampai.”

Kya and Asami clinked their glasses and before each taking a reverent sip, holding the drink on their tongues before allowing it to slide deliciously down their throats.

“Oh my god,” moaned Kya. “I can’t believe you have me drinking tequila at my age, but damn this is good.”

Bolin laughed loudly. “Best stuff I’ve ever had. It’s pretty much ruined me for anything else.”

Opal came around the corner of the bar dressed in black jeans and a gray Hello Kitty tee-shirt, her
chef’s gear stowed in the duffle bag slung over her shoulder. Her phone was in her hand.

“Kai just picked up Jinora and they’re heading over to our place, Bo,” she announced. “Are you ready to go?”

“I’m totally ready for a movie followed by sleeping in.” Bolin placed the bottle of tequila in front of Asami. “Just in case, huh, guys?”

Kya nodded with a slight smile. “We’ll finish locking up. You two go have fun. See you on Tuesday.”

Asami idly swirled her glass, lost in thought. Opal gave Kya a worried look, her eyebrow raised with an unspoken question. The older woman shook her head and tried to look reassuring. Although she hesitated, Opal ultimately grabbed Bolin’s hand, pulling him toward the door.

“Opal, wait—” Bolin started in surprise.

“Bye, guys! Come on, Bolin,” said Opal with forced cheerfulness, and she dragged the reluctant bartender out the door.

Kya took another sip of the heavenly tequila and wondered idly how it might work reduced down with some sugar into a sauce, then chuckled at the thought of the look on Bolin’s face were she to use a two hundred dollar bottle of booze to make a dessert. She glanced sideways, realizing Asami had not reacted to her laugh. The younger woman was still staring absently at the polished bar top.

“Asami?” she asked carefully.

“What harm?” replied Asami, her eyes still looking at something far away.

“Excuse me?”

Asami turned and focused on Kya. “Dad said you thought I had been done harm.”

Kya took a deep breath, her face thoughtful and sad. “Asami,” she began falteringly, “you are a beautiful, successful young woman. But I worry that growing up with secretive and repressed parents has not allowed you to feel comfortable with any sort of intimacy.”

Asami stared at her, eyes widening.

“You’ve never dated,” Kya continued. “You always shut down when someone shows any interest in you. You barely have acquaintances — let alone friends — outside the restaurant, and even though your staff loves you and shows you their affection, you have a hard time letting them get too close.”

Kya regarded the young chef with deep affection.

“I worry about you being lonely, Asami. And more than anything, I don’t ever want you to feel regret.”

Asami’s stomach dropped. The memory of Korra’s expression during their confrontation in the kitchen left an ache in her chest that she couldn’t dispel. “What if I already have regrets?”

Knowing eyes met hers. “You go fix them, while you still have the opportunity.”
Naga’s loud barking reverberated through the warehouse, forcing Korra awake. She stared blankly at the ceiling for a moment then rolled over and leaned over the railing off her loft to see what the commotion was all about. Naga faced the door, barking loudly, but her tail waved happily. *What the hell?* Korra grabbed the jeans she had discarded the night before and gingerly crept downstairs. Naga’s bark had subsided to an eager whine, and with the reduction of decibels Korra finally heard the unmistakable sound of a knock.

Korra made sure the door’s security chain was attached before cautiously opening the door. Naga struggled mightily to push her nose past Korra’s knee in order to greet a sheepish Asami Sato.

“I’m sorry if I woke you,” Asami seemed unable to meet Korra’s gaze, and her hands were clenched tightly around a grocery bag. “May I come in?”

“Oh, sure! Wait a sec — Naga, get back, dammit!”

Korra managed to push the stubborn animal away from the door long enough to unhook the security chain and let Asami through. She ran her hands through her hair and tried to clear the fog from her brain while Naga wriggled excitedly against Asami’s legs.

“Um, what are you doing here?” Korra started to ask, then shook her head. “Er, that’s not what I meant. How did you know where I lived?”

Asami opened her mouth, then closed it, struggling to organize her thoughts now that an adorably rumpled and surprised Korra was standing in front her. She clutched the bag more firmly to her and willed herself to remember she was an unflappable executive chef who had faced down food critics and rivals with aplomb.

She failed.

“I really wanted to apologize after yesterday, so I asked Kai to ask Jinora how to find you.” Asami thrust the bag at Korra, a slight shake in her voice. “Here, I brought this as a peace offering.”

Korra accepted the bag curiously, and almost moaned at the smells that wafted over her. “You really don’t need to apologize — oh my god, this smells like Liam’s food.”

“It is. I… I asked him what you’d like,” said Asami in a rush. “He gave me some coffee, too.”

Korra opened the bag and peered in. “There’s a cup of coffee in here?”

“No, I got him to give me some beans.”

Korra stared at Asami in shock. “You did not. He doesn’t give his beans to anybody.”

Asami finally lifted her gaze. “I traded him a free dinner for two at Sato Grill. Apparently his anniversary is coming up.”

There was a long pause while they regarded each other, then Korra managed look away and gesture behind her.

“Come on in.”

Asami followed Korra past a brightly painted food truck, a battered motorcycle, and an even more battered couch before they stepped through a doorway into Korra’s kitchen. Korra put the bag on the counter and then rummaged in the cupboards for place settings.
“Please sit down,” she said over her shoulder, and Asami settled obediently onto a stool. She looked around, taking in the well-worn butcher block island with the mismatched set of stools clustered around it, and the industrial eight burner stove that appeared old but beautifully maintained. Along one wall were metal shelves filled with bottles of oil and big containers of spices and dried chilies. A pile of boxes was piled in the far corner, a set of speakers perched on top. On several boxes she saw labels like “guest room”, “living room”, and “bedroom”; the descriptions seemed a little incongruous given what she had seen thus far.

Korra started emptying the bag, pausing reverently when she pulled out the bag of coffee beans. “I can’t believe he gave you some beans. Do you know how long I’ve been asking him?”

“Liam said around three years,” Asami blushed. “I remembered you mentioning it, and thought it would be the perfect way to make things up to you. He was pretty smug about how long he’s held you off.”

“You don’t need to make anything up to me, Asami,” mumbled Korra. “I’m the one who invaded your restaurant.”

Asami winced at the reminder of her initial hostility. “I won’t deny I was very surprised to see you,” she admitted. “But my reaction wasn’t the best. I don’t deal very well with surprises. Or people, frankly.”

Korra swallowed hard at the sadness in Asami’s voice. “Hey, it’s okay! I drive everybody crazy at some point, don’t worry about it. How about you dish up the food and I’ll make us some coffee.”

Asami cracked open the to-go containers and started spooning oatmeal into bowls. Her hands mechanically arranged Liam’s soda bread and a pile of bacon onto a plate as she surreptitiously watched Korra clean out her grinder before putting in a fresh measure of Liam’s custom roast.

“I’m going to make a latte for me. What would you like?”

“Just espresso, please.”

“I still can’t believe you got some of Liam’s beans. And for the trade you made, this is probably the most expensive pound of coffee on the planet.”

The corner of Asami’s mouth curled slightly upward. “Worth it, especially since you’re sharing.”

They dug into the food. Korra added sliced bananas, raisins, cream, and brown sugar to her oatmeal with obvious delight as Asami looked on in amusement.

“What?” demanded Korra. “This is how you’re supposed to eat it!”

Asami chuckled, then seemed to steel herself. “I heard about Wu, and why you were at the restaurant.”

Korra felt her cheeks grow hot, and she quickly stood up to get herself a glass of water to have something to do.

“I wanted to thank you for that,” Asami continued, “I honestly wasn’t sure what to do for him.”

Korra whirled around. “You wanted to thank me? I totally lost my shit at your crew!”

“You made up for it,” Asami reminded her. “Opal told me what happened. I’m so sorry I didn’t take the time to find out before I accused you — I thought you — I was so very, very wrong in how
I treated you.” She felt her hand trembling and quickly put down her spoon. “Especially after all the kindness you have shown me,” she finished hoarsely.

Korra was at her side in an instant, pulling her off her stool and into a hug. “I’m pretty sure you deserve every kindness I can give you,” she breathed. She felt Asami hesitate before returning the embrace, ultimately resting her head on Korra’s shoulder. A delicious warmth settled over her and she closed her eyes at the taller woman’s touch. After a moment she realized she had passed the threshold of friendly and hurriedly stepped back, allowing her arms to fall.

“I’m sorry, I forgot you’re not really into hugs,” she stammered, alarmed to have crossed that line yet again.

Asami tried to control her breathing, her heart still pounded from the contact. Her blush had returned in full force, but she managed a reassuring smile. “It’s not that I don’t like them, it’s just that I’m not really used to them. Since I’ve been getting more recently, I’m finding that I actually enjoy them a great deal.” Especially from you.

Korra beamed. “Chef Sato, you can have a hug from me whenever you like, just so you know.”

“That’s… good to know.”

Their eyes met, sapphire and emerald. The room suddenly felt warmer and Korra’s breath caught when she saw Asami’s pulse throbbing in her neck. “Would you like another one now?” she blurted before she could stop herself.

Asami’s eyes glowed, and then she was in Korra’s arms again, their cheeks pressed together. “Yes. I would,” she murmured. At the back of her mind was shock and a little fear that she was reacting so strongly, as she never had before in her life allowed herself to react to any other person. She pushed those thoughts away, focusing solely on how good it felt to be pressed up against that warm, welcoming body.

No regrets…

Korra was on fire. She struggled mightily to not fist Asami’s shirt in an eager hand, or bury her face in that alabaster neck to feel the pulse against her lips. With a groan she pulled herself away, but not before she saw a look of disappointment flash across Asami’s face. She squeezed Asami’s arm reassuringly, intent on not making it seem like a rejection.

“I’m sorry,” she said huskily. “I needed— we’re still getting to know each other, and I was very close to doing something terribly inappropriate.”

Asami’s eyes widened and she smiled shyly, a little twinkle in her expression letting Korra know the message was well received. Korra sighed in relief, then she chuckled.

“For someone who doesn’t have a lot of experience giving hugs,” she teased, “you’re pretty damn good at them.”

“I find myself having a lot of practice of late,” Asami replied affectionately.

Korra forced herself back to her seat at the counter and picked up her spoon. Asami sat across from her. They regarded each other thoughtfully, unsure what to do next.

“So when do you have to be at the restaurant today?” Korra finally asked.

Asami finished her espresso with a sigh of deep satisfaction. “Actually, we’re closed on Mondays.
A lot of the time I’ll go in anyway and do paperwork or something, but I’m playing hooky today.”

“Are you now? Is that a new thing for you too?”

Asami laughed. “Well, not often, but I try at least once or twice a month to take a real honest to goodness day off.”

“You’re such a rebel.”

Asami rolled her eyes. “You mock me. Just when I was going to invite you to join me.”

Korra sat up straighter. “That wasn’t mockery, it was admiration. It also so happens that I have the day off as well, courtesy of Jinora’s rage. What did you have in mind?”

“Knives.”

Korra blinked. “What?”

“I’m working on a new knife. You seemed to like the ones you saw on my boat. I thought maybe you’d like to come see some of my work in progress.”

“Holy shit!” yelled Korra. “A thousand times yes! I am so down for that!” She scooped up the dishes and deposited them into the sink with a clatter. “Let me walk Naga and then I can go.”

Asami grinned at Korra’s enthusiasm. “Meet me down at the dock. I have some stuff I need to get before we head over to the forge.”

Korra held the front door open for her, unable to quash the broad smile plastered on her face.

“See you soon.”

“Definitely.”

As the door closed, Korra stood frozen for a long moment, then she leaped high into the air with a loud whoop before whistling for Naga.

Chapter End Notes

Coming up, Korra gets to play in a forge with glowing hot metal, or more to the point, gets to watch Asami play in a forge with glowing hot metal.

Oh yeah, this can't miss...
Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

Sorry this took so long, but holy cow MidnightLion is a BEAST of a beta reader. Had to rewrite sections and everything, but boy am I thankful for the care and feeding my work has been receiving.

Hope you all enjoy it!

(PS - Translations are at the bottom, and a HUGE THANKS to fabioanto79 over at FF.net for helping me with my Italian...)

FirstRuleAboutFoodFight @FRAFF 2h
@FoodTruckMasterNaga @Chalupacabra 36 hours to go, my pretties. Are you ready to throw down?

Cryptozoological Foodie @Chalupacabra 1h
@FRAFF @FoodTruckMasterNaga I can already taste the sweet, sweet victory

They Call Me J-No @NagaMinionTwo 2h
@Chalupacabra @FRAFF @FoodTruckMasterNaga You keep telling yourself that, little naked imaginary creature

“Seriously? This is where we’re going?” Korra stared at the stark metal double doors set into the front of a battered brick building. A weed-choked empty lot and a shuttered car repair shop bookended the building. Across the street were freight train tracks. It was eerily quiet. “You’re not secretly a serial killer, are you?”

Asami rolled her eyes. “Come on, you big chicken. I’m not going to murder you.”

Korra shifted the heavy duffle bag she had insisted on carrying for Asami while the black haired woman pressed a small button to the left of the doors. After a brief pause, Korra heard the sound of a dead bolt being thrown back and the right hand side door swung open.

A burly older man stepped through the door and engulfed Asami in a huge hug. He was barrel chested with dark, weathered skin. A black beret perched jauntily atop salt and pepper curls; faded cargo pants and an eye-watering tie-dye tee shirt completed the ensemble.

“Asami! Sei in ritardo. Chi e’ la tua bella amica?”

“Stai indietro, Leonardo,” replied Asami, smiling. “Lei è con me. Questa e’ Korra.”

At the close of their exchange, he stuck out a huge, calloused hand which Korra accepted gingerly.

“Welcome to my humble workshop, Korra! I am Leonardo.” He kept his grip on Korra’s hand and pulled her through the doorway before commandeering Asami’s duffle bag.
“Leonardo teaches classes a couple of times a year,” explained Asami, smiling. “In addition to his commissions. I took them every chance I got until he made me stop. Now I pay him for one-on-one instruction when I have the time.”

“Ha! You do not pay. You insult me.”

Asami sighed. “I write you a check every time.”

“That’s because you are stubborn. Testa dura. I do not cash them. You cook for me; we are friends now.”

Asami blew out her breath. “I keep hoping you’ll give in.”

Leonardo shook his head. “Come along, mie bellezze! The fire awaits.”

When Korra stood in the entryway, her jaw dropped in surprise. The building opened into a huge open space where glass panels in the ceiling illuminated the interior with a wealth of natural light. Everywhere she looked, she saw innumerable lush green potted plants, iron grills and bannisters, clusters of steel bars, and other various unidentified bric-a-brac. She glanced down when she felt a touch down her arm, and saw Asami’s fingers brush her wrist.

“Come on, you’re going to love this.”

They wound their way through the densely packed foliage that appeared to nearly fill the space. As they walked, Korra noticed little metal statues and intricate candlesticks scattered amidst palms and ferns, and against the far wall there appeared to be a line of tall tomato plants growing happily under an assortment of grow lights.

“So...o,” said Korra quietly, “you speak Italian?”

“A little. I like to learn languages, and Leonardo always makes me practice.”

“What were you guys saying?”

Asami blushed and carefully avoided looking at Korra. “Oh, he... just wanted to know who you were.”

Korra narrowed her eyes, ready to challenge this statement, but they stepped around a support post and emerged into the main work area and she stopped, fascinated. The forge itself was an impressive hulk against one wall and the bright glow it emitted lit up the workbenches, anvils, tools, welding equipment, and stacks of raw materials that Leonardo used to make his creations. Tucked into a corner on the opposite wall was a small kitchen. Korra blinked as she took in a metal reproduction of Da Vinci’s Vetruvian Man hanging from the ceiling over a butcher block kitchen island, similar to the one she had at home. Behind that hung what appeared to be row after a row of cured meats, ropes of garlic and bunches of drying herbs. A large pot of soup simmered merrily on a small stove, the contrast between its aroma, the smell of hot metal, and the whiff of burning coal oddly pleasant.

Leonardo hurried over with two small classes filled with a clear liquid and handed one to each them.

“Alla salute, Asami! A new batch to try, and I have the forge nice and hot for you.”

Korra watched carefully as Asami knocked back her drink in one smooth motion, then did the same. Her eyes watered profusely, and she struggled not to choke at the intense burn.

“You drink this first thing in the morning?” Korra rasped as the other two laughed heartily.
“You don’t like my grappa, eh?” Leonardo patted Korra on the back. “It’s okay, you don’t know any better.”

“I’m sure she’ll like some of your other offerings just fine,” said Asami, handing back her glass. She turned to Korra. “In addition to being a master metal worker, Leonardo is also known for his somewhat specialized culinary skills. And by the way, a shot of grappa before forging is sort of a tradition.”

“Oh yeah?” Korra meant to ask more but was distracted as Asami started pulling various intriguing things out of her duffle bag.

“These are my blanks,” began Asami, opening up a large canvas knife roll to show an assortment of rectangular metal chunks. “This is what you start with when you’re going to make something. Leonardo makes most of these for me because I haven’t learned how to make damascus steel properly.”

“She lies!” shouted Leonardo from where he carefully stirred his soup. “She just likes to make me do the hard work!”

Asami ignored this comment. She pulled out a slightly scorched piece of leather and then unrolled it to reveal an unfinished knife blade, about six inches long.

“This is my main work-in-progress. One of the first knives I ever made was a paring knife, but it wasn’t very good, so I’m finally getting around to making a new one.”

“Seems kinda long for a paring knife,” commented Korra.

Asami shook her head. “This part here, where it’s narrower, is called the tang. That goes inside the handle. I make my knives so that the tang goes all the way through the handle, rather than just the first inch or so.”

“Does it make a difference?”

“Schools of thought. Honestly, it just sort of became my thing. Anyway, this knife is almost done except for the handle, which I’m still thinking about.” Asami put the blade back down, then turned back to her duffle bag. She shook out a long leather apron and tied it on. The she shrugged herself into a sort of half jacket, mostly leather sleeves with connecting material across the shoulders and chest that ended just below the top of the apron. She finished off her look by pulling on a leather gauntlet.

“Snazzy duds, there, Chef,” teased Korra.

Asami raised her eyebrow, twinkling green eyes belying her attempt at a stern demeanor. “Don’t annoy me, Korra. Otherwise you won’t get to play with any of my toys. Since I’m not sure about the handle, I thought we could start a new knife today. We can use one of the regular steel blanks that I made.”

Korra was unable to control her wriggle of excitement, to her utter disgust. However, she refrained from further teasing. Asami headed towards the forge and selected a long pair of tongs, using them to pick up the blank before shoving it into the forge, and burying it into a hot pile of coals.

“Damn, that’s hot.”

Asami adjusted her tongs slightly, peering at the bright orange glow critically.
“Yes. Hence my snazzy duds, as you so eloquently put it. Also keeps any sparks from landing on my skin. I get enough burns at the restaurant.”

“Makes sense.” Korra took another step back from the wall of heat next to the forge. “Just how hot is it in there, anyway?”

“About sixteen hundred degrees. Give or take.” Asami stepped back, leaving the tongs sticking out of the front of the forge. “Come on, let’s get you suited up.”

She gestured for Korra to follow her towards the back door of the shop where an assortment of leather aprons hung on a peg. She grabbed one and held it by the neck strap, stepping forward as if to place it over Korra’s head before stopping, instead holding it out awkwardly for Korra to take. Korra bit back a smile as she slid the neck strap in place, then fumbled at the waist straps a bit before looking sheepishly at Asami.

“A little help?”

“Wrap it around—No, not like that—Now that part under—Oh just wait a sec,” Asami rolled her eyes at Korra’s floundering and found herself reaching both arms around the smaller woman’s body to secure the ties firmly around her. Korra gulped and held very still, Asami’s close proximity making her heart thud painfully. She let out the breath she was holding when Asami finally stepped back. They exchanged a shy glance before Asami nodded her head towards the forge and stepped away.

Korra followed her dumbly, skin tingling. Asami pulled the buried blank partially out, checked the color and shoved it back in.

“Needs more time, mia cara,” Leonardo called. “Come, sit with me while you wait.” The older man sat comfortably on a wooden stool next to the butcher’s block, shaving slices of meat off a cured leg of pork onto a plate. A block of cheese, bowl of olives, loaf of bread, and unmarked bottles of olive oil and some type of vinegar also sat on the table.

“This looks good. What deli do you go to?”

Leonardo scoffed and glared at Asami before turning back to address Korra’s question. “I do not buy such food. I make it.”

“What, really? All of it?”

“Of course! In my family growing up, we always made our food. How else do you know if it’s good?” He picked up a piece of sliced meat and held it out for Korra to try. She cautiously chewed it.

“Oh my God,” she moaned. “Okay, whatever bad things I was thinking after you made me drink that paint thinner, I take it all back. This is amazing.”

“He was a beautiful animal. This fall I will try to find another just like him.”

Korra’s jaw dropped. “You mean, you shot the pig that you then turned into prosciutto.”

“Not pig. Wild boar. From up north. Took me all afternoon to get one good shot. He was crafty. Good for me, he is also very tasty, eh?” He jabbed Korra’s side with his elbow. “Also, this is not just prosciutto. Culatello. Better than regular prosciutto. My family has secret recipe for the cure.”

Korra caught Asami’s questioning glance and chuckled. She grabbed another piece of the culatello, jammed it into her mouth, and closed her eyes.

“Eh? What did you say?”

Korra chewed slowly, breathing deeply through her nose. The delectable flavors swirled tantalizingly around her tongue. *Almost... got it... there!* “White wine, don’t really know Italian wines, but I’m going to go out on a limb and guess you’re more likely to use that. White pepper, oregano, marjoram, fennel, and smoked salt.”

She opened her eyes to see Asami staring at Leonardo, holding her breath. His face was blank with shock as he in turn stared at Korra.

“You get that from one bite?” he demanded hoarsely.

Korra sighed happily. “One gloriously delicious mouthful.”

With a roar of laughter he leaped forward and scooped Korra into a crushing hug. “You truly bring me a new friend, Asami! Grazie! Amazing, you could taste the cure! My grandmother would be so angry. No one but family is to know, she said.” He set Korra down and kissed her on the cheek.

“But, she was also a hard woman who was slow to trust. Maybe she make exception for you.” He rounded the table and also kissed Asami soundly on both cheeks. “Now, your metal is surely ready. Let’s see if the hammer is also her friend, eh?”

Korra concentrated, one hand clenching the tongs in a death grip, the other holding a small hammer.

There was a small *ka-clank* as she clipped the edge of the blank.

“Try only lifting the hammer about a foot, so it doesn’t have to travel as far,” suggested Asami from the other side of the anvil. “Helps with the accuracy.”

“But then I don’t get enough force,” complained Korra. “And now the metal is too cold, right?”

“Probably. That’s okay, we can toss it in the coals again.”

They waited in companionable silence for a few minutes before Asami withdrew the glowing metal once more. She handed the tongs to Korra, who picked up the hammer with resignation. She paused as she noticed Asami watching her with her head cocked to one side, obviously thinking hard.

“Korra, you need to relax when you do this,” Asami came around to stand behind Korra and captured the shorter woman’s hands in her own, so that they both held the tools. “Let me show you how it should feel.”

Korra’s breath hitched in her throat at the touch, but forced herself to relax her grip and lower her shoulders as Asami pressed into her back, setting the blank firmly against the anvil and beginning a steady rhythm with the hammer.

“Leonardo taught me that the knife wants to come out, we just have to help it,” said Asami, loud enough to be heard over the pounding. Her hands continued to guide Korra’s as they steadily shaped the blank. “When we tap the middle, the metal is compressed and shoved towards the edges, so then we tap out the edges, and eventually the short thick blank becomes a long thin blade.”

After a few more minutes of exquisite torture, Asami finally stepped back and grabbed her gauntlet.
“Okay Korra, we need to heat it again and then you can try again on your own.”

Korra placed the hammer on the anvil and handed Asami the tongs. Her heart pounded, sweat dampened her face, and something fluttered nervously in her stomach. She was pretty sure it wasn’t due to the fire.

“Actually, Asami, I’m starting to really overheat,” Korra muttered, willing her hands to stop trembling. “The forge is kind of wearing me out I guess.” Way to be a pathetic liar, Korra.

Asami looked concerned, and retrieved a bottle of water from the kitchen for her. Korra chugged gratefully, then almost choked when she felt Asami’s hands loosening the apron ties around her waist and tugging the top strap over her head.

“I think you’re done for the day; I’ll just finish up the shaping.” Asami pulled the blank from the fire again and picked up the hammer. “Did you want to go hang out with Leonardo?”

Korra shook her head firmly, hopping up onto a nearby workbench. “I’d rather stay and watch you work.”

Asami smiled as she tossed her gauntlet onto a nearby bench and picked up the hammer. No longer guiding Korra, her rhythm was much faster as she deftly shaped out an eight inch cook’s knife.

During another reheat, she pulled off her jacket. The forge cast a soft glow on the black-haired chef, giving her an almost ethereal appearance. Small beads of sweat appeared on her temples, neck, and chest. Her cheeks were slightly flushed.

Korra unconsciously licked her lips, completely mesmerized. She failed to notice when the stocky Italian joined her.

“A beautiful woman forging a beautiful knife,” Leonardo sighed. “A work of art, eh?”

“She’s the most beautiful woman I have ever seen,” whispered Korra reverently, eyes riveted on the muscles in Asami’s forearms rolling under ivory skin.

Leonardo looked at her sharply, then smiled, his eyes twinkling. Asami turned the blade in several directions, peering at it closely, before finally pushing it into a bucket filled with something like gravel.

“Vermiculite,” explained Leonardo. “Helps treat the metal as it cools, prepares it for hardening step.”

Korra had no idea what any of that meant and at that moment didn’t care. Asami sauntered over to them, pulling off her apron. Her face was flushed from heat and the effort of the forging but she looked satisfied. Leonardo clapped Korra on the back and walked back towards his kitchen.

“Time for lunch!” he announced over his shoulder.

Korra jumped down and grabbed Asami’s hands excitedly. “That was amazing! I can’t believe how easy you made that look, and I can’t wait to see the final product.” She broke off, grinning broadly in her enthusiasm, and before she realized it had placed a firm kiss against Asami’s cheek.

Oh shit.

Mortified, she immediately stepped back and started to stammer an apology. To her shock Asami followed her, stopping when only inches separated them.
“I don’t— I didn’t mind that,” she said breathlessly.

Their eyes locked. Korra’s hand rose slowly, brushing up Asami’s arm, over her shoulder, and coming to rest cupped against a warm cheek. Asami’s eyes fluttered at the touch, and captured Korra’s hand under her own.

“Io non voglio essere un vecchio sporcaccione, Asami!” Leonardo called from the kitchen, a hint of laughter in his tone. “And do not let my food get cold.”

Asami sighed in exasperation, but her expression was more amused than embarrassed. She started to lower her hand, but Korra captured it and placed a chaste kiss across Asami’s knuckles.

“Do I want to know what he said?” Korra asked wryly, her thumb rubbing softly across the back of Asami’s hand.

“He was implying that we were about to be a little exhibitionist for his comfort levels,” murmured Asami, now focused on their clasped hands.

“We were, were we?” Korra teased as Asami stepped back, their hands still firmly joined.

“Yes,” said Asami seriously. “I think we might well have been.”

Korra interlaced their fingers and squeezed to indicate her agreement. “I wouldn’t dare disagree with you. Or make Leonardo’s food wait.”

The soup turned out be an amazing minestrone. Leonardo paired it with the antipasto platter he had been working on earlier, along with a delectable loaf of ciabatta and a bottle of homemade wine, dark and sweetly resinous.

“Let me guess,” said Korra around a mouthful of bread. “You baked this yourself.”

Leonardo rolled his eyes. “Of course. At the forge.”

“You’re kidding.” Korra stared at him. “The forge is way too hot.”

“Oh!” Korra exclaimed suddenly, and she turned to Leonardo with wide eyes. “I bet you can make some ridiculous pizza in there!”

Leonardo snickered. “Once you eat my pizza, you are ruined. You cannot eat anywhere else.”

Korra sat up straighter, her eyebrow raised. “Oh yeah? I’ll have you know my pizza crust has made women swoon. We’ll have to do a little taste test someday.”

He snorted sceptically at this. “Such a claim you make. Asami, you bring her back soon so I can see this. Though,” he added with a wicked grin, “I do not think you need her pizza crust to make you swoon, eh?”

“Vaffanculo, piccolo stronzo Italiano,” growled Asami, even while her lips curled upward in mirth.
Leonardo howled with laughter and pounded the table while Korra looked back and forth between them, bemused.

"You never swear before!" He chortled. "And I never see you smile this much. So serious, always." He nudged Korra playfully in the ribs. "You must be a good influence."

Korra caught Asami watching her, and the smile was there, tentative but hopeful. She raised her wine glass in salute, knowing her face showed the same.

They managed to finish their lunch with only occasional teasing from the Italian. The women helped him straighten the kitchen, then packed up Asami’s gear. Leonardo kissed both of them on each cheek.

“Ciao, ciao, mie bellezze! I see you soon!”


“Bye!” called Korra cheerfully, hefting the duffle bag back onto her shoulder after successfully fending off Asami’s attempt to carry it herself once again. As the big metal doors swung shut, she reached out for Asami’s hand, grinning delightedly when she felt her own hand gripped firmly in return. She looked up and met her gaze.

“Well, Chef Sato, you sure know how to take a girl on a date!”

“There’s a first time for everything, I suppose,” the chef replied, glancing over at Korra as they walked back towards the marina. She hesitated, then blurted, “I don’t suppose you’d like to go for a little sail?”

“Today?” squeaked Korra. “You’re not sick of me yet?”

“I don’t often take days off, if you recall,” came the sheepish reply. “Today I’m feeling like I want to pack in as much fun as possible.” Her voice softened a little as she fought back her natural inclination towards shyness. “And no, I don’t really think I could get sick of you.”

Korra stopped, tugging Asami’s hand so that they stood facing each other. She searched Asami’s face, then dropped the duffle bag and grabbed the front of her jacket, pulling her close before crashing their lips together. Asami stiffened, but when Korra started to pull back, arms wrapped firmly around her neck, holding her tightly. Korra smiled, then her eyes widened in shock as a hot tongue slid against her lips. She closed her eyes and parted her own lips instinctively, deepening the kiss and swallowing a moan at the intense sensations. Finally they broke apart, their foreheads touching as they caught their breath.

“Holy shit, that was not your first time.” Korra panted.

Asami nodded, still smiling and a little glassy eyed. “I did kiss Curtis Michelson on the cheek when I was in fourth grade, but I suspect that’s not what you mean.”

Korra laughed weakly. “No, not really.”

Asami raised her head, and found herself caught by those beautiful blue eyes. “I have truly never done this before,” she admitted softly. “And I will admit to being slightly terrified. But if I have learned anything in the last couple of days, it’s that I need to be fearless in pursuing happiness. And when I’m with you,” Asami took a deep breath. “When I’m with you I find it surprisingly easy.”

Korra brushed her lips tenderly against Asami’s and pulled her even closer. “I hope that never
changes,” she whispered.

They stood quietly for a long moment, still embracing, before Korra reluctantly stepped back, retrieving the duffle bag.

“Now, before we do anything more embarrassing on a public street,” she said sternly. “I was told there would be sailing.”

Asami threw her head back and laughed, and Korra’s heart stuttered at the sight. She was in serious trouble.

Translations:

“Asami! Sei in ritardo. Chi e' la tua bella amica?”

Asami, you’re late! Who’s your cute friend?”

“Stai indietro, Leonardo. Lei è con me. Questa è Korra.”

‘Back off, Leonardo. She’s with me. Her name is Korra.

“Testa dura”


“mie bellezze”

My beauties

“mia cara”

My dear

“Io non voglio essere un vecchio sporcaccione!”

I don’t want to be a dirty old man

"vaffanculo, piccolo stronzo Italiano"

Fuck off you nasty little Italian
Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

My beta continues to amaze...

:)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Great White Fluff @FoodTruckMasterNaga 4h
@Skoochy Heading your way on Tuesday, only one day late. Hope to see you!

Skoochy Skooch @Skoochy 2h
@FoodTruckMasterNaga AWWWWWWW YEEEEEEEEE

Cryptozoological Foodie @Chalupacabra 1h
@FoodTruckMasterNaga You sure you don’t need more practice time?

Great White Fluff @FoodTruckMasterNaga 1h
@Chalupacabra Oooh, somebody is starting the trash talk early. Might want to save your energy for your cooking. Not that it will help :)

__________________

Korra walked into her kitchen and looked around with interest at the piles of neatly prepped and packaged ingredients. Wu stood at the sink washing cutting boards and mixing bowls.

“Done already?”

He whirled around. “Hi, Chef Korra! I got here around eleven and finished up a little bit ago.”

Korra winced and dropped her keys on the counter. “Wu, I like you right now, let’s not change that, okay?” She noted his confused expression. “Just drop the ‘Chef’ part. I’m not a chef, I’m a food truck cook. Asami Sato is a chef.”

A goofy grin spread across her face remembering Asami, beautiful and windblown and laughing at the wheel of her boat. Korra shook her head in rueful embarrassment. Thankfully, Wu didn’t seem to notice. He wiped his hands dry on a dish towel before retrieving a large jug from the refrigerator.

“I didn’t start the meat soaking yet; I wanted you to test the marinade first.”

Korra grabbed a spoon and watched as Wu poured out a small dollop of Korra’s special recipe.

“Texture looks okay.” She licked the spoon. “Yum, tastes perfect. You do a nice job when you’re not self-sabotaging.”

Wu shrugged but looked pleased. “Yeah, yeah, Ch— Korra.” He turned back to the refrigerator and started pulling out bags of cut meat. “I’ll get these soaking and then I’ll be on my way.”
“Thanks, Wu. Nice first day.” Korra started to turn, then paused. “Actually, I’m gonna go grab some dinner in a few if you want to come along. We can talk about what tomorrow’s going to look like.”

Wu’s face lit up in happy surprise, and he nodded vigorously. “That would be really great, thanks!”

Korra climbed up to her bedroom loft and pulled off clothes still damp and salty from her brief yet enjoyable time on the boat. Asami had been apologetic about the short time they had been on the water but wanted to visit her father at the hospital. Korra dismissed all apologies with a kiss and a reminder of their date to Food Fight the following night. Then she had kissed Asami again, tangling her fingers in the woman’s silky hair before tearing herself away with a groan and reluctantly disembarking. The parting image of Asami’s sparkling smile had her grinning like a fool the entire way home.

“Hey,” called Wu. “Your dog is asking to go outside, is that okay?”

Korra realized she was standing still, lost in thought and half naked. “Hang on!” She rummaged in her dresser for fresh clothes then thundered down the stairs, whistling for Naga. Wu waited next to the truck, examining the painting of the big dog on the hood.

“Come on, we’ll take her with us.”

Wu shook his head. “You really like your dog.”

“She’s the best. Also, if you mess with me or try to hook up with Jinora, she’ll eat you. It’s a very solid relationship.”

“You’re joking about her eating people, right?” Wu looked at the big dog with suspicion.

Korra smirked at him. “I don’t recommend you try and find out.”

Asami hesitantly pushed open the door to her father’s room, not wanting to wake him if he slept. “Dad?”

“Asami.” Hiroshi raised a hand and waved at her. “I’m so glad you came.”

She pulled up a chair and sat down. He looked a little more alert than the last time she had seen him, and his bed was raised higher.

“So, how did all the tests go today?”

Hiroshi smiled. “Not too bad, but they took a long time.”

“I’m sorry,” Asami began. “I should have come earlier.”

He waved this aside. “It’s best you are here now, when I can properly appreciate your company.” He patted her shoulder. “Kya stopped by already. And—” he hesitated. Asami waited, then cautiously reached out and rested her hand on his. His eyes widened in surprise. Then he took a deep breath. “My friend Simon came to visit.”
Asami started. “Your friend from college?”

Hiroshi nodded, fear evident on his face. “There has been nothing going on, Asami. In fact we only got back in touch a few months ago—“

“Dad.” She cradled his hand in both of hers and squeezed. “I wouldn’t mind if he were more. In fact, I might even prefer it.”

Tears ran down his cheeks and he choked out a sob. Asami jumped up when a loud beeping started above her head. She glanced up and saw bright red numbers flashing on the monitor. Her stomach lurched, and she squeezed his hand tighter.

“Dad. Dad! Please!” Asami found herself holding him tightly, her own tears falling. “I’m here and I’m not going anywhere. I just want you to get better, and I want you to be happy, okay? I just want you to be happy.”

He clung to her, nodding. The beeping stopped, and he drew a long shuddering breath. “I never dreamed I could actually have this conversation with you.” His eyes glimmered with emotion. “I’m so sorry, Asami. You deserved better from us.”

Asami sat back, wiping her eyes. “Well, then. You need to stick around long enough to make it up to me.”

He blinked, then slowly nodded, his lips starting to curl upwards. “You’re absolutely correct. I’ll get right on that.”

They looked at each other and burst out laughing.

Naga trotted happily along, knowing that this path always led to the same place, and that place involved choice helpings of leftovers. Korra periodically reined her in, mindful of the wheezing behind them.

“You are without a doubt in piss-poor shape,” Korra teased. “You must have skinny genetics to look like that when you cook for a living.”

Wu glared at her as he struggled to catch his breath, then chuckled. “Well, yeah. My whole family is a bunch of sticks. I hate exercise.”

“I clearly need a better employee questionnaire.”

“Did you make me fill that out when I was drunk? ‘Cause I don’t remember any questionnaire.”

Korra snorted. “Well, be warned, I’m gonna make you go to the gym with—“ Her pocket beeped and she fumbled for her phone.

**J-No: Where are u?**
Naga whimpered in excitement as they turned the final corner before approaching The Dockyards, converted cargo containers stacked in a “U” shape on a big open piece of land near the water to make a smokehouse. A large canvas canopy stretched between the containers, sheltering rows of picnic tables. An impressive array of motorcycles sat parked nearby, and an even more impressive collection of bicycles were propped in an enclosed area manned by two heavily tattooed and bearded attendants. A pleasantly smoky haze emanated into the street, and Korra watched as Wu sniffed appreciatively.

“Damn, something smells amazing!”

Korra grinned at him. “Tastes even better.”

They wound their way past the tables over to the window where a small line of patrons waited patiently to put in their order. Around three quarters of the tables were occupied, and a cheerful buzz of conversation filled the space.

“Hey Korralicious,” drawled the dark-skinned woman behind the counter as they approached. “Haven’t seen you in a while.”

Korra nodded and smiled. “Nice to see you, Maya. This is Wu, and it’s his first time.”

“A virgin. How sweet. Sampler platter?”

“Of course, but with extra ribs, and three beers please.” Korra glanced over at Wu, who was beet red and spluttering. “Wow, you’re easy to fluster. We’re going to have to toughen you up.”

Maya laughed as she swapped Korra’s cash for a number card on a small stand. “Alice may be by later. I’ll let her know you’re here if I see her.”

They found a table near the edge that had a good place for Naga to lie down, though the big dog was practically vibrating in her excitement and had a hard time settling. Korra made sure their number sat high and obvious from its perch on top of a napkin dispenser and took a sip of her beer.

“So, you know that woman — is she the owner?”

“So sort of. It’s a family operation. They’re big in the local barbecue scene. I know her sister Alice the best. She runs a food truck, so we hang out a lot. Maya and her brother Langston run The Dockyards now because their parents are semi-retired at this point. Very cool people, all of them.”

Korra spotted Jinora walk into the dining area, followed closely by Kai. She started to wave, then turned and looked hard at the panting malemute poised next to her.
“Wu, come with me. Naga, stay!”

“Wait, where—”

Kai nudged Jinora as he saw Korra barreling towards them, and she nodded as she moved to intercept.

“Jinora, wait!” Korra panted. “Stay there!” She reached Jinora and paused to catch her breath. “I didn’t think to ask if you were coming with Kai.”

Jinora looked confused for a moment, before she caught Korra’s meaning. “I should have remembered that of course you’d bring Naga.”

“It’s okay, I have somebody else handy to be Kai’s date. Wu, go stand next to him.”

Both men looked at her in shock as she took the hems of their shirts and rubbed them against each other in an attempt to mingle their odors a bit.

“Look,” said Korra patiently. “Naga gets a little unreasonable with men around Jinora. This doesn’t have to be weird, but when we walk back to the table you guys sit together away from her, okay? We’ll worry about breaking Naga in to the idea of Kai on a different day.”

“You mean you weren’t kidding about her eating people?” asked Wu in astonishment.

“Well, she’s never actually eaten anyone,” said Jinora, chuckling. “But she does make her displeasure known, and frankly I’d rather not tempt fate.” She turned to Kai. “Can you and Wu go get a couple more beers?”

“Um—”

“Kai. We need more beer.”

His eyes narrowed but he turned and dragged Wu back to the order window, already groaning at the now long line. Jinora followed Korra back to their table where she was met by the exuberant dog.

“I’m really sorry about what happened,” Korra began. “I hope you know that.”

Jinora sighed. “Being friends with you is like riding a roller coaster sometimes. You care so deeply about everything, yet you throw people for loops and sometimes it’s exhilarating and sometimes it’s terrifying, and I just—” She broke off and stared out across the cheerful hubbub. “I worry about you, you know?”

Korra rubbed her face tiredly and grabbed her beer. “I know, I know. Rollercoaster is a pretty apt analogy. I certainly feel like I’ve been riding one.”

Jinora started ripping a napkin apart pensively. “Kai told me you and Asami got into it at the restaurant. Why did you even go there if you were still mad?”

Korra blinked. The memory of that altercation had faded dramatically in light of everything that had happened afterwards; she had almost forgotten it had happened at all. She started laughing, saw Jinora staring at her in shock, and laughed even harder.

“Oh man,” Korra finally gasped, wiping her eyes.

Jinora leaned back with her arms crossed. “Now you’re really starting to worry me, Korra. What the hell?”
“I wasn’t mad. It was all a big misunderstanding, and in that case it actually it was Asami being a goof and not me.”

“Shocking.”

“Shut up. Anyway, we’re good. We’re more than good.” Korra stopped, not sure what to say next.

Jinora peered at her suspiciously. “Are you blushing? Holy crap you’re blushing. Oh girlfriend, you need to dish like right now.”

“She’s…” Korra trailed off, shaking her head. She felt her face heating and her smile widening by the second. “Honestly, she’s the most amazing, incredible, badass, beautiful woman ever. Fuck, I can’t even list all the ways she blows my mind. Top it off with being an amazing kisser and a general menace to my sanity and I’ve never felt like this about anybody before in my whole damn life!”

Jinora started giggling. “It must’ve been those damn Happy Cupcakes. Can’t imagine what else she would see in you.”

“Oh, fuck you very much.” Korra growled, still grinning.

“Hey!” Wu hurried up with Kai in tow, each carrying more cups of beer. Kai’s face was flustered as he sank onto the bench and proceeded to chug down one of the beers. When he finished, he immediately picked up another one.

Jinora smoothly intercepted him and held the cup above her head, out of reach. “Okay, sweet guy, what the hell just happened?”

Wu kept glancing nervously over his shoulder. “There was a lady in line who started hitting on him. I think she’d been drinking, because she wouldn’t stop bothering him. She was practically rubbing her nipples on him.” He turned to Jinora, a look of distaste plastered to his face. “I will say he was very polite and gentlemanly about it.”

Korra snickered.

“Anyway, I could see he was getting really uncomfortable, so I gave him a big kiss on the cheek and bitched her out for hitting on my boyfriend.”

“You might have warned me that you were going to do that!” Kai barked out, embarrassed.

Wu raised one eyebrow. “How could I have warned you? She was standing right there! ‘Excuse me, Chef Kai, but I’m going to pretend to be your homosexual lover to make this crazy woman go away.’ I think even she would have picked up on that.”

“Yeah, well, thanks for doing it in front of all those biker dudes that started giving me kissy face.”

Jinora and Korra lay collapsed against the table, howling in laughter.

“Oh, baby,” Jinora hiccupsed. “You’d probably make some nice man very happy.”

“Ha ha.”

Wu took a long pull at his beer. “Nah. I mean, don’t get me wrong, Kai’s pretty enough, but definitely straight.”
Korra raised one eyebrow. “So you’re of the man-eating tribe, nice. Are you in the market?”

“No way, I’ve given up.” Wu declared. “I always seem to find the guys that make everybody’s gaydar go off, but are actually as straight as the come.” He looked over at Kai. “You don’t even set off my gaydar, so you’re good.” He sighed. “I did meet this one guy I really liked, and I would have sworn on a stack of bibles he was into me, too. We met for coffee a few times, then drinks, then he asked me out to dinner. He apparently has a brother who works at a restaurant, so we chatted a lot about food and stuff. He actually knows quite a bit about wines. After dinner we went for a walk and I just tucked my arm into his, and he flipped out. Thought he was gonna arrest me or something!”

Jinora finished off her beer and leaned forward. “So then what happened?”

“He just gave me some lame excuse about not meaning to give me the wrong impression and ran off. I even had to take a cab back to my apartment, the asshole.”

Kai looked outraged. “What a dick. Wait, why would he threaten to arrest you? Is he a cop or something?”

“Assuming he wasn’t totally full of shit, he’s allegedly Detective Fucking Mako of the San Francisco Police Department.”

Wu looked around the table at the three shocked faces staring at him.

“What? What did I say?”

Korra: Hope everything went okay with your dad
Asami: It did. He actually got some promising test results. Fingers crossed
Korra: Damn, that’s good news! Have mine crossed too
Korra: By the way, I hope you didn’t want to keep things on the down low
Asami: Should I be worried?
Korra: I hope not, but Jinora and Kai know she got it out of me in about five minutes
Asami: …
Korra: Sorry if that wasn’t okay
Korra: To be honest I want to scream how amazing you are from the top of sutro tower
Korra: I’ve never been good at subtle
Asami: I’ve noticed, and it’s okay. I don’t mind if everybody knows
Asami: Just please remember I’m new at this, so you’ll have to bear with me while I figure out
what I’m doing

**Korra:** Consider yourself in possession of an infinite amount of Get Out Of Jail cards

**Asami:** I hope to consider myself in possession of a lot more than that

**Korra:** …

**Asami:** Too forward?

**Korra:** You don’t know how close I came to running back to your boat just now, but I’m forcing myself to be good

**Asami:** That’s probably for the best, but I’m very much looking forward to tomorrow night

**Korra:** Double that. Sweet dreams, beautiful badass

**Asami:** Sweet dreams, adorable food trucker

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Chapter End Notes

Coming up next, we finally see what Korra can do when she's throwing down...
We are finally cooking with gas, as they say.

(rimshot)

Anyway, my humble thanks goes out again to my long suffering beta MidnightLion who tirelessly corrects my bad grammar and calls out necessary plot niggles despite having lots of other things to do.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

They Call Me J-No @NagaMinionTwo 3h
@FRAFF @FoodTruckMasterNaga Kick ass tonight, boss! #FoodTrucks4Life #FoodFightForever

Skoochy Skooch @Skoochy 2h
@FoodTruckMasterNaga You gonna rock this, baby! Still #NagaForPresident

This Is Alice @HotMamaLoveTrucker 2h
@FoodTruckMasterNaga Make us proud girlfriend! #FoodTrucks4Life

There was a line of people stretching down the block, all enjoying the savory fumes emanating from the brightly colored food truck as well as the unexpected entertainment emanating from inside it.

“Wu, toss me the special sauce. No, not that bottle, the other one. Wu! The one that says special sauce on the side!”

“Sorry, Chef!”

“Dammit, what did we talk about?”

“Shit! Sorry, Food Truck Cook Korra!”

“Oooh, I love it! I’m going to start calling you Food Truck Cook Korra, too!”

“Seriously, Jinora? Why don’t you do something useful, like take some damn orders already!”

“You got it, Food Truck Cook Korra!”

A wide-eyed patron approached the order window. Jinora leaned forward and beamed at him.

“Oh hey, Skoochy, nice to see you. What would you like today?”

Skoochy blinked. “Um, tri-tip roll with extra onions and an empanada. You have a new guy I see.”
“Eight bucks. Yeah, that’s Wu. We’re still breaking him in. By the way, you seen Mako lately?” Jinora smirked when she heard Wu bang his head on an overhead cabinet.

“He came by the gym on Saturday,” Skoochy commented as he handed over a rumpled ten. “He’s been all weird lately. I mean,” he amended. “Weirder than usual. He even got in the ring to spar against this huge guy who was totally out of his league. No lie, probably outweighed Mako by about sixty pounds. Dude just mopped the floor with him. Don’t know what he thought he was trying to prove.”

“I couldn’t possibly imagine,” Jinora’s grin grew wider. “Well, if you see him you tell him we all said ‘hi’, okay?”

“Sure thing.” Skoochy leaned into the window. “Hey Korra, you gonna come visit me soon? Haven’t seen you in a couple of days.”

Korra turned, and smiled over her shoulder. “Probably tomorrow. Why, you finally gonna spar with me?”

“Thanks, I want to live a little while longer. Just worried you’re gonna lose your guns.”

Korra snorted. “My guns are just fine, Skooch, but I promise I’ll see you soon. Now get outta here, we have a line to clear.”

Skoochy chuckled. “See ya later.”

Jinora waved, then turned cheerfully to the line. “Next!”

Wu wiped down the last counter then rolled his shoulders in attempt to loosen them up. “Damn, it’s tough doing this in such a small space.”

Korra smiled sympathetically at him. “A bit different from the kitchen at Sato Grill, huh?”

“I’ll say. I’m sorry I made so many mistakes.”

Korra handed him a bottle of water from the cooler then grabbed one for herself. She gestured for Wu to follow her out of the truck and together they secured the panels over the windows.

“Actually, for your first day in the truck, that wasn’t bad.” Korra leaned against the side of the truck and took a long swig of her water. “I think it took Jinora and me a couple of weeks before we really started jelling.”

“Lies. I was fine right away. Korra was the one having all the problems,” Jinora scoffed as she came around the corner of the truck followed by a grinning Naga. Her face was pained. “Did you change her dog food or something, Korra? She just did something really unspeakable.” Jinora grabbed several bleach wipes and started scrubbing her hands.

Korra winced. “Sorry, you didn’t clean it up already did you? I can go do it.”

“Oh course I took care of it,” Jinora scoffed. “I certainly wasn’t going to leave it there for some poor schmuck to walk through. But yes, we’re adding this to the tab of things you owe me for.”

“She seems okay.” Korra rubbed a soft ear affectionately and peered at her dog. “Do I need to take you to the vet?”
Naga jerked away and leaped into the truck. Jinora burst out laughing and Wu turned to Korra in confusion.

“Did she actually understand you?”

Korra snorted. “She knows certain words; unfortunately ‘vet’ is one of them. She’s been a complete wuss about going ever since I had to take her in to get a foxtail pulled out of her nose. She’s currently hiding behind the passenger seat.”

“You have a very strange dog, Korra,” said Wu with a frown.

Korra punched him in the shoulder. “No dissing my dog, rookie.”

Jinora looked at her watch. “Come on, let’s get going. We have to get you ready for tonight, Korra.”

“Oh?” Wu looked interested. “What’s going on tonight?”

“Korra’s competing in tonight’s FoodFight. Oh, and she’s got a hot date with your old boss,” teased Jinora. “We need to make her look nice, though we probably really need at least three days to do it properly.”

“Keep it up, you jerks,” Korra growled. “It’s a long walk back.”

“Whatever you say, Food Truck Cook Korra.”

———

Dinner service at Sato Grill on a Tuesday was normally a sedate affair; the dining room was never more than three quarters full and the staff often started closing the kitchen by nine-thirty. However, with a convention in town and articles about Sato Grill beginning to show up in travel magazines, the place was packed. At nine-thirty there were still people waiting for tables. The wait staff streamed through the kitchen doors — full plates going out, cleared plates coming back. Flashes of flame popped at the stoves as the line cooks shuffled their smoking pans and the bussers frantically racked tableware and pans to keep up with the demand. There was a new entree on the menu — hazelnut crusted pork tenderloin with chanterelle mushrooms, kale, and fava beans — and Asami hovered near the plating counter to make sure it was plated properly. She also kept checking her watch with an anxious expression, a fact that did not pass unnoticed by other members of her staff.

“Busy for a Tuesday.”

Asami turned to see Opal at her elbow, her sous chef’s green eyes twinkling with mischief. Asami made a noncommittal sound, pretending to concentrate on Kai’s murmured encouragement to the interns.

Opal grinned and continued nonchalantly, “It’s a good thing none of us have lives or the fact that we’re strangely busy tonight would be a problem.”

“I know what you mean, Chef,” Asami jumped at finding Kya at her other side. “Social engagements when in the restaurant business can be a tricky thing. Best if avoided, really.”

Asami threw up her arms in exasperation. “Would you two stop already? I don’t have anywhere to be until after we close.”

“Did you hear that, Kya?” Opal nudged the pastry chef. “Our executive chef has a social engagement!”
Kay shook her head. “I do hope you’re not going out looking like that, Chef Sato. Not that you’ll have time to go home and change!”

“Chef Kya!” Michael called from the pastry station. “Big order!”

Kya smirked at Asami before hurrying away. “Saved by the soufflé, but I’ll be back.”

Asami rolled her eyes in exasperation, as Opal handed her a squeeze bottle full of sauce. “Be useful; the interns are getting a little ragged.”

Asami carefully finished the next half a dozen plates, then took advantage of a brief lull to make a round of all the stations. Despite the unexpected workload, the kitchen continued to function smoothly, she smiled in satisfaction, nodding with pride at the excellence of her staff. She looked over at Kya and Michael walking Melanie through plating one of the souffléés, and then thought of the carefully folded clothes packed in her duffle bag. She wasn’t certain was the etiquette was for attending an underground food event, but she hoped she’d chosen well.

Korra pulled up to the front of Sato Grill at five minutes to eleven, stilling the engine of her motorcycle with a practiced flick of her thumb. She left her helmet perched on the seat and nervously ran her hands through her hair before tugging at the bottom of her leather jacket. Dressing her had in fact taken hours as she and Jinora had argued over the perfect balance of being prepared for a cooking competition while simultaneously impressing Asami with the fact that this was most certainly a date.

Wu had watched, wide-eyed, clearly not wanting to offend his new boss, but eventually he cut loose with an impatient “Girl, please!” and proceeded to plunder his way through Korra’s entire wardrobe. With a mixture of incredulous and scathing comments, he tossed his way through the limited selection of jeans, cargo pants, t-shirts, and workout clothes. With a muffled shout of victory he unearthed a pressed, black Oxford button down that Korra hadn’t even know she owned from the very back of the closet. He paired it with indigo jeans and a blue argyle bow tie he retrieved from the chest pocket of his jacket after extracting a promise that it would be returned unharmed.

Jinora squealed at the bow tie, ignored Korra’s scowls, and then insisted on applying some hair gel to tame Korra’s normally wild chocolate locks. Korra sighed heavily as her assistants continued to fuss over her appearance before they finally declared her presentable and released her to collect Asami, beaming at her like parents sending their child off to prom.

Korra stood in front of the steel and glass entrance to the restaurant, her stomach fluttering with anxiety. “Come on, Korra,” she whispered to herself, “you totally got this.” Her freshly polished Doc Martens thudded quietly against the stone tile as she made her way past the host podium and towards the bar.

“Korra!” Bolin reached over the bar to clap Korra on the shoulder. “It’s good to see you!”

“Thanks, Bolin,” she blushed slightly. “I’m, uh, here to—“

“To leave us with all the work while you sneak our boss out of here?”

Korra whirled to see Opal and Kya behind her, arms crossed and stern expressions on their faces. Her mind went blank as she floundered for a coherent response. To her exasperated relief, they dissolved into giggles almost immediately.

“The look on your face!” Opal chortled. “Blame Jinora for that, by the way. She texted me that you
were on your way over and hoped that we’d give you some grief.”

Korra ground her teeth. “She is so fired.”

“Oh, don’t bother pretending. Also, let’s have a look, shall we?” Opal deftly unzipped Korra’s jacket, then pursed her lips at the resulting view. “What do you think, Kya?”

The pastry chef took a speculative step forward before she reached out and tightened the knot of Korra’s tie. “Quite dashing, I must say.” She smiled, and then her face settled into a fierce glare. “You know what I’m going to say next, don’t you?”

Korra blinked, then nodded slowly. “There’s no need. I promise you that she will always be safe with me.”

“Good,” Kya smiled again. “I’d hate to have to kill you.”

A throat cleared behind them, and Korra swallowed audibly in the sudden silence.

Asami stood shyly before them, wearing a form fitting burgundy sweater and dark gray slacks that molded nicely to her long legs. Her hair, normally bound in a bun or ponytail, fell loose around her shoulders, and Korra itched to run her fingers through the silky length.

“You look,” she rasped, then hastily cleared her throat. “You look amazing.”

Asami blushed, but her eyes sparkled at the reaction.

Korra stepped forward and held out a shaking hand. “We should get going,” she stammered. “It’s close by, but we’re supposed to be there by quarter after at the latest.” Her heart pounded as Asami gripped her hand and smiled warmly at her. Somehow they managed to make their way out of the restaurant, followed by cheerful calls of “Good luck!” and “Have fun!”

Asami looked skeptically at the old motorcycle as Korra handed her a helmet. Their eyes met as Korra double-checked the chin strap, her thumb brushing softly along Asami’s jaw.

“I know it doesn’t look like much,” said Korra, noticing the look of doubt. “But it’s perfectly safe and we’re not going far.”

A box containing her cooking gear and some favored extra ingredients took up the sidecar (including the block of Himalayan Chhurpi cheese), so Korra settled Asami behind her instead. Even with the other woman’s arms wrapped around her, she managed to drive the eight blocks to their destination without crashing. Asami’s grip increased steadily as they made their way up Market street; Korra felt real regret when they reached their destination and Asami relaxed her hold. The old office building had once housed a major newspaper, but was now scheduled to be remodeled into condos. Korra had no idea how the FoodFight organizers had managed to secure the use of it, and hoped they weren’t all going to get arrested.

“Asami?” said Korra, a little breathless, as they pulled into the loading dock and dismounted. “I think you’re going to make it hard for me to concentrate tonight.”

“Would you prefer I left?” Asami teased as she removed her helmet and shook out her hair.

“Not on your life.” Korra scooped up her gear and headed towards the line of people already waiting to enter. “I already swore to win in your name, and I intend to deliver on that.”

“I’ll have to think of a suitable reward.”
Korra bit back a whimper.

They emerged from a long hallway into a large room where dozens of guests were already milling. Set against the far wall sat a raised platform with a table and half a dozen chairs. On either side of the table two temporary kitchens were still being assembled, extension cords and hoses being taped down by a crew under the direction of a short woman brandishing rolls of duct tape and a walkie talkie. Korra was impressed. Her last couple of competitions had involved small camp stoves and patio grills in place of ovens. To see such an elaborate setup was definitely new.

“Asami Sato,” boomed a voice, and they both turned quickly to see a tall man with a thin mustache bearing down on them. “I am stunned and pleased to see you here.”

Korra felt Asami stiffen and she placed a reassuring hand against her date’s back. Whoever this guy was, she was already not a fan.

“Hello, Varrick,” said Asami coolly.

“It’s truly fortuitous that we’ve bumped into one another. I really need to talk to you about my latest endeavors!” He leaned forward and air kissed her cheek before he looped her arm through his and attempted to drag her off. Asami bit back a smile as she heard the low growl from next to her. Korra’s eyes flashed dangerously as she dropped her gear and placed a firm hand against his chest, stopping him.

“Excuse me,” she said through gritted teeth, her stance making it clear that she was prepared to force any and all issues he cared to raise. “Who are you, exactly?”

He sniffed as he peered down his nose at the irritated woman before him.

“Blackstone Varrick, of Varrick Enterprises. You’ve no doubt heard of me?”

“Can’t say I have, sorry,” began Korra, but she was prevented from saying anything more when Jinora ran up to her.

“There you are! I’ve been looking for you!” she burst out. “There’s been a change to the format; they need you up front.”

Korra hesitated, glancing over at Asami with a raised eyebrow.

“It’s okay, Korra,” Asami assured her. “You need to get ready. But before you go—” She leaned over and placed a chaste kiss on the corner of Korra’s mouth. “I’ll be sure to have settled on a reward by the time you win,” she murmured.

Korra blushed, then grinned. She bowed, eyes sparkling, then retrieved her discarded belongings. “My lady,” she said gravely, “I look forward to it.”

As Korra sauntered away, Asami’s smile grew. She turned with a sigh as Korra disappeared into the crowd and caught Varrick studying her.

“You appear to be here on a date, Chef Sato! You led me to believe this an unlikely circumstance the last time we chatted.”

Asami rolled her eyes. “At the risk of sounding cliche, it apparently took the right person coming along.”
"I see, I see. And it appears that she is in fact a competitor at this evening’s event?"

"Yes," said Asami distantly, looking for opportunities to excuse herself before Varrick could propose some new business deal she would then have find a polite way to decline. She had been avoiding his emails for weeks; her one and only previous experience with him had involved setting up a restaurant in one of his new hotels. The experience had been so awful that she had resolved to never do it again, despite the fact that it ultimately turned out so lucrative that she was able to open Sato Grill. It infuriated her that someone so pretentious and aggravating could be so financially successful.

To her shock, Varrick suddenly straightened up and walked away. "I’ll drop by Sato Grill at some point, to continue our conversation, Chef Sato."

Asami’s jaw dropped, but she gathered herself and hurried in the direction Korra and Jinora had gone before he changed his mind.

"Asami! Over here!" She turned, and saw Jinora waving her over to a row of chairs. "I saved you a seat. I think they’re going to start in a minute or two."

Asami sank down, watching as a line of people climbed the steps onto the central platform and sat down. The short woman with the walkie talkie handed them each a wireless microphone. They all tapped the microphones, sending small thumps through the speakers. To either side of their platform, several workers had wheeled racks of steel shelves into place, one behind each kitchen station. They were overflowing with food, spices, and other random ingredients.

Asami leaned over to Jinora. "Are the competitions always like this?"

Jinora shook her head. "Not at all. Usually they’re much more low key, unless it’s a sit down dinner competition. Those are usually at a host restaurant, or somebody’s house. Somebody with serious money must’ve asked to sponsor one and made some specific requests. Normally, I would have gotten more dirt about that, but because Korra is competing and everybody knows I work for her, my friends who run this kept me out of the loop. I’m really mad; she won’t be able to use the secret ingredient I brought her." She shook her head. "Oh, there’s Korra."

Asami followed Jinora’s gaze and saw Korra standing patiently at one of the kitchen stations. She had removed her button-down and tie, revealing a tight black t-shirt underneath. A large apron wrapped around her waist, and she had pulled a dark bandana over her hair to keep it back. She glanced briefly at the surrounding crowd, and smiled widely when she spotted Asami. She winked, then turned her attention back to her challenger. A small, dark-skinned man in a white chef’s coat stood at the opposite station.

The lights went out, except for a single spotlight shining in front of the center table. Asami was shocked to see Varrick stride into the pool of light wearing a red cloak, of all things, carrying his own microphone and a pair of tongs.

"Ladies and gentleman! Welcome to tonight’s edition of FoodFight!" He twirled his cape dramatically.

"What the hell?" Jinora muttered under her breath.

"Tonight, we are experimenting with a new type of competition. One which I hope you’ll all enjoy. The rules are as follows: each chef is only allowed to use ingredients provided from our pantry. Each chef must produce at least three different plates of food, all using some element of a secret ingredient neither chef currently knows. They will only have an hour to prepare their dishes and
they will be judged on flavor, presentation and originality. Finally,” Varrick paused, for effect. “The
winner will be awarded five thousand dollars!”

A collective intake of breath ran around the room. This changed everything everybody had known
about FoodFight events. Previously, competitors were allowed to bring whatever ingredients they
liked, and weren’t required to use any particular item. They certainly never expected any prize
beyond bragging rights.

Two young men in chef’s whites wheeled out a cart covered by a tablecloth.

“Chef Korra!” Korra rolled her eyes and nodded.

“Chef Manny!” The dark-skinned man smiled eagerly.

“Prepare to meet your secret ingredient!” Varrick paused again, then whipped off the tablecloth,
revealing platters of glistening pork belly. Asami glanced over at Korra and saw her staring intently
at the cart.

“Chefs, you have one hour to prepare your pork belly dishes, starting… NOW!”

Chapter End Notes

I hope you enjoyed the latest chapter in the saga of my adorkable cooking crew, and
bonus points if you recognize what the new FoodFight format is inspired by...
In which Korra unleashes her mega bad-assery, and Asami discovers she has a couple of previously unknown turn-ons (and unleashes a little bad-assery of her own).

This chapter is un-beta'd, all mistakes are my own...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“I haven’t seen pork take a hit like that since the last time I tried kissing your wife!”

“What the hell does that even mean?!? Stop, before you hurt yourself.”

“Are you kidding? She’s majoring in testicular studies at Ball State!”

“You’re trying to say Chef Korra’s got brass balls, aren’t you? You think you’re so cute…”

“No hijinks without hygiene for Chef Manny, I guess — that’s the tenth time he’s washed his hands.”

“He does seem somewhat obsessed. I’m going to need some awfully personal detailing from him, clearly.”

Jinora clutched at her head, groaning. “Oh my God, can we please make the color commentary stop already?”

Asami blinked, casting a quick glance at the slumped girl next to her, but did not reply before returning focus to the competition unfolding before her. She was riveted by the near magical efforts by the competing chefs, and the attempts at humor by the judges that so annoyed Jinora passed her by unheeded. Over the years numerous culinary accolades had been laid at Asami’s door, not least her James Beard award holding pride of place on the wall of Sato Grill (Opal and Kya had insisted). However, Asami was starting to think the recognition she had received was at best premature and at worst woefully undeserved.

Korra laughed heartily, exchanging good-humored trash-talk with her opponent while her hands were nearly a blur of movement. At Korra’s station, a slab of pork belly sizzled in an iron skillet, a mixture of garlic, honey, and oyster sauce bubbling along merrily. Another slab rested on onions and whole garlic bulbs, and its coating of savory herbs smoked deliciously under the broiler. A third slab had been locked into a pressure cooker clearly intended to replicate a multi-hour roast in a greatly reduced amount of time. Pots on the stove simmered with an assortment of sides and sauces. By Asami’s count Korra had at least ten distinct items cooking simultaneously, an astounding feat of creative focus and time management. A look at her opponent’s station showed he was almost as busy, and while he responded to Korra cheerfully enough, he appeared to be struggling a little to stay on track with everything he was trying to prepare.

Shoulder muscles rolled as Korra swiftly kneaded some type of dough before taking small fistfuls and folding it around the handle of a wooden spoon. She quickly filled a waiting steamer and set an egg timer before turning back to the skillet. After one or two test pokes with her tongs, she lifted the
honey pork belly out of the skillet and left it to rest on a cutting board. Next she grabbed a dripping colander full of frisee leaves and quickly laid out small beds of the curly greens onto waiting plates. The broiled pork belly came out and was placed on a second cutting board, but as Korra went to grab a knife her egg timer went off. She deftly replaced the steamed buns with a fresh batch of dough and with a crank of the egg timer went back to slicing broiled pork belly into thin strips, laying them carefully over the beds of frisee.

“Okay, I’m starting to get pretty damn excited by what I’m seeing here in front of me.”

“That’s what she said!”

“Really, that’s the best you’ve got? Focus on the pork here, judges!”

“She said that too!”

“Oh my God. Kill me now…”

“AHEM. The salad at Chef Korra’s station is looking intriguing, but so do the pork belly sliders that Chef Manny is currently assembling.”

“Sliders? Really?”

“If I were Korra, I’d be getting pretty worried by whatever is in that pressure cooker. She needs that to work in order to have the required three dishes.”

“Yes, and it sounds like Chef Manny has started giving her some grief for it.”

“All I’m saying is that his sliders better be epic, because c’mon, sliders?”

“You know that baseless self confidence kills more Americans every year than bathtubs.”

“The fuck? Seriously, you people are losing your minds. FIFTEEN MINUTES LEFT, CHEFS!”

Korra stuffed her freshly steamed buns with the honey pork belly, garnishing with chopped green onions and sesame seeds. Velvety poached quail eggs topped the frisee salad, and the onion and garlic-infused juices from the broiler pan had been blended into a warm vinaigrette that delicately dressed the greens. Her final coup de grâce came out of the pressure cooker; the pork belly fell apart easily under Korra’s light touch, and she grinned in relief as she folded the shredded meat into a creamy masala curry sauce and let that simmer while she deep fried balls of rice and paneer cheese in bubbling oil. When she had enough she ladled the curry into small bowls, carefully placing a trio of rice balls into the center of each.

Asami and Jinora leaned forward as Varrick rose from his seat.

“Five… Four… Three… Two… One… And step away chefs!” Varrick boomed. “Let’s hear it for our competitors, shall we? An impressive display of culinary mastery!”

Applause and cheers filled the room. Korra grabbed a towel and wiped it over her face and neck before walking over to Chef Manny’s station, hand outstretched and still grinning. He returned her smile and pulled her into a hug, and the cheering of the crowd increased.

“Attention, please, everyone!” Varrick tapped the microphone repeatedly. “It’s time for the judging!”

Korra and Manny stepped back as the white coated assistants returned to transfer plates of food from
the cooking stations to their cart, then wheeled everything over to the judges table. The woman with the walkie talkie reappeared and handed each judge a clipboard.

“Chef Manny!” called Varrick, hopping lightly down from the judging platform and pushing his microphone in front of the little chef’s face. “Please describe your dishes to the judges!”

“Um, my dishes are pork belly sliders with with baby arugula sprouts and sriracha aioli. Then I have stir fry pork belly with mung bean noodles, bean sprouts, carrots, endive, and peppers. Finally, I made candied pork belly with a peanut maple glaze.”

“Intriguing! And what inspired you to make these choices?”

Manny laughed, running his hand through his hair nervously. “Uh, sliders are my favorite type of food, and stir fry is always easy and tastes good. The candied pork belly is in honor of my favorite donut shop — they do a maple bacon donut that is to die for.”

“Well done, chef, well done! Judges?”

The judging panel continued to chew while bending over their clipboards to rank each dish. Finally they all sat up and nodded, and Manny’s plates were cleared and replaced with Korra’s.

Varrick turned to her, eyebrow raised. “Chef Korra! Please tell us your inspiration for your dishes!”

Korra shrugged. “The buns are in honor of the type of food we tend to make in our food truck, though I’ve never made anything quite like this before. Pretty sure I’m going to add it to the menu now, though!”

A voice in the back shouted, “Food trucks for life!”

Chuckles rolled through the crowd.

“As for the frisee salad and the curry, well, they’re something I’d like to cook for my girlfriend someday soon.” Korra’s gaze settled on Asami, and the crowd turned to see where she was looking. Asami felt her face grow warm at the surprise honorific, but she refused to break contact with those hypnotic blue eyes, her own affectionate smile lighting up her face.

The whispers started almost immediately as people took closer notice of her sitting there.

“Holy shit, is that Asami Sato?”

“I think it is!”

“I’ve never seen her at one of these — do you think she’s going to start competing?”

“No way, she’s too high class for this stuff…”

“How high class can she be if she’s dating a food truck chef?”

Asami stiffened at that last comment, and Jinora grabbed her hand and squeezed. “Hey, don’t listen to those jerks. They’re just jealous.”

Varrick ignored the quiet murmurings. “Judges, have you finished your tastings?”

The judging panel were muttering among themselves, but at his prompting the bald man at the end (who Asami vaguely recognized as a chef from a downtown steakhouse) stood up and nodded.
“We have a decision.”

Varrick beamed and turned back to the crowd. “As a reminder, we’re judging in three categories — flavor, presentation and originality. There are five points for each category, with a maximum of fifteen points for those who are bad at math.” He paused, beaming, then scowled when no one picked up on his attempt at humor. He sighed and continued on. “Judges, what is your decision.”

The bald man reviewed the paper in his hand.

“We scored Chef Manny four points for flavor, three points for presentation, and four points for originality, for a total of eleven points. The judges would like to add that the originality was entirely based on the inspired candied pork belly as the sliders and stir fry, while delicious, were a little mundane.”

The little man winced, but nodded as the crowd applauded him warmly. Korra clapped him on the shoulder, leaning over to whisper in his ear. He choked back a laugh and nodded again, his face once again cheerful.

With a pause to clear his throat, the bald judge reviewed the paper in his hand once again. “We scored Chef Korra five points for flavor, four points for presentation and four points for originality, for a total of thirteen points. The pork buns were delectable but a bit simple as a dish. However the frisee salad and curry were outstanding in both creativity as well as flavor.”

The crowd cheered as Korra shook Manny’s hand again, waved at the judges, and sprinted over to where Asami stood waiting. Hands reached out to clap her on the back and the cheers turned to whistles and good-natured catcalls as she pulled Asami into a tight hug and pressed a loud kiss against a blushing cheek.

Ignoring the crowd around her, she took a step back and lifted Asami’s hand to her lips. “I won in your name, my lady. What favor have I earned?”

Asami’s eyes twinkled. “It will have to wait for a more convenient, and private, time.”

“Oh my God, you guys,” groaned Jinora, standing nearby. “Are you already being this cheesy?”

Varrick chose that moment to interrupt. “There you are, Chef Korra. You seem to have forgotten your prize!”

“I’m getting my prize later,” blurted Korra before clapping a hand to her mouth. “Sorry, that came out a little wrong.”

“Pretty sure it didn’t,” Jinora muttered. Korra swatted at her while looking apologetically at Asami who rolled her eyes and shook her head, lips curled in amusement.

“In any case, here it is, and I will now have to make a point of visiting your truck soon, to see what other excellent food offerings you may have.” He handed Korra a thick bundle of crisp one hundred dollar bills, then with a swirl of his cape hurried back to the crowd congregating near the judges platform.

Korra flipped the edges of the money stack, appreciating the sound they made. “Damn, that guy is a freak show but I have to admit this is kind of cool.”

“You better let me hold that for you,” said Jinora, playfully reaching out. “You know how you are with losing things.”
“Hands off, woman. You get nothing.”

Jinora stepped back, eyes twinkling. “I bet you don’t say that to Asami!” She squealed and took off running as Korra took one menacing step towards her.

“You are so fired!” Korra shouted at her retreating back. She turned to face Asami, mortified and ready to apologize for any and all discomfort she had been subjected to over the course of the evening, only to discover the woman trying hard to stifle a laugh.

“She gets fired a lot, I’ve noticed,” Asami finally managed, catching her breath. “You might want to reconsider your management strategy.”

“We have a complicated relationship that mostly involves me taking her abuse, but for some mysterious reason I keep paying her.”

Korra looked around, seeing the crowd beginning to thin and the crews breaking down the kitchen stations. The thought of this night being over pained her, but she knew it was late and Asami probably needed to go home. She jumped when she felt a warm hand on her back, and turned to see Asami smiling warmly at her, emerald eyes meeting hers. Asami’s hand slid up past her shoulders before coming to rest at the back of her neck, and her own eyes widened as their lips met in a kiss that started gently but almost immediately deepened. She cupped Asami’s jaw reverently, thumb brushing softly along a pale cheek. After a long moment they parted, Korra’s grin back in full force. She ran her hand through her hair and tossed all previous thoughts of polite and restrained gallantry out the window.

“You wanna get out of here, Chef Sato?”

“I thought you’d never ask, Chef Korra.”

“I can’t believe you paid a hundred dollars for a beach blanket and a pile of firewood,” said Asami. She sat cross legged on the blanket and watched as Korra got the fire going. They were next to a round scorched fire pit halfway between the water and the seawall on a long stretch of beach. Other bonfires dotted the sand in both directions, and the muted rumble of the waves filled the air.

“It was the smallest bill I had and it’s not like some stoners on the beach are gonna give me any change.” Korra sat back, satisfied that the fire was sufficiently burning. “And I wanted to have a bonfire with you. Here, stand up for a second.”

Asami stood and Korra handed her the blanket to hold. Then she rapidly scooped out a small depression in the sand and then piled more sand up behind it, shaping out a comfortable looking seating space. She patted everything firmly into place before laying the blanket back down over it.

“As good as an easy chair,” she commented with satisfaction. She settled herself down next to the fire and waved at Asami to join her.

Asami sighed as she sank back against Korra’s chest, strong arms wrapped firmly around her. “Neat trick.”

“I know, right? When I was kid my friends and I used to love building little forts on the beach with driftwood, and we’d make sand seats inside. I will admit it took us a couple of times of going home with wet butts before we got good at estimating the high tide mark. Or at least paying better attention to how close the water was getting.”
Asami blinked, then chuckled as she understood. “I’ve never been to a beach with that much driftwood, but that sounds really fun.”

“The best part about a driftwood beach is the bonfire you can make. Wood that’s been soaked in salt water burns blue and green. It’s super pretty.” Korra coughed, then added. “Even if it’s because you accidentally set your fort on fire.”

“Oh my God, Korra!” Asami burst out laughing. “You were a terror as a child, weren’t you?”

“In my defense, it’s not like Kodiak Island has a ton of safe child activities. As it was we always had to have somebody old enough to have a gun with us at the beach in case of bears.”

Asami twisted around so she could start at Korra’s face. “You’re kidding.”

“Nope.” Korra smiled and kissed Asami’s temple. “That’s a nice thing about San Francisco — the only beach bears I have to worry about are the naked ones, and I generally try to avoid that particular beach anyway.”

They both laughed at this before cuddling closer, enjoying the warmth of the fire and the salty tang of the air. The fog was wispy, allowing occasional peaks of bright stars above, or flash of a gibbous moon. Asami closed her eyes as she settled her cheek against Korra’s shoulder, her arm tight around Korra’s waist.

“I realize that I don’t have a lot to compare against, but this has been a spectacular date,” she finally murmured, and sighed as she felt Korra’s arms tighten around her.

“Damn, guess I’m going to have to try and top this next time.”

Asami started to answer, but stopped as she felt Korra stiffen. “What?”

“I think we have company.”

Three figures appeared out of the darkness. Korra recognized one of them, a cheerful blonde wearing a black hoodie sweatshirt, as belonging to the group she had negotiated with for the blanket and firewood.

“There are my favorite ladies,” he slurred happily. “We came to sell you more firewood!”

“Quiet, dumbass,” growled the dark haired man behind him. “We didn’t bring no fucking wood.”

The third man was bald, wearing nothing more than a t-shirt despite the chill. “Yeah, we’re more interested in rich bitches on the beach carrying Benjamins.”

Korra cursed herself. She had produced the bill without exposing the rest of her prize bundle, but apparently just having a hundred dollar bill in the middle of the night at the beach was enough to buy trouble.

“The other night,” she said to Asami in a low voice, “when you told me you trained in a martial art that didn’t have a sense of humor, were you being serious?”

Asami’s lip curled slightly. “Black belt in Krav Maga. As serious as it gets,” she whispered back.

Korra’s lips brushed against her ear as she spoke quickly in a low voice. “Have some sand in your hands, and try to keep your back to the fire.” With that she pushed herself up and faced the trio.

The blonde was arguing with his companions, having recognized the severity of the situation despite
being deeply stoned. “Hey guys, this isn’t cool, okay? Let’s just go back to the party.”

The bald man backhanded him viciously and the hapless man fell hard to the sand. “Shut the fuck up, loser!”

The dark haired man approached Korra with a swagger. “So whatever you got just hand it over now, unless you like pain.”

Korra’s teeth glinted in the firelight. “Actually, I love pain.” She took two quick steps forward and flung her fistful of sand into his face, then twirled in a low kick that swept him of his feet.

He roared as he scrambled to his feet, frantically wiping his face. “Fucking bitch!” Fists swinging wildly, he charged. Korra blocked two punches before ducking under the third and landing two quick blows against his gut. He grunted but was able to slam forward an elbow that caught her cheek before she slipped away.

“Ow, dammit, not the face!” Her feet set, she threw a roundhouse kick and felt grim satisfaction at the feel of her boot crushing into the side of his head. He crumpled to the ground and didn’t move. She gave him one last shot in the kidney before straightening up. “Thanks for the workout, asshole.”

One down, she spun around and saw Asami moving fluidly around the bald man’s furious attempts to grab her, the tall chef landing blow after blow. A stream of curses spewed from him, vowing a painful death, but Asami finally landed a brutal strike with her elbow against his temple and he dropped motionless to the sand.

“That was like, totally amazing.” The women look up to see the blonde man standing nearby, swaying slightly, a dazed look on his face. “You chicks are like, superheroes or something.” His lip was swollen and bleeding, but he didn’t seem to be aware of that fact. “Sorry about these guys. Don’t really know them, you know? But I’m cool if you ever want some firewood again…”

Korra eyed Asami carefully, trying to see if she had been injured in anyway. However not only did she appear uninjured, she wasn’t even breathing hard. “A superhero, huh? I’d love to see your alter ego.”

Asami turned, smiling, then her eyes widened and she grabbed Korra’s chin. “Oh, sweetheart.”

Korra beamed at the term of endearment, then yelped as Asami brushed her fingers across her bruised cheek. “Son of a—” Warm lips cut her off in a searing kiss and she moaned as their tongues clashed hotly together.

Asami tore herself away, her cheeks a little flushed. “You’re bleeding a little. We need to get you home.”

Korra nodded, breathing hard. “Yeah, I think I’m done with this particular bonfire.” She looked at the blonde man, still standing there with a glazed smile. “You gonna be okay?”

“Yeah, I’m cool. Gonna go back to my party now, okay? You super ladies have a crazy night.”

“Oh yeah, it’s been that.”

Chapter End Notes
The "color commentary" quotes during the Food Fight are a tribute to the TV Show MXC (Most Extreme Elimination Challenge) and in particular the characters "Vic Romano" and "Kenny Blankenship" (copyright to whoever owns that stuff). If you've never seen it and like slapstick, there's probably some examples on youtube that will make you laugh really hard.

I tried to find some interesting quotes from the original Japanese Iron Chef, but I couldn't find any that came close to working.

Anyway, hope you enjoyed the latest installment!

"Right you are, Ken!"
Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

Writing the last chapter was hella fun, and based on all the great reviews I got it seems like it was also hella fun to read...

:)

But anyway, after focusing hard on the Food Fight for a couple of chapters, we'll now be revisiting the other story lines for a while, as well as bringing in some new/additional characters to further spice things up. Hopefully I'll be able to keep track of everything...

Happy reading!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

They Call Me J-No @NagaMinionTwo 8h
@FRAFF @FoodTruckMasterNaga MY BOSS TOTALLY OWNED IT TONIGHT, BOOYAH #FoodTrucks4Life #FoodFightForever

This Is Alice @HotMamaLoveTrucker 7h
@NagaMinionTwo @FoodTruckMasterNaga That’s the way to make the mama proud, you go girl! #FoodTrucks4Life

Steve The Man @FortMasonStud15 5h
@FoodTruckMasterNaga @NagaMinionTwo Aww, man, I missed it! You guys owe me!

They Call Me J-No @NagaMinionTwo 1h
@FortMasonStud15 We owe you a smack to the head, more like…

Asami carefully pressed a second butterfly bandage over the cut, biting her lip in concentration. “I think that will hold, but I’m not convinced that you don’t need stitches,” she said finally.

Her patient leaned against her bathroom sink, trying not to wince under Asami’s careful ministrations. “I despise hospitals and the last thing I’m gonna do after such a great date is make you sit for hours in an ER waiting room. Besides,” she grinned. “I’m told chicks dig scars.”

Asami raised one eyebrow and shook her head. “Come on, let’s get an icepack on that cheek.”

Korra reached into a box perched on the shelf above the toilet and pulled out a chemical ice pack. She coughed, a little shamefaced. “I, uh, tend to need these a lot, so I get ‘em in bulk.”

“Why does this not surprise me?”

There was a half-hearted thump from Naga’s tail as they emerged from the bathroom. The big dog was firmly ensconced on her couch and showed no signs of moving. Korra started to head towards the kitchen, then groaned when she saw the time.
“Shit, Asami, it’s almost four in the morning. I’m so sorry for keeping you up so late.”

Asami merely smiled. “Don’t be. This has been the best night I can remember having in a long while.”

Korra scoffed. “Even with almost being mugged?”

“Especially with that — we were designated as superheroes, after all.” She reached out and brushed a stray lock of Korra’s hair off her forehead. “So, can I trust you to behave yourself if I stay tonight?”

Korra blushed hard. “You — you want to stay?”

Asami’s hand drifted down and cupped Korra’s uninjured cheek. “You took a hit to the head, so I don’t really want to leave you alone. Also, I suspect you’d insist on walking with me if I were to go back to my boat, and that means you’d be walking by yourself back here. So, yes, logically I should stay here, and it looks like I’ll have to stay with you because Naga is taking up all the couch space.”

Their eyes met, and Korra swallowed hard, then nodded. She held out her hand and led the way upstairs, noticing with relief that Jinora and Wu had put the rejected outfits away and her bed was neatly made.

“T-shirt and sweats okay?”

Asami smiled. “Perfect.”

Korra rummaged in her drawers for sleepwear for both of them. They changed quickly, Korra catching a glimpse of pale skin before she whirled around to give Asami some privacy. She heard a soft laugh behind her.

“It’s okay, Korra, I don’t mind if you look — too many years of communal showers in boarding schools for me to care about much about changing in front of people. In any case, I’m decent now.”

Korra turned around cautiously to see Asami climbing under the covers and flopped down next to her, flashing a tired grin. “Thank you,” she mumbled. “I had a fantastic night, and I’m glad you’re here.”

Asami leaned over and placed a soft kiss against her cheek. “Me, too.” Her verdant eyes fluttered shut as she settled into her pillow, and Korra thought she looked more beautiful than ever. After staring fixedly at the ceiling for a few minutes gathering her nerve, she finally whispered, “Asami?”

“Hrm?”

“Since we already agreed I was going to behave myself, can I, um, just hold you?” Korra bit her lip, waiting.

“I was hoping you’d ask.” Asami rolled over into Korra’s embrace. Strong arms pulled her firmly against a broad chest, their fingers intertwining.

“Goodnight, Asami.”

“Mmmhmm,” came the sleepy response. “A very good night, Korra.”

Asami took a deep breath and straightened her chef’s coat, then pushed her way into the kitchen.
“Good morning, everyone.”

“Good morning, Chef!” came the cheerful chorus in response.

She groaned when she saw Opal and Kya immediately drop what they were doing and head straight for her. She retreated into her office and braced herself against the onslaught. They entered and shut the door behind them with a firm click, the firing squad lined up, as it were.

“Oh, dish,” said Opal. “I want to know all.”

“Don’t leave out any juicy details,” added Kya.

Asami felt herself blushing, and sighed.

“Well, she won the Food Fight.”

“Against?”

“Manuel Rodriguez from La Mesa.”

“Very good Mexican food.”

“Great margaritas. That’s not what we want to know!”

Asami blew out her breath. “What do you want to know?”

Opal crept closer. “Did you make out with her? Was it awesome? I bet she’s an amazing kisser.”

“Are you taken and straight?” asked Kya pointedly.

“I’m taken and technically straight but I’m not dead,” said Opal dismissively. “And don’t tell me you didn’t at least wonder about it, Kya. Korra would make a nun’s panties go up in flames.”

Kay cleared her throat. “Well, maybe a little.”

Asami gaped at them. “Okay, first of all, if you want to keep your jobs, you’ll keep your lascivious thoughts about my girlfriend to yourselves, thank you.”

“Girlfriend?” squeaked Opal.

“Officially?” Kya clapped her hands gleefully before high-fiving Opal. “Kai owes me twenty!”

Asami buried her face in her hands. “Get out, both of you. I’m only here long enough to make sure everything is going okay then I’m heading to the hospital to see my dad for lunch.” She made a pointed show of grabbing the inventory clipboard after turning on her computer. Opal rolled her eyes and headed back into the kitchen. Kya stood regarding her a moment longer then enveloped her in a huge hug.

“I’m so happy for you, Asami,” she said, her voice warm with affection. “Your mother would be too. This is a big step for you, and I have a feeling it will be a good one.”

Asami closed her eyes against the rush of emotion, and let her head fall against Kya’s shoulder. “It’s a little overwhelming at times, but she’s so kind and gentle and silly and—”

“Incredibly sexy,” said Kya knowingly, her eyes twinkling.
“Michael is going to make an excellent head pastry chef when you’re gone.”

Kay laughed and pressed an affectionate kiss on the top of Asami’s head then turned to leave.
“Please tell Hiroshi I’ll come see him tomorrow. We’ll be fine here until you get back.”

Asami smiled and nodded. “Oh, and Kya?”

The pastry chef paused in the doorway, eyebrow raised.

“Korra is an outstanding kisser.”

Kya burst out laughing. “Oh my darling, I had no doubt about that.”

_______________

Korra sat slumped on a bench, watching her dog meander around a clump of bushes.

“Anytime now, Naga.”

The big dog ignored her, occasionally pausing to scratch at a patch of dirt before she finally picked a choice spot and hunkered down. Korra pushed herself up and pulled a doggie bag from her pocket. She winced when she saw the aftermath.

“Oh man, what is up with you, geez.” Korra cleaned up as best she could then glared at her dog.

“That’s it. You’re going to the vet.”

Naga whimpered.

“Don’t give me that. You clearly got into something and it’s lingering, whatever it is.”

Korra heard The Beatles blasting from the kitchen when she returned home, Jinora singing along loudly. Korra grinned as she entered the kitchen, then faltered as she recognized the lyrics.

_I want her everywhere_

_And if she's beside me I know I need never care_

_But to love her is to need her_

_Everywhere, knowing that love is to share_

_Each one believing that love never dies_

_Watching her eyes and hoping I'm always there_

Korra shook her head, bemused at how she seemed to be so smitten by her green-eyed menace in such a short period of time and cursing the fact she’d apparently turned into a complete sap. She had woken up that morning with Asami still cuddled against her and had known then she was in serious trouble. Whether Asami knew it or not she now had a firm grip on Korra’s heart and was definitely a threat to her sanity.

“Hey, are you okay?” Jinora peered at her quizzically.
“Uh, I’m fine,” Korra croaked. “A little tired, is all.”

Jinora smirked. “Somebody didn’t get any sleep last night, I see.”

“Shut. Up. Whatever your dirty mind is conjuring I can guarantee it didn’t happen.”

“So you didn’t kiss her.”

“Well…”

“And she didn’t spend the night.”

“Well…” Korra scowled at Jinora, her shoulders shaking with barely repressed laughter. “But nothing happened! It was really late so she crashed here. Clothes stayed on! There was no inappropriate touching!”

“Hmmph. Boring.”

Wu walked in carrying a box full of produce. “What’s this about inappropriate touching?”

“Oh my god, really?” Korra stomped outside to start warming up her grills.

“Inappropriate touching better not have involved my tie, is all I’m saying.”

Jinora snorted. “I’m sure Korra protected it very carefully from any girl cooties.”

“Actually,” said Korra as she came back into the kitchen, “I needed it for a prop during my strip tease and at one point was using it as a thong.”

Wu dropped the bowl he was holding, the look of horror on his face sending the two women into paroxysms of laughter.

“Oh, oh, oh,” choked Jinora finally. “The look on your face—“ she waved one hand helplessly as she collapsed against the counter. Korra took a deep shuddering breath to regain her composure and grabbed her phone. “Okay guys, we’re just doing the same thing today as we did yesterday. Jinora, can you keep an eye on the rookie for me? I’m going to see if I can get Her Majesty over there in for a checkup.”

“Hey,” said Wu indignantly. “Who are you calling rookie?”

Jinora poked him with wooden spoon. “I don’t know about anything else, but for our truck, you’re a rookie.”

Wu huffed. “I prefer talented and handsome newcomer.”

“Nope, you are totally the Nagamobile rookie and I’m sure somewhere you’ve even got pimples, but I’m trusting you with grilling my meat so don’t screw it up.” Korra gave him a hard glare as she held the phone to her ear, then turned away as she heard a voice on the line. “Hey Sharon, it’s Korra. Do you guys have any open spots for Naga this morning? She’s a little off and I— oh great, I’ll bring her in now.”

Korra grabbed Naga’s leash and her favorite meat thermometer, pressing the latter into Wu’s hands. “Do. Not. Overcook. I’ll be back in an hour or so.”

Jinora waved her away. “We’ve got it, boss. Right, Wu?”
Wu was angrily pulling containers out of the refrigerator. “With the amount of money I spend on skin care I can guarantee that I do not have pimples!”

“Whatever helps you sleep at night, Wu.”

The hospital corridors were crowded; attending physicians were doing their rounds with hordes of eager, white-coated medical students. Nurses and orderlies wheeled carts and patients around and through them. Asami stepped aside as a portable x-ray machine was hustled out of a freight elevator and down the hall, still carefully holding a stack of boxes in front of her. Finally she managed to slip into her father’s room, closing the door behind her with an audible sigh, relieved she had managed to make it to her destination with everything intact. She could see her father’s bed raised and a table placed nearby, waiting for the lunch she was bringing.

“Asami?”

“Hi, Dad,” she began, then stopped as a tall, older man rose from a nearby chair. He was rosy cheeked with thinning white blond hair, and clutched a dark wool driving cap in his hand. “Oh, excuse me.”

The man smiled shyly before his eyes flickered to Hiroshi, who cleared his throat.

“My dear, this is an old friend of mine, Simon Rafferty.” Hiroshi looked nervous, his fingers gripping the blankets of his bed. Asami was perfectly aware of who Simon had been in his life and Hiroshi knew it. His eyes held a mix of fear and hope as he watched for his daughter’s reaction.

Asami placed her boxes of food onto the table with care, then turned to face the tense man standing next to her father’s bed, both men looking as if they were awaiting a judgement. It occurred to her that in a way, she was about to give them one. She reached out and grabbed Simon’s hand in hers.

“I am very very pleased to meet you, Simon,” she said with complete sincerity. “Thank you for coming to have lunch with my father.” She turned to her father, feeling the smile grow as she saw the tears fall down his stubbled cheeks, his relief palpable.

Simon cleared his throat shakily. “It’s a pleasure to meet you as well, Asami.” His voice was a beautifully rich baritone, slightly raspy with emotion. “I’ve heard so much about you.” He cleared his throat. “I know you came to have lunch with your father, so I will leave you to it.”

“No, please stay,” she said quickly. “I brought more than enough food.”

He hesitated, glancing at Hiroshi. Asami felt her own tears welling up when she saw her father reach out a shaky hand to his friend. “Yes, please join us. Besides,” he said, the twinkle back in his eyes. “My daughter is the best chef in the city, if not the country. I would hate for you to miss out.”

Simon met Asami’s gaze, and she smiled encouragingly at him once more. After a long moment, he nodded, his posture relaxing. “I would be delighted.”

Asami pulled the table closer to her father’s bed and started unpacking the boxes. From the cloth tote she had slung over her shoulder she pulled out plates, cutlery, and two flutes, all carefully wrapped in cloth napkins. From the deepest depths of the bag she also pulled bottle of sparkling cider.

“I wasn’t sure when you’d be able to come to Sato Grill, so I brought it to you.”

“Including the place settings, I see,” said Hiroshi with a smile. “Such service.”
Asami grinned. “Sorry I couldn’t bring real wine, but with everything they’re pumping into you I’m pretty sure your doctors would not approve.”

Hiroshi looked ruefully at the IV bags hanging above him, their tubes running down to his arm. “I suspect you’re correct, which is a pity, as I have some good news to share.”

Asami popped the cap off the bottle of cider and filled both flutes. “Well, good news deserves a toast. Grab a glass.”

She leaned over and grabbed a paper cup from the sink near bed and poured out a third portion. “Sorry, I didn’t think to bring an extra flute. Simon, you’ll have to let me know next time we’re going to meet unexpectedly.”

Both men chuckled, then Hiroshi said in a rush, “My oncologist came by earlier to give me my test results,”

There was a sudden silence, all eyes on the man in the hospital bed.

Hiroshi raised his glass. “The brain tumor is not malignant, and based on the scans he thinks he can remove it.”

“Oh thank god,” Simon burst out. He reached out and gripped Hiroshi’s hand, then froze. Hiroshi’s expression was one of shock, then happiness, then once again trepidation as he turned to gauge Asami’s reaction. She shook her head, overcome with emotion and unable to speak, but she too reached out, and placed her hand on Simon’s where it still held Hiroshi’s, squeezing hard, letting her fingers press a blessing into warm skin, feeling redemption embrace them all.

Chapter End Notes

The Beatles song Jinora was singing was "Here, There, and Everywhere" off the Revolver album. And yes, it's disgustingly romantic.

To kittymannequin, AnotherShotOfBourbon, and anybody else who's probably going to complain that our girls behaved themselves -- for their personalities in this AU did you REALLY think they were gonna get busy on their first real date?

:)  

But don't worry, that whole night woke up something in Asami, and she's soon going to be feeling very... "inspired"...
Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

Hell hath no fury like a friend of Korra's scorned. Also, there's good news, and there's bad news...

This Is Alice @HotMamaLoveTrucker 3h
Me and my baby backs will be at St. Ingrid’s plaza today for your BBQ lunch needs
@FoodTruckMasterNaga @NagaMinionTwo You guys coming?

Great White Fluff @FoodTruckMasterNaga 3h
@HotMamaLoveTrucker Good idea -- We will be there with tri-tip action!

BLACKSTONE VARRICK @KingVarrick 2h
@FoodTruckMasterNaga Not familiar with the etiquette for food trucks. Do I need to bring my own cutlery?

They Call Me J-No @NagaMinionTwo 2h
@KingVarrick Yes, but we allow you to select the particular animal you want to eat and butcher it on site

BLACKSTONE VARRICK @KingVarrick 1h
@NagaMinionTwo @FoodTruckMasterNaga How droll, but I suspect you’re joking

They Call Me J-No @NagaMinionTwo 2h
@KingVarrick Can’t get anything past you, can I?

Asami repacked the plates and glasses as a nurse replaced her father’s depleted IV bags. Simon had departed after hugging both of them and promising to come visit again soon. The nurse made a couple of notes on Hiroshi’s chart after considering his vital signs.

“How are you pain levels now, Mr. Sato?”

“Not too bad, I think the meds are helping. Maybe a four. I’m very tired though.”

The nurse nodded absently as she checked all the monitoring equipment. “You’ve just gotten another dose which should help. They will also help you sleep.” She smiled at them both before leaving the room.

Hiroshi nodded and leaned back. He smiled wearily at Asami. “Thank you so much for today. The food was delicious, and Simon—” He trailed off.
“He seems like a lovely man. I’m glad I got to meet him.” Asami took his hand in hers. “Does Kya know he’s come to visit?”

“Yes, she actually kept in contact with him all through the years. Christmas cards mostly, I think.” Hiroshi sighed. “They shared an unusual bond as the ‘dirty secrets.’”

“Dad,” said Asami softly. “I can’t begin to imagine what you all went through, but it’s over now, okay?” She squeezed his hand affectionately. “You don’t have to hide from anyone, especially not me.”

His eyes were suspiciously shiny, but he managed to nod, still smiling. “Yes, and I will do my best to live long enough to enjoy this fact.”

“You’d better!” Asami warned. “We have a lot of time to make up for.” She hesitated for a moment, then gripped his hand tighter. “By the way, I wanted to tell you something.” She bit her lip as he looked at her expectantly.

“Nothing bad I hope?”

She ducked her head, blushing. “No, no — nothing bad. It’s just that I’ve met someone.”

He sat up a little straighter, looking eager. “That’s wonderful, Asami! What’s his name?”

She cocked one eyebrow as she smiled, waiting for him to catch up. Hiroshi cocked his head, puzzled, then his expression cleared. “Her name?”

Her smile was a little bashful. “Her name is Korra. Kya has already given her stamp of approval, but I suppose you’ll want to as well.”

Hiroshi’s grin mirrored hers. “I suppose it’s to be expected. I’ve read many studies where they think there’s a genetic element for same sex attraction.”

“If that’s true, then I certainly got a double whammy,” said Asami wryly.

Hiroshi chuckled even as his eyes started to droop with the medications taking effect, but he rallied to give Asami one last hug. “I can’t wait to meet her, my dear.”

“You will, Dad,” Asami assured him as his eyes closed. “I promise.”

———

Asami: Good news for dad — doc think he can be treated successfully
Korra: FANTASTIC! will keep fingers crossed
Korra: BTW, just realized I’m right next to you, come visit?
Asami: You’re at St. Ingrid’s hospital?
Korra: At the plaza across the street — you’ll see truck if you exit main entrance
Asami: Be right there

“Asami!” Jinora waved cheerfully from her perch next to Korra’s brightly colored truck.

Asami smiled warmly in greeting. “This is a nice surprise. What brought you guys here today?”
“Korra hadn’t decided where we were going yet and the other truck invited us to come along here.” Jinora pointed at the red and gold truck parked nearby. “Friend of ours, does wonderfully wicked things with meat smokers.”

Asami felt two arms wrap around her from behind and smiled as she leaned back into Korra’s embrace.

“Hey you,” Korra murmured against Asami’s ear. “So, are you going to accuse me of stalking again?”

Asami groaned as Korra’s lips brushed her cheek.

“That was not my finest moment, thanks for reminding me,” she groused, but then said playfully, “Is it still stalking if I want you to find me?” She felt Korra’s grin, but further discussion was interrupted by Jinora’s groaning eye roll and the emergence of Wu from the back of the truck.

“Oh my god, Wu, I’m gonna get a cavity from all this disgusting sweetness — please make them stop,” Jinora pleaded.

Wu ignored her, holding out Korra’s cell phone. “I think the vet has been trying to call you, Korra.”

“Vet?” Asami asked curiously.

Korra nodded, scrolling down her contacts looking for her vet’s number. “Naga’s been a little off lately so I dropped her off to get a checkup this morning. I’ll be right back, okay?”

Asami squeezed Korra’s hand as she stepped away, then turned to greet her former intern.

“Hi, Chef,” said Wu shyly. “I never got a chance to apologize for all the mess I caused—“

Asami wave off his earnest apologies. “There was no permanent damage, and mostly I’m just hoping you ended up in something that works better for you.”

Wu gulped and nodded. “It was an honor to work for you, but you’re right. I’m sorry I didn’t realize that I wasn’t in the right place for myself.” Wu patted the truck. “I don’t know if I’ll want to do this food truck thing forever, but it’s a good place to be while I figure it out.” Then he grinned. “And boy, it will annoy my mom to no end, which is an added bonus. Even if I have to work with her,” he finished with a mocking shot at Jinora.

Jinora’s jaw dropped. “Are you kidding me?!? This after you had the gall to kiss my boyfriend!”

“I was trying to help him!”

The laugh burst out of Asami before she could catch it. “Oh, there’s a story there I’m sure. I can’t wait to ask Kai about it.”

Jinora snickered. “Please do!” She shoved Wu lightly. “You’re a totally prissy jerk, but I guess you’re all right.”

Wu shoved her back. “You’re a bossy pain in the ass, but I guess you’re all right too.”

“Damn, speaking of cavities,” Korra came up to them, sliding her phone into her pocket. “I swear I usually have to be a referee for these two, ‘Sams, and now look at them being all gushy.”

“I am not gushy!” Wu and Jinora responded instantly. Jinora shoved Wu again, then turned to Korra. “What’s the word on Naga?”
Korra’s jaw tightened, and Asami found herself wrapping her hand around Korra’s. “Is everything okay?”

Korra took a deep breath. “They’re not sure what’s up with her. She’s apparently running a slight fever, but they didn’t find anything definitive with the initial checkup, so they want to keep her overnight to run some more tests. I can go get her tomorrow morning.”

“Holy shit, really?” Jinora’s face fell as she saw Korra’s worry. “Hey, Korra, hey. I’m sure she’s gonna be fine. She’s the most badass dog on the planet!”

Korra nodded, trying to banish the queasy feeling in her stomach. “Yeah, I’m sure it will be fine.” She shook herself. “Let’s get the truck situated, okay? Time to head to Chrissy Field so we can feed the kite boarders.”

“You got it, Food Truck Cook Korra,” said Wu cheerfully, ignoring Korra’s glare. Jinora snickered, and the two disappeared into the truck, their good-natured bickering floating out over the sounds of banging and clanking as they put everything away.

Asami pulled Korra into her arms, burying her face against the chocolate skinned neck. After a moment she felt Korra start to relax into her embrace. “Are you going to be okay?” she asked softly, her hand running comforting circles across the small of Korra’s back.

Korra sighed, breathing in the heady scent she had come to recognize as uniquely Asami’s, a beguiling mixture of jasmine, honey and the salty tang of the sea.

“Yeah, I just — I’ve had her since she was two months old, found her abandoned next to the dumpsters behind my apartment.” Korra squeezed Asami tighter then stepped back, managing a crooked smile. “She’s never been sick in her life, so I guess she’s due to have something eventually.” She blew out her breath and dropped her gaze. “You probably need to get back to the Grill, and I need to herd my hooligans to our next stop. Can I call you later?”

Asami gently lifted her chin and pressed a chaste kiss against Korra’s lips before pulling back. “I have a better idea. Come to the restaurant tonight and let me feed you.” Her heart melted as she saw the twinkle return to cerulean blue eyes, and before long Korra was giving her a kiss much less chaste, breaking apart only when they heard wolf-whistles emanating from inside the truck. She felt a flutter in her stomach when she saw Korra lick her lips. “I’m afraid I might have to insist.”

“You insist, huh?” Korra teased, her cheeks pink and her voice a little breathless. “Well, far be it from me to argue with a lady.”

The big yellow truck pulled up to the curb, and the rumbles of the engine stuttered into silence as Korra shut everything down. Behind her Wu let out a loud groan.

“Tell me why you’ve dragged me along to this godforsaken place?”

Jinora poked him in the arm. “You’re here because you are pathetic specimen of a man, and need to toughen up.”

Wu swatted her hand away irritably. “I’ll have you know I like being a delicate fucking flower and do not feel the need to assert any excessive masculinity.”

“There’s nothing implicitly or excessively masculine about taking care of your body, Wu,” said Korra sternly. “Would you call Asami or Jinora masculine?”
“Um,” Wu hedged, his eyes going wide. “Not sure how to answer that without you kicking my ass.”

Jinora laughed and pulled a couple of duffle bags from behind the driver’s seat, handing one to Korra. Wu sighed, picked up his Gucci tote, and followed the two women out of the truck. Fluorescent light spilled through the glass-fronted building before them, peeling paint identifying it as Fog City Gym. The glass front was opaque with condensation, and as they pushed through the front doors they were assailed by a wall of moist heat and the earthy smell of sweat. They were surrounded by people jumping rope, lifting weights, and working various types of punching bags. A small group huddled around a center boxing ring, rowdily encouraging two heavily padded figures dancing around each other.

Korra took a deep breath and rolled her neck to loosen it up. “Smell that, Wu? That’s the smell of bad-assery in action.” She looked over to see Wu’s shocked expression and his glance back at the door and grabbed his elbow. “Oh, no you don’t. You’ll be fine, I promise.”

“Hey, nice to see my favorite ladies!” Skoochy appeared at Jinora’s elbow, companionably bumping her shoulder.

“Hi Skooch!” said Jinora. “You remember Wu?”

Skoochy appraised Wu carefully. “Ah, the rookie.”

“I am not—“

Korra clapped Wu firmly on the back, cutting off his spluttering retort. “Wu has come to give your place a try. Take him through the tour?”

Skoochy grinned. “Excellent, at Fog City Gym we love everybody and everybody loves us, even if we’re beating the holy hell out of each other.”

Wu paled but made no protest as Skoochy led him towards the locker room.

Korra chuckled at his stunned expression. “Hope we don’t end up breaking him.”

“I just hope Mako doesn’t show up,” Jinora commented. “Because I think Wu has had enough shocks today.”

“Oh,” said Korra, a gleam in her eye. “I’m pretty sure Mako is going to be here, actually.”

Jinora gaped at her. “Korra! What are you up to?”

“Wu is one of us now. And we,” said Korra with a crack to her knuckles,”don’t let us get disrespected.”

Jinora nodded with sudden understanding. “Sparring ring.”

“Sparring ring. Make sure Wu gets a front row seat, will you?”

Jinora replied only with an snicker.

Twenty minutes later found Wu looked askance at the huge leather heavy bag, Skoochy holding it in place from behind.

“It’s not going to hit you back, come on!” he said, wagging his eyebrows at Wu. “Just start with a jab. Come on, left hand straight out from your chin, just throw it.”
Wu checked his feet and raised his newly gloved hands up in front of his face. He threw his left hand out and hit the bag with a soft pat. The bag didn’t move.

“Okay, not bad, but you’re not trying to say ‘hi’ to it, you’re trying to hit it. Little more oomph, please.”

Wu gritted his teeth and tried again.

*Pat.*

“Okay, that’s a little better. Let’s try the right hand now. Remember you’re throwing from the shoulder and you’re turning your hips to get your weight behind it.”

*Pat.*

“Again!”

*Pat.*

“Okay, one-two! Left right!”

*Pat. Pat.*

Wu stepped back and pulled off his gloves, dropping them on the ground in frustration. “This is ridiculous. I hit like a girl.”

“Uh oh.” Wu looked over at Skoochy, who had stepped closer to him in consternation. “Saying that out loud, here, is a good way to get you ass handed to you, got it?”

“It’s just an expression—” Wu began, but Skoochy shushed him, looking around the gym for any eavesdroppers. He spotted Korra wrapping her hands in tape and waved her over. She finished the job, grabbed a pair of bright blue boxing gloves and joined them, one eyebrow raised.

Skoochy cleared his throat. “Um, Wu thinks he hits like a girl.”

“It’s just an expression!”

Korra placed one hand on his chest and pushed him firmly back against the nearby wall, away from the bag.

“Well, let me show you what a dumb expression it is.” Korra pulled on her gloves and gestured Skoochy aside. She shifted her feet and dropped her shoulders, her eyes closed, her chest rising and falling with slow deep breaths. Then she lifted both hands to her chin before unleashing a flurry of punches.

*Thwack.*

*Thwack.*

*Thwack. Thwack. Thwack.*

The bag swayed on its chain and Korra bobbed and weaved around its movement, landing punch after punch. Finally she whirled and landed a huge roundhouse kick against it; the chain rattled as the bag jumped under the impact. She took a step back, breathing a little faster, a huge grin on her face. She patted Wu on the shoulder and walked away, winking at Skoochy as she left.
Skoochy looked at the speechless Wu. “That, my skinny friend, is how you hit like a girl.”

Wu swallowed hard and nodded.

Korra smirked as Skoochy took pity on Wu and walked him over to the treadmills where he could neither himself, nor inadvertently insult anyone. She shook her head at how physically inept he seemed, given that his hands were so nimble when it came to cooking.

After warming up for fifteen minutes with the jump rope, she started cycling between push-ups, sit-ups, and pull-ups, all the while keeping an eye on the door. Eventually she was rewarded when she spotted a familiar figure stride into the gym, his SFPD gym bag clenched in one fist. She made no move to intercept, instead waiting until he exited the locker room and began his own warm-up.

Across the way Jinora and Wu chatted as she showed him some stretches, Jinora grinned at his pained expressions as she pressed him into various positions. Korra caught her eye and mouthed “ten minutes.” Acknowledgment received, she meandered in the direction of her quarry. He wore a ‘Property of SFPD’ t-shirt with the sleeves ripped off, a pair of black running shorts and a disgruntled expression. As usual, his hair was more or less immobilized by excessive hair gel.

“Hey, Mako. Long time no see.”

“Korra,” he grunted. “You haven’t been around much.”

“Busy, busy, busy,” she said blandly. “Always like getting in a workout when I can, though. Also, I was hoping I could get a good sparring match in. It’s been a while and I don’t want to get too out of practice.”

“No thanks,” he said, not meeting her gaze. “I’m good.”

Korra let one lip curl. “Oh yeah? After the beatdown I heard you got recently, I figured you’d want more practice, not less. But that’s okay, I’ll find somebody else.”

Mako whirled to face her, his jaw clenched. One again she wondered how he could possibly be related to the good-natured and generous Bolin when he himself was usually a cranky and cynical stress case.

“You know what?” he growled. “Changed my mind.”

Korra bit back a smile. “You seem tense, Mako. Rough day at the office? Maybe you should do a stint in the sauna instead. Go next door, get a massage?”

He glared at her and reached for his gloves. “Go get padded up. I’ll meet you in the ring.”

Skoochy appeared at Korra’s side as she busily strapped herself into various pieces of protective gear, eyebrow raised.

“I need you to ref a match, Skooch,” said Korra as she held out the chest pad for him to strap her into.

He grunted as checked the straps. “Do I even want to know?”

She grinned. “Somebody has let his crankiness get the better of him for too long and it’s worth mentioning that he’s the most repressed guy on the planet. Maybe enough hits to the head will wake him up and let him be happy for once.”
Skoochy groaned. “Dammit, Korra, please don’t get my gym shut down because you gave a police detective a concussion.”

“Hey, I’m not forcing him into the ring.” Korra bounced lightly on her toes, twisting her torso and swinging her arms to test the fit of her pads. Satisfied, she climbed into the ring and shadowboxed in one corner while she waited for Mako. The men hanging out nearby started calling out to her good-naturedly.

“Hot mama, who you be given the beat down to?”

“I love a women in pads, man. Smells like an impending ass-kicking.”

“You can put the hurt on me anytime, Korra!”

Korra waved at the onlookers with a grin, then watched Mako and Skoochy climb into the ring.

“Okay, kids,” he announced. “Three rounds of two minutes each. Try to avoid head shots. Mario! Do the clock for me!”

A heavily tattooed young man leaned over and hit the button on the timer.

“Touch gloves.”

Korra smiled hugely at the scowling Mako as they fist bumped. “Thanks for doing a couple of rounds with me, dude!”

The dour man nodded and brought his gloves up to his chin, his face mostly hidden behind the bright red pads of his headgear. As Skoochy stepped back, Mako shuffled forward, throwing a couple of exploratory jabs that Korra easily avoided. Out of the corner of her eye she saw Jinora herding Wu towards the ring and danced to one of side of Mako to keep his back towards the approaching pair. She threw a jabbing feint to his head followed by a solid hook to his side. He grunted and heaved an uppercut aiming for her chin but she rolled out of the way.

“Pretty slow, there, Detective!” Korra chuckled. “Are you sure you’re not too tense?”

“You keep chattering at me and I’ll show you tense,” he responded, his eyes narrowed as he continued to work for an opening.

Korra ducked under his hook and gave him a soft jab to the gut, “You’re making this too easy for me, come on!” Korra relished opportunities to needle Mako in a playful tone while they traded punches. His scowl deepened with each comment she made.

The timer beeped and Skoochy quickly stepped in between them, sending them to opposite corners to catch their breath. Mako’s chest heaved as he stared fixedly at the floor, not looking around, and definitely not noticing that Jinora and Wu had joined the onlookers next to the ring. Wu was paying more attention to Mario than the bout, clearly admiring his assortment of tattoos.

The timer beeped again and this time Mako’s flurry of punches Mako were neither exploratory, nor friendly. Korra dodged and blocked and waited patiently for him to tire himself out. The strength and quantity of his punches told her he was trying to end the fight quickly, but he wasn’t focused enough to do much damage. She threw the occasional jab or hook, constantly moving, never dropping her guard, until finally she saw Mako’s hands start to drop as he started to step and give himself more space to catch his breath.

Korra unleashed her own attack, making him retreat step by step until he was against the ropes. In
desperation he swung out wildly and managed to clip Korra’s bruised cheek. She yelped and reflexively lashed out a brutal left hand jab, catching Mako square in the face. He toppled over, his nose pouring blood.

“Korra, I said no concussions!” Skoochy moaned as he helped Mako take off his headgear and pressed a towel to his face.

“Hey, he started it with the punches to the head,” Korra replied hotly. Her cheek was on fire and she suspected it might be bleeding again. “Mako, what the hell was with all that—“

“Mako?!”

The detective’s eyes widened as Wu’s voice rose above the raucous laughter of the other patrons.

“Wu?” he stuttered, somewhat muffled by the towel covering his nose and mouth. “What are you doing here?”

Wu crossed his arms. “I came with Korra and Jinora. Not that you would care.”

“Look,” Mako began, but Wu waved him off.

“I get it, Detective,” the little chef replied. “Not your type and all that. But you know what? Your loss.” Wu turned on his heel and walked away.

Jinora’s jaw dropped, then she burst out laughing as she trotted after him. “Damn, Wu!”

Korra clapped Mako on the back, gleefully ignoring the pained grunt. “Have to say, looks like you might have offended my assistant. Pity. He’s a great guy.”

Mako wiped the last of the blood of his face. “Your assistant? That’s just great. You two can be natural disasters together.”

“Oh I think you’ve got that title all wrapped up, Mr. Cranky Pants.” She ducked under the ropes and jumped lightly to the ground. “Sorry about the nose, but thanks for the bout. And I hope you figure out how to be a happier guy. You’re starting to worry people.”

“I’m fine!” he snapped.

She looked at him, but he was unable to meet her gaze. “You’re not, but nobody can fix that but you. I’m always around to chat if you like. I suspect Bolin would be too.”

He finally raised his eyes to meet her gaze, and she winced at the pain in his expression. After a moment he looked away again, and she turned away with a sigh. She’d said her piece. As she walked away he still sat there, bloody towel in hand and lost in thought.

Outside she found Jinora and Wu leaning against the Nagamobile, talking quietly. “Everything okay?” she asked.

“Yep,” Wu responded. “I’m totally okay, just ready to go home and collapse.” He grinned slyly at her. “I won’t deny I felt a certain satisfaction in you giving him a bloody nose.”

“You’re a savage.” Jinora commented as she swung open the door. “But I like it.”

“I’m not a savage, I’m a firm believer in karma.” He looked critically at Korra. “I’m also a firm believer in hygiene. Please tell me you’re going to shower before going over to Sato Grill.”
Korra glared at the snickering Jinora. “Yes, I’m going to take a shower!”

“Good, because you stink,” Jinora teased.

“I do not! Also, shut up.”

“Sorry, but you do kind of reek, Food Truck Cook Korra!” Wu waved his hand in front of his nose.

“Oh my god, shut up!”
Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

And the plot thickens (just like a good sauce)!

A very appreciative shout out to my awesome beta MidnightLion.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Alyssa Loves Wind @WaveFlyerGirl 3h
@FoodTruckMasterNaga @NagaMinionTwo I will be dreaming about those empanadas, thx for feeding us today!
#FoodTrucks4Life

They Call Me J-No @NagaMinionTwo 2h
#WetsuitHotness

Alyssa Loves Wind @WaveFlyerGirl 2h
@FoodTruckMasterNaga @NagaMinionTwo Awesome idea, I think a trade is in order!

Great White Fluff @FoodTruckMasterNaga 3h
@NagaMinionTwo @WaveFlyerGirl Umm, how about I cook and watch while J-No takes a lesson?

They Call Me J-No @NagaMinionTwo 2h
@WaveFlyerGirl @FoodTruckMasterNaga No way, if I’M getting cold and wet YOU’RE getting cold and wet

Korra smoothed the front of her shirt down as she entered Sato Grill for the second time in two days. At the host station a cheerful young woman looked up and Korra waved at her, pointing at the bar. The hostess smiled and nodded Korra along. As she made her way through the restaurant she saw Bolin catch sight of her and beckon her along. As she made her way through the restaurant she saw Bolin catch sight of her and beckon her over.

“Hey, Korra!”

“How’s it going, Bolin?”

“Good, give me a sec.” Bolin finished shaking his concoction and poured it out carefully into a waiting cocktail glass. He placed it front of a mournful-looking businessman slumped over his plate, then gestured for Korra to take a spot closer to the kitchen, at the opposite end of the bar.

“Chef told me you were on your way. I’ll let her know you’re here.”

Korra leaned forward. “Wait; have you talked to your brother tonight?”

Bolin let out of a short bark of laughter. “Yeah, heard you gave him a bloody nose. He actually asked me to have breakfast with him tomorrow which is nothing short of a god damned miracle, so thanks for punching him in the face.”
Korra blushed. “I swear that wasn’t intentional, but if it means he’s gonna talk to you, I’ll put it in the win column.”

“Well, he’s either going to tell me he’s got cancer or that he digs guys,” Bolin shrugged. “At this point I don’t care; it’s just about damn time he says something to me. I haven’t been able to have a real conversation with him in months. Anyway, hang on a sec. If I don’t tell Chef you’re here it’s going to get ugly for me pretty quick.”

He ducked out of the bar and hurried through the swinging doors that led to the kitchen, then reappeared, giving Korra a cheerful thumb’s up. A few minutes later Asami appeared in full Chef’s regalia and Korra felt her mouth go dry. The executive chef’s crisp white jacket was tailored perfectly and flattered her curves. A neat bun of dark hair emphasized the elegant curve of her neck. Heads turned as she passed through the dining area on her way to the bar, but her eyes were locked on where Korra sat waiting, the smile on her face widening with every step.

“Bon appétit,” she announced, placing a kiss on Korra’s cheek as she set a plate in front of her. “Not traditionally a menu item here, but I thought you might enjoy this.” She settled onto the stool next to Korra as Bolin laid a knife and fork next to the plate.

“Oh my,” Korra moaned. “This looks amazing and the smell—” She leaned over to breathe in the steam.

Asami beamed. “My version of steak frites. Starting with beef medallions with a side of bearnaise.” She paused while Korra cut a small piece and dipped it in the rich sauce, her expression blissful as she chewed. “And instead of traditional potato frites, these are a mix of carrot, parsnip, and yuca, cooked in duck fat and seasoned with truffle salt.”

Korra’s eyes lit up at the description, and she tried each eagerly. “Damn, Asami, these are fantastic!”

Asami smiled, then looked over at Bolin. “I think the Zapata Malbec?”

“Coming up!” He placed a glass of red wine next to Korra’s plate and Asami waited for her reaction, knowing what she did of Korra’s amazing palate.

Korra did not disappoint. Her first cautious sip led to a second larger mouthful, her face flushed with pleasure as she swirled the dark liquid around her tongue, cataloguing the complex flavor profile. “Holy shit, I’ve never had wine like this — What is this?”

“A Malbec. It’s Argentinian, and has largely replaced Pinot Noir and Shiraz as the go-to red these days. Frankly I was pretty underwhelmed by most of the bottles I tried and decided it was all marketing hype, and then I discovered the Bodega Catena Zapata winery and was hooked.”

Korra smiled and reached out for Asami’s hand, rubbing her thumb softly across smooth skin. “I’m feeling really spoiled right now. You better be careful — I could get used to this, Chef.”

Asami blushed and dropped her gaze to where their hand were linked together. “Me, too,” she murmured finally. Then she smiled shyly, raising her eyes to meet Korra’s. “But I think I’ve been careful enough in life.”


“Good evening, Chefs! Once again I am most fortunate. I came here thinking to speak with Chef Sato, only to find both of you here together!”

Korra saw irritation flash across Asami’s face, and managed to bite back her own groan. They both
turned to see Blackstone Varrick standing behind them, his eyebrow raised and a small curl to his lips. He pulled out another stool and sat down, gesturing at Bolin.

“Dirty Martini, three olives, one onion.”

Bolin’s eyebrows shot up, but he dutifully filled a cocktail glass with ice and water to chill it while he assembled the necessary ingredients. Varrick watched Bolin’s process with interest, not speaking until Bolin replaced the ice water with a perfect blend of gin, vermouth and olive juice, the olive and onion garnish speared with a partially peeled sprig of fresh rosemary. He placed the glass in front of Varrick and excused himself, rolling his eyes at Asami as he left.

“Oh my,” said Varrick appreciatively after his first sip. “Your bartender appears to be a mixologist of some talent.”

“You do realize a Michelin-rating includes the bar as well as the kitchen?” Asami asked drily.

“Oh, of course,” Varrick took another sip, and sat back smiling. “So. Allow me to reiterate my congratulations on your victory, Chef Korra. I must say I’m surprised that a chef of your talents does not run a more traditional restaurant.”

Korra took her time selecting a yuca frite before answering. “Been there, done that. I prefer my truck, thanks.”

“You in fact worked for Mario Costantino at one point, did you not? A moderate talent; I was not surprised to hear his restaurant finally shuttered its doors.”

Korra stiffened at the mention of her former boss. “How do you know that?”

Varrick closed his eyes as he savored another long sip of martini. “When I approached the organizers of Food Fight, I made a point of looking into the backgrounds of all their regular participants. You were of particular interest because of your win rate, but I will admit that I was surprised to see that you are a street chef given your impeccable credentials.”

Korra felt a hand grip her knee, and she looked over to see a muscle twitch in her girlfriend’s jaw.

“And what is your interest in these chefs?” Asami’s tone made it obvious she suspected he had less than benign reasons.

“Ah, opportunity is always knocking,” he declared, raising his drink theatrically. “And my latest endeavor is gaining momentum.”

Korra made a point of slicing off another piece of beef and dipping it into the perfect texture of the bearnaise sauce. She already knew she didn’t like this guy, and Asami’s body language was not helping her control her irritation. Since she didn’t want to get arrested for assault, she kept quiet and her hands busy.

“A television event! World-class chefs competing for huge cash rewards. I am already finalizing negotiations for television rights. This will be a worldwide phenomenon!” Varrick set his empty glass down on the polished surface of the bar, waving at Bolin to bring him another one. “We did a similar competition in New York, though in that case each chef had two assistants. Frankly I think that will make for better television. It gives the producer more things to point the camera at, and allows us to up the minimum dish requirement to five or more. Just think!” Varrick continued, his eyes gleaming. “City versus city, country versus country. Why should world-class cuisine have such limited scope? Everyone should enjoy it!”
Korra scoffed. “Everyone already enjoys it. They come to the food trucks on their lunch break and get fantastic food for under ten bucks.”

“Indeed, you are correct. But the average man will not come to Sato Grill on a whim. It is too intimidating to consider. Look around!” He pointed at the main dining area. “You see suits, gowns, fancy clothes. You don’t see jeans and t-shirts—“

Korra looked down at jeans and swallowed hard. The hand on her knee squeezed tightly, and she looked up to see Asami looking at her affectionately. She relaxed again, and covered Asami’s hand with her own.

“As a matter of fact Sato Grill does not have a dress code,” Asami commented. “And I regularly donate tables to fundraisers to encourage a variety of guests to come enjoy our food.”

“Exactly my point!” Varrick declared. “You have to donate tables for people not on the society pages to come.” He leaned forward. “But imagine, everyone seeing chefs competing, like a sporting event. Winning chefs will become household names, with the ability to spawn a number of new restaurants that people will flock to, for a chance to see their heroes—”

Asami exhaled. “There it is.”

Varrick paused. “Excuse me?”

“The real reason for your interest in all of this. You always have trouble with restaurants in your hotels. This would help you enormously, and possibly even give you more of a draw.”

Varrick sat back, eyeing her speculatively. Then he shrugged. “That’s certainly one of many reasons. If this works out how I suspect, the television rights will also be extremely lucrative. I’m a businessman, Miss Sato. Looking for secure revenue streams is what I do.”

Bolin placed a fresh martini in front of Varrick who picked it up, saying, “As I recall, our last partnership was a financial success for you, was it not?”

Asami shook her head at the clear implication. “Yes, the financial result was ultimately satisfactory.”

“You are still irritated by the terms of our agreement.”

“You will understand that secretly adding wording to the contract that gave you full control of my first restaurant along with its name after two years makes me naturally suspicious,” she retorted. “I worked hard for that restaurant’s reputation and you appropriated it, then ruined it.”

“You were compensated for that.”

Asami leaned forward, the jaw in her muscle twitching again. “Yes, because of Kya’s recommendation that I seek legal counsel. In any case, you can hardly expect me to be excited at the thought of working with you again.”

“Fair enough, fair enough,” Varrick said agreeably. “I will admit it wasn’t one of my finer ideas, and I’m certain you reveled in the schadenfreude when we had to close it down. In this case, the winning chefs themselves will be their own brand that can be licensed! Everyone wins!”

Korra snickered under her breath. She had to give the guy credit for irrepressibility. Now, however, Varrick turned to her.

“Which leads us to you.”
“Me?”

Varrick pulled an olive off the sprig with his teeth, chewing thoughtfully for a moment. “Do you know what makes a truly great sporting event, Chef Korra?”

“Uh—“

“It can involve a number of factors, all of which I suspect you can appreciate.” He started ticking them off with his fingers. “A winning underdog. A come-from-behind victory. A photo finish. A long-standing rivalry. And the best one,” he paused, wiggling his eyebrows at Korra. “A grudge match.”

Korra blinked. “Um, okay. What does this have to do with cooking?”

“Everything, when it’s a televised cooking competition!” He nearly shouted with his excitement. “After the demise of his restaurant, Mario Costantino moved to New York, and was in fact the surprise winner of the New York event. I suspect a lot of that had to do with the hand-picked assistants he was provided with by his new sponsor.”

“Oh yeah? And who might that be?”

“Hou-Ting Wong.”

Korra choked on her parsnip. Asami looked at her in concern and flagged down Bolin for a glass of water.

“And Hou-Ting Wong leads me to you, Chef Sato!” Varrick continued, blithely ignoring Korra’s frantic gulping. “I have discovered that Chef Wong’s slightly estranged son, Wu, is working for you!”

Asami blinked in shock. “That is actually no longer the case. We mutually terminated his internship and he has found a placement more to his liking.”

“Yeah, he works for me now,” gasped Korra, finally getting her breath back.

Varrick stared at them for a long moment, then burst into peals of laughter. “Oh, oh, oh! This is too rich!”

Korra leaned towards Asami. “Is he always like this?” she asked in a low voice.

She nodded. “Pretty much.”

Varrick’s giggles continued for a few minutes, then he downed the remaining half of his martini and stood up. “I’ll take my leave now. I suspect you and Wu Wong will wish to start making plans. Let me know who your second assistant is going to be. The competition will take place in about two months. The date will be finalized in a week or so, I imagine.”

“Wait, what?” Korra sputtered. “There’s no way in hell you’re getting me on TV, and I sure as hell don’t want to franchise restaurants or whatever the hell is supposed to happen.”

“No, but you could potentially franchise food trucks, or write a cookbook, or open a cooking school, or just take a long vacation in Fiji. A hundred thousand dollars buys you a number of options. Did I mention that was the prize money for the national event? And that’s not even the most important thing!”
Korra and Asami gaped at him.

He leaned towards them, his eyes twinkling with glee. “I don’t care how good Costantino’s assistants are. From what I saw last night, you’ll destroy him, very publicly, on national TV.” He straightened in satisfaction. “How much better can one get than sweetly served revenge?”

He turned on one heel and walked swiftly away. “I’ll be in touch!” he called over his shoulder.

They watched him leave, at a loss for words after the surreal experience.

Korra finally turned to Asami. “Okay, I’m going to finish eating this amazing food, and then I’m going to try and forget that just happened.”

“I see what you meant by hammocks on cold nights,” commented Asami.

Korra wriggled to settle herself more comfortably and sighed in contentment as she felt Asami’s grip tighten around her waist. “You mean how you should only be in hammocks on cold nights if there are cuddles in involved?”

“I believe that’s what you said, yes.” Asami yawned and pulled the blanket up more firmly under her chin. “I have to agree. This is by far the most comfortable I’ve ever been in this hammock.”

Korra hummed in approval. “That night I found you sitting in it, I couldn’t help but think how nice it would be to join you.”

“Really?”

“Yeah... Is that creepy?”

“Possibly, but I’m going to go with the idea that it’s charming.”

“You’re too kind.”

Around them were the faint clanks and thuds of docked boats rocking in their slips. Somewhere nearby they heard the sharp exhalation of a sea lion surfacing in the harbor, and the cool tones of Melody Gardot on the cabin speakers floated up through the open hatchway. They continued to gently swing in silence, wrapped in fleece blankets against the damp chill. Finally Korra stirred.

“Okay, so seriously. Explain to me how Varrick goes through life not getting punched in the nose a lot.”

Asami laughed softly. “I’ve never met anyone like him. Even as infuriated as he’s made me, I still somehow end up chatting with him on occasion. I don’t trust him, of course.”

“He did steal your restaurant,” Korra pointed out.

“That he did,” sighed Asami. “It cost him a lot of money, and it was all for nothing in the end. He didn’t realize at the time that the only value the restaurant really had was its staff. When he forced me out, most of the rest of the kitchen staff also left, and six months later it was obvious the replacement kitchen crew he had hired had ruined the menu. He had to bring in a whole new partner and start over. In a strange way he did me a favor. There was no hit on my reputation when the restaurant tanked because he had made a point of publicly distancing me from it by the time it failed, and the settlement was enough to let me start Sato Grill without having to take on any outside investors.”
“What do you think his angle is with this whole television thing?”

Asami tilted her head up to see Korra’s face. “Why, are you considering it?”

“I don’t know!” Korra groaned. “I really don’t want to be on TV, and Varrick is a weirdo and I don’t like what he did to you.”

“But…”

Korra blew out her breath. “The thought of putting a very visible cooking beatdown on Mario Fucking Costantino is very, very tempting.”

“Hrm. I can imagine.” Asami pressed a lingering kiss against her cheek. “You know, I don’t know if I mentioned this, but watching you cook was very…” She paused, looking for the best word.

“Scary? Comical? Messy?”

Asami’s snuggled closer into Korra’s warmth, their legs intertwining. “Arousing. It was very, very, arousing.” She placed another kiss, this time along Korra’s jaw. “I’ve never felt that way before, about anyone. Somehow, lying here snuggled in the hammock with you, thinking about last night—”

Korra closed her eyes at the touch and her pulse thudded in her chest. A third kiss landed on the soft skin under her ear, and she shuddered.

“I thought you didn’t get cold,” Asami teased, her lips brushing against Korra’s ear.

Korra’s breath hitched. “Cold is not the issue. In fact, I’m suddenly quite warm.” She gasped as Asami nibbled on her earlobe. “You need to stop that.”

“Why?”

Korra’s ran one hand up Asami’s side, and with the other reached up to tuck a stray lock of hair behind her ear. “Because I’m trying to be good, as you requested.”

“Did I request that?” Asami pressed a delicate kiss at the base of Korra’s neck.

“You’re killing me here, Sato,” Korra growled, her whole body thrumming.

Asami laughed, then rolled herself out of the hammock, scattering the blankets, and headed for the hatchway. She looked back at Korra, a saucy tilt to her head. “I myself am getting quite cold. I think you need to come warm me up.”

Korra practically fell from the hammock and clambered into the cockpit. “I do, do I?”

“Oh, most definitely.”

The hatch slammed shut behind them.

Chapter End Notes

"Oh my"
Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

A feel good chapter, just in time for Christmas!

:)  

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Steve The Man @FortMasonStud15 3h
@FoodTruckMasterNaga @NagaMinionTwo I want my hot food truck ladies to feed me, when are you coming back to Fort Mason?

BLACKSTONE VARRICK @KingVarrick 2h
@FortMasonStud15 Would you be willing to contribute additional financial incentives to increase this likelihood? Just curious

Steve The Man @FortMasonStud15 1h
@KingVarrick What?

They stumbled past the galley and the navigation station before collapsing onto the bed in the forward cabin. Asami’s skin was hot under Korra’s hands as she eased her blouse off delectable shoulders, revealing the bare skin above a form fitting camisole. Korra felt fingers fumbling at the hem of her polo shirt and she lifted herself up a little in order to tug it off. She grinned as she saw Asami bite her lip, hesitating.

“It’s okay,” she said softly. “You’re allowed to touch.”

Asami reached out one trembling hand, her fingertips tracing the taut abdomen up to the edge of Korra’s navy sports bra. Her green eyes darkened, flickering up to meet Korra’s gaze. Korra shuddered, then lunged down to capture parted lips in a kiss that instantly deepened, their tongues sliding hotly against each other.

“Oh god,” Asami moaned as Korra broke the kiss, trailing lips down her neck before laying a gentle bite against her pulse point. Her fingers clutched at strong shoulders, her legs parting instinctively as Korra pressed closer but somehow not close enough to sate her desire. She gasped at the sensation of a firm thigh pressed against her center, and her hips rolled upwards in response. A warm hand came up to cup her breast through the thin cotton of the camisole, and a thumb brushed across a stiffening nipple. Asami cried out at the sensation, her back arching into the touch as they ache in her core grew stronger.

Gradually her breaths grew faster and more shallow as her body clenched against the unfamiliar sensations. Tremors shook her limbs and she felt a wave of dizziness wash over her.
Korra paused, sensing the change. She quickly rolled to one side and caressed a pale cheek. “Asami, honey, hey, it’s okay.” Her touch switched to soothing rather than passionate, and she rubbed slow circles against Asami’s heaving chest. “We don’t have to do anything you’re not ready for.”

“I’m so sorry, I don’t know what’s wrong with me—”

“Shhh,” murmured Korra. She pressed a kiss against Asami’s temple. “There’s nothing wrong with you other than maybe getting a little ahead of yourself.” She chuckled. “Or maybe I’m just so amazing that you simply swoon in my presence.”

Asami hid her face against Korra’s chest, feeling herself start to relax in the tender embrace, relishing the heady smell of her skin. “I just freaked out on you when this was my idea in the first place,” she lamented as she recovered her breath.

Korra pressed another kiss into her hair. “I know you’ve never done this before, and we’re still kind of learning each other. It’s totally okay for us to go slow.” She rolled over onto her back, pulling Asami against her side. “I promise I’m not upset.”

There were quiet for a while, listening to the faint thuds of the bumpers through the hull as the boat rocked in its berth. Korra continued rubbing Asami’s back affectionately.

“No.” Asami sat up, looking determined.

Korra raised herself up on one elbow, gazing at her quizzically. “No?”

Asami shook her head. “I want this. I want you. I don’t want to give into my weird subconscious insecurities.” She pushed herself off the bed, one hand on her hip. “We’re superheroes, dammit. I told you I’m done being careful and I meant that!”

Korra laughed delightedly. “Oh my god, you’re adorable.” She pushed herself to the edge of the bed and pulled Asami to stand between her knees. She looked up, her gaze full of affection, blue eyes bright. “Do you trust me?”

“Yes,” Asami whispered with no hesitation, the barest hint of her smile returning.

“I trust you too.” Korra smiled. “I have an idea.” She ran her hands across Asami’s hips, slow and deliberate, until her fingers found the button of her slacks and popped it open. Her eyes never left Asami’s, and her smile grew wider at each small click of the zipper as she pulled it down.

Asami’s lip was back between her teeth and her eyes were dark. Korra gently eased her slacks down to the floor, leaving Asami standing in her camisole and matching panties. Korra stood up, clasping Asami’s hands and guiding them to the front of her jeans. She leaned forward and brushed her lips against Asami’s ear, relishing the shiver she elicited.

“Take them off me?”

Asami’s breath hitched at the invitation, her fingers unbuttoning Korra’s fly and pushing the jeans off those glorious legs. Her mind went blank as she took in how Korra’s boyshorts emphasized every muscular curve.

Korra’s expression was wicked as she stepped away and laid back on the bed, her hands clasped behind her head.

“I think,” she purred, “that perhaps this is as as much as we should take off tonight.” Her eyes twinkled playfully. “Also, I think you need to be the one driving.”
“Hey, Korra.”

There was an expectant pause.

“Earth to Korra.”

Another pause.

“FOOD TRUCK COOK KORRA!”

Korra jumped, startled out of her reverie. She glared at Jinora and Wu where they stood smirking at her from the kitchen doorway.

“What the fuck, you guys?” she grumbled, however despite her best efforts she wasn’t able to school her features into anything threatening.

Jinora sauntered up to her, her eyes running up and down Korra’s body. “Well, I guess you had a good time ‘Sato Grillin’ last night.”

“What are hell are you talking about?” Korra’s scoffed, her face heating up as she turned away. A pot of Liam’s coffee roast was percolating and she busied herself with preparing cups. There was a slight tug on her shirt as Jinora hooked her finger under the collar. “Hey!”

Wu started laughing, then choked as he tried to hide it with a cough.

“Hey Wu, I see two hickeys and a couple of welts. What do you think?”

Wu snorted. “I think I don’t want to get fired, is what I think.”

“Wuss.”

Korra batted Jinora’s hand away. “Back off, wench.”

Jinora giggled. “I’ll have to text Kai to get a report from his side.”

“Have I fired you yet today?”

“I told you!” Wu called from where he was rummaging in the refrigerator.

“Honey,” said Jinora as she turned away to wrap an apron around her waist. “You look too blissed out to do much of anything today.”

Korra’s grin returned with a vengeance, to her complete disgust. “I’m in a good mood. Sue me.”

“I want details.”

“You get nothing, including any coffee if you keep bugging me!”

Jinora plopped down onto a stool. “Fine! Gimme coffee.” Her cup safely in hand she moved to the far side of the counter then muttered “I bet you got more than coffee from Asami last night!”

Korra rolled her eyes but couldn’t bring herself to do more than shrug, helpless against the goofy expression she knew was on her face. Last night was just too fresh in her mind…

“Is this okay?” Asami asked worriedly as she eased herself onto Korra’s waiting form.
“I don’t think I can express how very okay this is.”

“I really don’t know what I’m doing—”

Korra brushed a finger across Asami’s lips. “Is there anything I’ve done that you’ve liked?”

“Oh my, yes.”

“Start with that, then.”

From the main cabin, Melody Gardot’s voice faded and a moment later the sensual tones of Lana Del Ray’s “West Coast” floated in. Asami dipped her head and kissed Korra’s neck, scraping lightly with her teeth. She grinned when she heard Korra’s breath quicken, and repeated the move. Korra’s body shuddered against her, and she felt warm hands grasp her hips. Emboldened, she pressed more kisses along Korra’s jaw before their lips met again. She revelled in the taste of Korra’s tongue against hers, how their bodies seemed to fit together so perfectly. Her earlier fear dissipated as she was encouraged to explore.

Eventually Korra couldn’t help herself. Arms slid up to wrap her in a firm embrace, hands threading into long black hair, a leg rising up tantalizingly between hers. Asami gasped at the sensation of Korra pressed against her core, damp silk the only barrier. Their hips began to rock together, slowly at first, then faster.

“Oh, oh god.”

“You feel amazing.”

“Korra—”

“It’s okay. I’ve got you.”

Asami could feel Korra’s heat building against her thigh, her own arousal almost unbearable in its intensity. Her mouth clamped down at the base of Korra’s neck, her hands grabbing on for dear life as waves of pleasure washed over her. Below her Korra writhed, breathing out a long moan through her own release. They finally collapsed bonelessly against each other, chests heaving. Korra pressed a loving kiss against her sweaty forehead, letting out a throaty chuckle.

“What’s so funny?” Asami mumbled.

Korra shook her head, trying to put her feelings into words. Finally she just shrugged and shook her head, smiling with contentment.

“I think you’ve just beaten your subconscious insecurities into submission, Superhero.”

“Okay, not sure where you went just now but that smile on your face should be illegal,” Jinora declared. She passed Korra her cell phone. “Naga’s vet has been trying to call you again. Probably time to go get Her Majesty.”

“Hope so, thanks,” Korra grabbed the phone and wandered outside to where Wu was preparing to roast a flock’s worth of chicken carcasses. Using Korra’s modified pipe cutter, he had removed the top of around two dozen beer cans and was dropping chunks of onion, garlic, and lemon into each half-emptied can.

“I can’t believe this is how you roast chicken,” commented Wu as he started carefully inserting cans into hallowed out body cavities. “It’s almost perverted, how we’re shoving these huge things up
“I bet you say that to all the boys,” said Korra slyly, wagging her eyebrows.

Wu dropped the can and chicken onto the worktable in shock, the beer sloshing over Korra’s shoes. “Oh my god you did not just say that, and by the way that totally serves you right!”

Korra stared down at her feet, and sighed. “Yeah, maybe.” She laughed at his raised eyebrow. “Okay, definitely. Anyway, you’ll see what I’m talking about when they’re done. They’ll be amazingly juicy and the skin—” She squinted at the chicken closest to her. “Um, Wu? Sorry, but you have to do the thing with shoving the spicy garlic butter under the skin before you start roasting them. That’s the part that makes the skin tasty.”

Wu groaned. “Sorry, I forgot.” He looked mournfully at his hands. “I’m going to need a serious manicure after today.”

“We do have gloves you know,” said Korra as she watched him gingerly start working the butter mixture between the skin and the flesh of the bird in his hand.

Wu shrugged. “Got beaten into me not to use them in my cooking school, so even though you don’t care it feels weird when I wear them.”

Korra scoffed. “I have no idea why wearing gloves makes you less of a chef, but really it’s up to you.” She checked the temperatures on the grill one last time. “These are almost ready. And remember, once you pop them all in—”

“Watch the temperature but don’t open the lids. I won’t forget.” Wu smirked.

“Okay then, rookie. I’ll be back in a few. Gonna go see about my dog.”

She chuckled as Wu rolled his eyes and went back to slathering his chickens.

"Chef."

Pause.

"Chef Sato."

Another pause.

"ASAMI-MONSTER!"

Asami sprang to her feet, her office chair clattering over behind her. She glared at Kya and Opal.

“That,” she gritted through clenched teeth “was not okay.”

Opal’s face was red with choked laughter as she clung weakly to the door frame of Asami’s office. “She called you Asami-monster?”

Kya shrugged, a little shame-faced, but with an unrepentant twinkle in her eye.

“Somebody is a little distracted this morning,” drawled Kya. “Possibly tired? Opal, pull yourself together and bring Chef some espresso.”
Opal waved and staggered off in the direction of the bar, her chortles fading as she went. Asami lifted her chair back into an upright position and sank into it, her earlier discontent gone. She smiled shyly at Kya who studied her, a faint curl to her lips.

“You look happy.”

Asami blushed, but nodded. “I think I am, actually. Very much so.” Then she frowned, and Kya leaned forward.

“What is it?”

Asami shook her head. “I don’t know, I just realized…” She swallowed. “I haven’t even known her that long, and yet now I can’t stop thinking about her. Is that wrong?” Her face showed a flicker of uncertainty.

“Oh my dear,” said Kya, patting Asami’s knee. “I had only known your mother for around twelve hours when I knew I never wanted to be apart from her.”

Asami blinked in astonishment. “How could you possibly know that?”

Kya sat back, grinning a little at the memory. “She walked up to me in the library in search of a book I had checked out. I guess the librarian pointed me out to her. She had sneaked a cup of hot chocolate and a cookie into the library as a bribe for me to let her have the book so she could finish a paper she was working on.”

Kay smoothed her apron across her legs, her eyes soft and unfocused, remembering.

“Well of course I refused because I had a test to study for, to her annoyance. But in the end we wound up sitting there together for hours, sharing the book between us. Afterwards she insisted on buying me dinner, and then she walked me back to my dorm room and gave me a goodnight kiss on the cheek. For luck on my test, she said. I was floored, but I could still feel her kiss the next morning.” She looked back at Asami and shrugged. “Sometimes, you just know.”

———

“Pregnant?”

Korra stared at Doctor Johnson in shock. The veterinarian nodded and tapped her finger on the lab results in her lap.

“But,” Korra looked down at Naga, sprawled on foam pad. “She’s fixed! I got her checked out after I found her. At this clinic! You guys said she was fixed!”

Doctor Johnson pursed her lips. “Well, it turns out that my predecessor, Doctor Avery, noted what looked like a surgical scar on her abdomen that was similar to what’s left after a spaying procedure. I have his notes here.” There was a flipping of papers and an embarrassed cough. “Unfortunately he did no further investigation, and in fact it was simply a similarly appearing injury and she was not spayed. Thus she was susceptible to, well, getting knocked up.” The doctor smirked, then sighed. “That’s not all, I’m afraid.”

Korra tore her gaze away from her panting dog and looked back up at the doctor.

“The ultrasound shows that it may be at least a partially ectopic pregnancy.”

“A what?”
“Sometimes fertilized eggs don’t make it all the way down to the uterus. She’s showing signs of extreme swelling in one of her fallopian tubes which is no doubt causing many of the symptoms of discomfort you’ve described.”

Korra immediate crouched down next to the malamute’s head. “Oh, geez, I’m sorry girl, I didn’t know…” She looked up anxiously. “What can we do?”

Doctor Johnson smiled. “That’s the good news — we should be able to surgically correct this problem, while also conducting a tubal ligation to ensure it doesn’t happen again. Given the history, we’ll of course do this procedure at a significant discount.”

“Is that safe? What—“ Korra bit her lip. “What about the puppies?”

“Any embryos that successfully implanted in the uterus should be fine if you wish to let her pregnancy go to term, but unfortunately we may not know right away.”

Naga wooed, pressing her head against Korra’s hand. Korra felt tears track down her cheeks as she rubbed the soft ears.

“Whaddya know, girl,” she whispered. “We’re going to be parents!”

Korra: You will NOT BELIEVE what just happened!

Asami: I assume you’re going to tell me

Korra: I’M GOING TO BE A MOM!

Asami: …

Chapter End Notes

There! Hopefully this reassures everybody who was convinced that I was about to kill Naga off...

:)
Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

Wanted to get one last chapter in before the end of 2015 (finished sort of in a hurry and totally un-beta'd, you are warned). Hope all of you have a great New Year and thanks so much for all of the support you’ve given me and my little Foodiverse. Stay tuned for fun times ahead!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Korra,” Jinora shouted. “Your phone’s ringing again!”

Korra ran in from the grill area where she had been helping Wu pull beer cans out of chickens. He had decided to embrace the idea and was trying to get her to rename it ‘butt-plug chicken’ for the menu with limited success.

“Hello?”

“You’re going to be a what?”

Korra smiled as she heard the amusement in Asami’s voice. “Took you long enough to call me back.”

“I do have a day job,” Asami deadpanned. “So, before I start worrying about scary or what should be impossible scenarios, care to enlighten me?”

Korra chuckled. “Sorry, in retrospect I realized my word choice could have been better. Anyway, turns out Naga is in the family way, and I was both totally shocked and really excited about it.”

“You’re dog is going to have puppies?” Asami gasped. “Wait, wouldn’t that make you a grandmother?”

“Please, I am not a grandmother!” Korra huffed. “I prefer to think of myself as a supportive co-parent.”

Asami’s laughter poured out of the phone. “Alright then. Be it far from me to judge, and anyway this is very exciting! When’s the big day?”

Korra peered at the paperwork taped to her refrigerator. “The vet thinks anywhere from the next 4-6 weeks, it’s pretty early. The only reason we know already is one of the eggs got stuck and she has to have surgery, but the vet thinks it will all be okay!”


“Can I call you later?”

“We’re hosting a big event at the restaurant tonight. It’s a private party for a local software company and I’m not sure when I’ll be done,” said Asami regretfully. “If I can get freed up before midnight I’ll text you, okay?”
“Oh, okay,” replied Korra, trying to keep the disappointment out of her voice. “Good luck!” She hesitated, then blurted. “I’ll miss you tonight.”

There was a pause, then Korra heard a door slam in the background.

“Sorry, had to hide in my office to get away from Opal.” Asami apologized, sounding a little breathless. “I just had to tell you that I’ve been missing you since I left you at O’Shaughnessey’s this morning.” Her voice took on a teasing tone. “It was the first time I’ve ever wanted to skip out on work. I hope you’re proud of yourself.”

Korra grinned happily. “Unbelievably so. Of course after you left, Liam informed me that I looked like I ‘kicked the pot and ate the rainbow’. I’m not exactly sure what that means but he was smiling when he said it, so I can only assume it’s a good thing.” Korra turned and saw Jinora and Wu smirking at her. “But now I need to go before I embarrass myself any further, and you need to go to do your party thing.”

“You’re right, I really do need to go,” said Asami reluctantly. “Bye Korra.”

“Fare thee well, my lady.”

Kya hurried back through the door into the kitchen from the main dining area, trailing a bustling horde of waitstaff bearing empty platters en route to the plating counter. She came up to where Asami was overseeing the interns, Carlos and Rich, doing their first official stint at the stove working as line cooks. They were working slower than the regular cooks and had less pans in front of them, but were steadily improving under Asami’s patient tutelage. Lamb chops sizzled and brussel sprouts caramelized amidst the clattering of pans.

“So, I think you’re going to be unhappy.”

Asami glanced over at her. “I can’t wait to hear this.”

Kya sighed. “Come with me.”

Together they peered out the kitchen door window.


The imposing figure of Blackstone Varrick stood in the middle of the dining area. Sato Grill’s hostess and a woman Asami recognized as the software company’s event coordinator were both trying to discreetly escort him towards the door. Next to him stood a stocky figure in a black suit looking sullenly around the restaurant.

Asami turned to Kya in shock. “What is Varrick doing here, and tell me he did not bring Mario Costantino of all people into my restaurant.”

“I don’t know, and apparently so,” Kya replied, her voice unusually somber.

“I’m going to kill him,” Asami ground out, her teeth gritted in irritation. “I’d like this company to host another party here in the future, so let’s go help Sarah kick him out.”

Varrick straightened as she approached. “Chef Sato! I was hoping to speak with you.”

Asami ignored the preferred hand. “Sato Grill is currently closed for a private event, as I’m sure
you’re aware. I’m going to have to ask you to show up unannounced on another day.”

Varrick waved his hand vaguely towards his companion. “I’m sure you know Chef Costantino?”

Asami barely spared him a glance. “What do you want, Varrick?”

Costantino snorted. “She doesn’t seem to like you much.”

“We have a complicated relationship.”

“We have no relationship,” Asami retorted. “I’m in the middle of an event, and I need you out of here.”

“Geez, lady, no wonder they call you the Ice Queen,” chuckled Costantino. “Wouldn’t kill you to loosen up a little.”

Asami’s jaw dropped but before she could muster a reply Kya was in front of her.

“And what do they call you, other than a drunk misogynist and a failed restauranteur?” she demanded, her eyes flashing.

Varrick clapped his hands, his eyes sparkling. “Oh, this is too delicious.”

“I don’t fucking need this,” Costantino snarled, pointing an angry finger at Kya. “I thought we were supposed to meet up with the other chef who’s gonna compete with me? Don’t tell me it’s one of these bimbos—“ He grunted as Asami stepped around Kya and smoothly twisted his arm behind his back with one hand and with the other grabbed the collar of his jacket. Around them the restaurant fell silent, the stunned party-goers stopping to stare as Asami pushed the spluttering man none too gently through the door that Sarah, her hostess, gleefully held open. Kya followed close behind, ensuring that Varrick joined Costantino on the sidewalk.

“As I was saying, Sato Grill is closed for a private party, and my guests do not deserve this disruption.” Asami glared at both of them. “Frankly, Varrick, this is obnoxious even for you.”

“My humble apologies, Chef,” said Varrick, not looking the least bit repentant. “But please give Chef Korra my regards. I’m sorry we missed her.”

Costantino whirled to face Varrick. “Korra? As in Korra the kitchen intern? Are you fucking kidding me? There’s no way that bitch wannabe is going up against me.”

Asami felt Kya’s hand grab her elbow, pulling her back into the restaurant and firmly closing the door against the two men, cutting off Varrick’s response.

“Well,” she said brightly, keeping herself between Asami and the door. “That was exciting!”

Around them applause and hoots burst out from the party guests who had gathered near the entrance to witness the summary ejection of the interlopers. Asami felt herself blushing as her anger slowly dissipated.

“I’m extremely sorry for that,” she began hesitantly, but was interrupted by the arrival of the beaming event coordinator. Her name tag proclaimed her to be Christine.

“Hey everyone,” Christine called out cheerfully. “I think we can all agree that Sato Grill just became our favorite restaurant, and we’d like to thank Chef Sato and her staff for giving us a great party by making them all honorary Noodlers!”
The cheering was tumultuous. Christine solemnly handed over two black t-shirts emblazoned with the words ‘NoodleSoft’ and the stylized picture of a bowl of noodles that served as the corporate logo. “We have a ton more in a box for the rest of your staff. We wouldn’t be a proper software company without tacky t-shirts.”

“Aww, how sweet,” murmured Kya in amusement. “We’ve been adopted by nerds.”

Asami poked her in the side, then turned to Christine. “I truly apologize for that interruption. In the future I’ll be sure to make sure to have some sort of security in place—“

“Oh please, that was better than having live entertainment,” Christine declared. “We are a game company, after all, so we like things a little crazy.”

“Plenty of that around here,” smirked Kya. “We only *look* civilized.”

“Kya!” scolded Asami, but she couldn’t help her smile. “We should get back to the kitchen, please enjoy the rest of your time here, and don’t hesitate to let us know if there’s anything else we can do to make your night memorable.”

“Well, I’m going to start by finding somebody else you can manhandle out of the restaurant. We might need to include that scenario in our next game.”

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**Asami:** You awake?

**Korra:** Mostly

**Korra:** Was hoping you’d ping

**Asami:** I want you to do the competition

**Korra:** What?

**Asami:** Varrick’s thing against Costantino

**Asami:** I want you to do it

**Korra:** Where did this come from?

**Asami:** Tell you later but when you do it I want to be there

**Korra:** Would hope you’d come watch of course

**Asami:** No I want to be one of your assistant chefs

**Asami:** Gotta go talk to you later

**Korra:** The hell?

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Korra’s phone rang under her ear, jolting her awake. She fumbled sleepily for it. “Hello?”

“I woke you.”
“S’okay, you’re allowed. What time is it anyway?” She yawned and rubbed her face.

“Time to let me in?”

Korra paused as her brain struggled to process this comment. “You’re outside my place.”

“And you say your brain doesn’t work in the mornings.” Asami chuckled.

Korra made her way down the stairs from her loft, still clutching the phone to her ear. “Are you giving me grief before I’ve even had my coffee, Sato?” She pulled the door open to see Asami waiting patiently. The chef’s eyes darkened as she took in Korra’s tank top and boxers. “Hey, you —”

She was cut off by a hard kiss, and she managed to kick the door closed before feeling herself being pushed steadily back.

“Asami?” She groaned as soft lips ran down her neck and struggled to stay on her feet. “Not that I’m not loving this, but, um—” She broke off as her back hit the side of her food truck, Asami pressed tightly against her.

“I had a really weird night last night,” Asami breathed against her ear, sucking gently on an earlobe. “And I really want to tell you about it, but for some reason the minute I saw you, all that went out the window.” She captured Korra’s lips again, curling her fingers in Korra’s tousled hair. A slow heat was building in her stomach and she let herself revel in it. She felt Korra grin against her lips, then shrieked as she was suddenly lifted up, warm hands under her thighs encouraging her legs to wrap around a strong waist.

“Yeah, let’s talk later,” Korra muttered as she carried Asami up the steps to her loft.

They fell onto the bed together, laughing.

“How are the subconscious insecurities feeling this morning?” Korra teased.

Asami pushed her back far enough to wriggle out of her jacket and kick off her shoes. “Still thoroughly vanquished.” She pulled Korra closer to her, and shuddered when she felt teeth scrape down the base of her neck. “I’ll have you know — oh, god — that I was a perfectly boring and sane person before I met you, and now,” she paused, gasping a little at the sensation of Korra’s hands slipping under her shirt. “Now I seem to be having daily adventures.”

“Should I be apologizing?” Korra’s lips ghosted across Asami’s clavicle.

“Don’t you dare,” Asami moaned as she felt fingertips caressing her sides, teasing her breasts. She started to tug at the hem of Korra’s tank top, then froze at the sound of the door banging open downstairs.

“Korra!” Jinora shouted. “Get your ass out of bed!”

“Fuck,” groaned Korra. She pulled back slightly, pressing a light kiss against Asami’s cheek. Then she smirked and waggled her eyebrows. “So, how adventurous are you feeling now?”

Asami’s eyes widened as she caught Korra’s meaning. “Not adventurous enough for what I think you’re suggesting.”

“Heh, I’m kidding,” Korra chuckled. “I’m not adventurous enough for what I’m suggesting.”
“Korra!” Jinora exclaimed. “Don’t make me come up there!”

Korra rolled her eyes. “I hear you! Give us a minute,” she called back.

Jinora tskeled. “That better be Asami up there with you.”

“For fuck’s sake, who else would it be?” Korra grumbled reaching for a pair of jeans. “I haven’t had anybody sleep here but her in over two years.” At Asami’s raised eyebrow, she hastened to add.

“And that was platonically, I swear. As you’ve previously noted, I don’t have a guest room.”

Asami leaned over and brushed her lips across Korra’s. “You’re such a little casanova.”

“Hey! Who are you calling little?”

Downstairs Jinora was pulling breakfast burritos out of a bag as Asami walked into the kitchen.

“Hey, Asami,” she called out. “I didn’t know you’d be here or I would have brought more food.”

Asami shook her head, smiling. “Thank you, Jinora, but I actually ate breakfast before I came over.”

Jinora appeared disappointed that there hadn’t been an overnight stay, but maintained a small smirk at Korra as she stumbled into the kitchen and collapsed onto a stool.

“Good morning, Food Truck Cook Korra,” she sang, handing over a burrito.

Korra glowered. “What’s got you so cheerful this morning, anyway?”

“Kai texted me about Asami’s totally epic smackdown last night. Apparently somebody filmed it and posted it on YouTube!”

Asami’s jaw dropped. “Please tell me you’re kidding.”

“Nope!” Jinora held up her cell phone triumphantly and Asami felt the blood drain from her face.

Korra leaned over to look and choked on the piece of burrito she was chewing. “Did I just see you literally throw Mario Costantino out of your restaurant?”

Asami buried her face in her hands. “Just shoot me now. I can’t wait to see the write-ups I get after this. I’ll probably have to close down.”

Jinora took a swig of her latte and shook her head. “Oh honey, you have a fan club now! You should see the comments you’ve gotten. ‘Love the awesome chef who tosses lame party crasher,’” and ‘Super Chef Sato is my new hero, definitely gonna hit up Sato Grill for dinner soon,’ and my personal fave, ‘Sato Grill chefs assault assholes with aplomb, go kitchen chicks!’” She took a big bite of her burrito, then mumbled through her mouthful. “I haven’t checked Yelp yet but Kai said your score went up.”

Asami rolled her eyes then threw a napkin at Korra who was convulsing with laughter. “You’re not helping.”

Korra laughed even harder. Tears leaked from her eyes as she clutched her stomach, gasping for breath. “You weren’t kidding when you said you were having adventures,” she eventually managed to choke out.

“Well, that is what I wanted to talk to you about before you distracted me,” Asami huffed.
“How did I distract you?”

Asami crossed her arms and glared. “You opened the door half naked.”

“I was mostly asleep and those were my pajamas!”

Jinora snickered before noticing Korra’s scowl. “I know, I know. I’m fired.”

Korra cleared her throat. “So, Varrick and Costantino showed up at your place last night. I assume this has everything to do with the text you sent me.”

“I knew he was likely unpleasant based on his reputation,” said Asami, her eyes flashing. “Meeting him in person was painful. He’s an absolutely vile human being.”

“And now you want to help me take him down?” Korra’s blue eyes glinted mischievously, then she frowned.

Asami caught it. “What?”

“Why the hell would Varrick bring him around like that?” Korra shakes her head. “It’s like he was going out of his way to cause a scene. Makes no sense.”

Jinora crumpled her wrapper and tossed it into the trash. “Sure it does. Haven’t you people ever watched Jerry Springer?” She sighed at the blank looks. “Okay, nevermind on Springer. Korra, you were telling me about this yesterday — he wants to do this TV thing, right? So, he’s going for big ratings. How else you gonna have drama and suspense watching people cook? There has to be something besides the cooking.”

Korra blinked. “Wow, that’s so crazy it almost makes sense. But Asami,” she hesitated. “You know you can’t be my assistant, right?”

Asami frowned. “Why not?”

“Because you’re like, Asami freakin’ Sato!” Korra waved her hands around vaguely. “I’m a fucking food truck cook, and you’ve won about a million awards and run one of the top restaurants in the country.” Her gaze dropped to the table. “You being my sous chef is just wrong.”

Asami couldn’t stop the snort. “Korra, I say this with all sincerity.” She reached out and grabbed Korra’s hand. “You’re an idiot.”

Jinora bit back a laugh. “I’ve said this many times.”

“Jinora, hush,” said Asami, giving her stern look then returned her attention to her drooping girlfriend. “Korra, the other night you spontaneously invented three amazing dishes and cooked them perfectly under an unreasonable time limit. I won’t pretend that I’m not an excellent chef, but I could not have done that.”

Korra looked up, doubt on her face. “What do you mean? You could have probably made something way better.”

“Maybe,” Asami shrugged. “But to do that would take me days. My process works well, but it’s not fast. I’ll spend hours just thinking through how I might want to approach a new recipe, let alone all the time I’ll spend perfecting it. I am not comfortable nor probably capable of creating a completely new menu under a timer like that. However, my way means I have experimented with a huge body of ingredients, so I can advise depending on what’s made available. I can also certainly prepare
whatever you need in a timely fashion. Besides,” she sniffed. “He called Kya and me bimbos, so I think a little payback is in order.”

Jinora gave Korra a friendly shove. “Seriously, boss. You’ve beaten a ton of fancy chefs in Food Fights over the past couple of years. It’s not like you don’t know what you’re doing, and you’re the one who’s always going on that you don’t need to work in a restaurant to make great food.”

“Okay, I promise I’ll think about it,” Korra said, giving up. She caught Asami’s expectant expression and sighed. “All of it.” Then she smirked. “You do remember that this means you’d be cooking with Wu, right?”

“I’m doing what with who?” Wu stood in the doorway of the kitchen, a cup of coffee in his hand and a look of trepidation on his face.

Jinora stood up and clapped Wu on the back. “Nothing to worry about now, but I vote we all reconvene tonight at Swamp Bottom. For further planning purposes, of course.”

“Of course,” drawled Korra.

Asami frowned. “Not sure I’ve heard of it.”

“Kai, Opal, and Bolin have all been there,” Jinora assured her. “I was going to ask them to come anyway, so you can catch a ride with them.” Then she grinned wickedly. “Wu’s been there too, but he probably doesn’t remember much.”

“Oh no, that place,” groaned Wu. “I will be drinking club soda this time, thank you very much.”

Asami’s eyebrow went up, but she refrained from asking for more details. “I should probably get going.”

Korra stood up hastily. “I’ll walk you out.”

They paused in the doorway, both reluctant to separate. Outside the sun was starting to burn through the fog and it looked like it was going to be a beautiful day.

Korra pulled Asami in close and gave her a lingering kiss. “Thanks for being my alarm clock this morning,” she murmured. “I’d like to return the favor some time.”

“I’d like that too,” whispered Asami in reply. “See you tonight.”

Chapter End Notes

Coming up, plots and intrigue, and the return of Madison, that little minx...

:)
Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

Happy New Year everybody, I've missed you all!

This contains the second of three scenes I had in mind when I originally started this story last April, and while I was excited I finally got to write it, boy was it tough to actually do the writing. Many, many revisions. I hope my efforts are satisfactory (I'm looking at you kittymannequin and AnotherShotOfBourbon).

Also, "Ladies and Gentlemen, the return of Madison!"

She's so bad, she's good...

:)

PS - Hey Traeger, I think you mentioned something at some point about food porn? *cough*

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The eight ball sank into the corner pocket with a satisfying thud. Korra stood up and leaned against her pool cue as she grinned in triumph.

“Stop gloating, already,” Jinora groused. “Let’s make it two out of three.”

“Your funeral.”

Perched on nearby stools Wu and Madison sat watching with amusement, Madison nursing a whiskey and Wu steadfastly sticking to his cranberry and soda.

“Have you ever beaten her?” Wu asked Jinora curiously.

“Yeah, Jinora, have you ever beaten me?” Korra mocked, ducking as Jinora swung a pool cue at her head.

“Shut up and rack the balls, Korra!”

Wu giggled. “That’s what she said!”

“Wu, really?”

Madison laughed and clapped Wu on the back, then suddenly straightened up, a look of awe on her face. “Oh, stop the presses, I’ve just seen my future wife. Korra, you can be my best mammal. Hang on a sec while I go propose.” She hopped off her stool and headed to the door where a small crowd had just entered, a familiar raven-haired figure in the their midst. Madison made a beeline for Asami and bowed playfully, gesturing around the bar. Korra’s grip tightened on her pool cue, but Asami merely nodded politely as she took in her surroundings. Her eyes lit up as she saw Korra standing
near the pool table. She smiled at Madison and excused herself before joining her.

“Fancy meeting you here,” breathed Asami as Korra pulled her into a hug.

Korra’s eyes twinkled. “What’s a gal like you doing in a place like this?”

“Mmmm, you tell me.”

Their lips met, pliant and soft with a banked heat. After a long moment of bliss, Korra pulled back with a sigh. “I don’t remember. Maybe we should just ditch.”

“We’ll have none of that,” Jinora announced loudly as she pushed the two women apart. “We have work to do.”

Korra looked around, suddenly noticing the newly full bar. “Hey, is that Rich and Carlos?” She blinked as she recognized a member of Sato Grill’s wait staff. “Did you bring your entire crew?”

Asami grinned and shrugged. “Kya promised the staff I’d buy them a round of drinks if we could get the restaurant closed and cleaned by ten forty-five. I couldn’t very well back out on such a promise, considering they pulled it off, so we’re apparently having an impromptu party.”

Madison sauntered up to them with a smirk. “I guess this is the lady you were mooning over the other night, eh, Korra?”

“Were you really mooning over me, Korra?” Asami asked playfully as Jinora and Wu struggled to control their laughter.

Korra flushed crimson and glared at the bartender. “I do not moon. There was zero mooniness. I might possibly have been wistful.” She turned to Asami. “Let me also add that Madison here is a shameless flirt, so be warned.”

“Ha!” Madison winked at Asami. “She was so moony she was affecting the tides. Lovely to meet you, and if you get tired of Korra let me know. I specialize at being the naughty rebound.”

Jinora smacked Madison in the back of the head. “Behave, you hussy. I have plans for these two and you and your womanizing ways are not a part of it.”

Madison chuckled and held up her hands in surrender. “I can’t win, and anyway I need to go start making drinks for this horde.”

Jinora pointed towards the far end of the bar where Bolin sat chatting with Opal and Kai. “See that guy in the vest and tie? That’s Sato Grill’s bartender. I bet if you ask nicely and don’t hit on his girlfriend he’d be happy to help you out.”

Madison considered him, lips pursed. “Hrm, we’ll see.” She blew a parting kiss at them and walked away.

“For fucks’s sake,” Jinora groaned, sinking onto a nearby stool. “That woman.” She shook herself then leaned forward with a certain gleam in her eye. “Okay, let’s get this show on the road.”

Jinora, it turned out, had been collecting mounds of dirt on Mario Costantino from her vast network of foodie friends.

“This guy is a trip. He closed his restaurant in Napa as we all know, then he disappeared for a while. Eventually he showed up acting as a personal chef in Chicago for that shock jock asshole. Rick the
Dick, or whatever his name is.”

Wu appeared interested at this. “Was that the guy who said the U.S. should annex Mexico as the fifty-first state and send all the brown and black people to live there?”

“The very same.”

Korra snorted. “They were clearly made for each other.”

“Anyway,” Jinora continued with a relish. “So creepy shock jock guy got arrested for peeing on a cop and then his show was shut down because all of his corporate sponsors ran screaming after the whole Mexico fiasco. Costantino then signed on as the tour chef for the Legends of Metal, but was fired after the New York show apparently for getting caught spitting on the food in a drunken rage.”

Korra bit back a smile at the look of horror on Wu and Asami’s faces. “I’m surprised anybody was sober enough to notice. Haven’t any of you ever been to a rock concert?”

Wu pointed at himself in indignation. “Do I look like somebody who would go to a metal show? I attend the symphony, thank you very much.”

“If I may finish?” Jinora huffed. “To close out this sordid tale, there was apparently some legal kerfuffle around getting fired and Costantino managed to get some money out of it. I guess he decided to stay in New York and seems to have gotten in with the the underground food scene there. Unlike us purists here in San Francisco, the scene in New York seems to involve a lot more money, so I guess he’s figured out a way to make a living off of it.”

Raucous shouting erupted near the bar and they craned their necks to see a crowd thronged at the bar, a mix of the Sato Grill staff and Swamp Bottom regulars. Behind it, Madison and Bolin were feverishly mixing drinks and pouring out as fast as they could. A line of cocktail glasses stretched across the width of the bar, and the two bartenders were working their way from the ends of the bar towards the center, filling glass after glass with sparkling concoctions.

“Come on, bartender babe, let’s see what you got!”

“Show her how it’s done, Bo!”

“Sato Grill! Sato Grill! Sato Grill!”

“Come on Maddie, don’t let fancy boy here beat ya!”

“You get him, Swamp Bottom Girl!”

Korra chuckled, resting her chin on Asami’s shoulder as she watched. “Are we watching the birth of Bartender Fight?”

“Oooh, no no no, I have it!” exclaimed Jinora. “We have to call it ‘Bartender Battle’ — keep the alliteration going.”

Asami snorted, tilting her head to feel her cheek against Korra’s. “Just don’t tell Varrick. He doesn’t need anymore ideas.”

The noise level rose as the competitors got closer and closer to the final glasses. With a hurried flourish Madison topped off the last glass and slammed her cocktail shaker onto the bar mere seconds before Bolin. She raised her hands in triumph as Bolin slumped in defeat.
“Pay up, pretty boy!” she crowed, holding out her hand.

Bolin shook her hand good-naturedly, a rueful expression on his face. He then reached out to help Opal onto the bar. She gave him a light kiss to the cheek then proceeded to undo his bow tie before turning to Madison and crooking her finger. Madison leaned over with a lecherous grin and tilted her chin up. Opal tapped her on the nose in admonishment then carefully knotted up the tie around Madison’s neck. The crowd erupted in more cheers and Madison beamed as she accepted the enthusiastic congratulations coming from all sides.

“Too bad for Bolin,” commented Wu. “That was an awfully nice tie.”

Korra groaned. “She’s going to be completely impossible after this.”

“Uh oh, look what the cat dragged in,” said Jinora, looking at the doorway. Next to her Wu knocked over his drink in surprise, ice cubes clattering to the floor. Standing in the doorway was the tall figure of Detective Mako, dressed in a dark gray suit and blue tie, a flash of gold at his waist where his badge was clipped. He scanned the crowd until his gaze fell on where Wu sat frozen in place, eyes wide, staring back at him.

Asami settled herself onto a stool and watched as Korra piled the makings of a late night omelette onto the counter next to her old stove. There was something very comfortable about being in the quirky kitchen; exposed wooden support beams were covered in pictures, postcards, concert tickets, and food truck flyers, all affixed with colorful thumbtacks. In one corner was an artfully done graffiti tag that Asami eventually recognized as spelling out ‘J-No’. She smiled as she also made out a stylized dog paw in the center of the ‘O’. A string of lights were draped along the storage shelf, the twinkling LEDs giving off a warm glow. The only other light source was a single lamp over the stove where Korra was busily prepping ingredients. Asami watched as the muscles in Korra’s back and arms flexed enticingly as she moved, and felt a blush warm her cheeks as she realized she was staring at Korra’s tantalizing backside.

“Hrm. Looks like I’ve got ham, pepper jack cheese, mushrooms, and bell peppers, if that’s all right?”

Asami dragged her attention back to Korra’s face, seeing the beautiful dark-skinned face split by a knowing grin.

“Excuse me, Chef, but my eyes are up here.”

“I’m aware, yes, and that sounds delicious.” Asami took a deep breath and attempted to reign in her hormones. She shrugged off her sweater, revealing the white babydoll t-shirt she usually wore under her chef’s coat. “Can I help?”

“Sure!” Korra pointed her at her collection of knifes and cutting boards. “Take your pick and you can do the mushrooms and peppers while I take care of the ham and cheese.”

They worked in companionable silence for a while, then Korra sighed.

“Do you think they’re going to figure it out?”

Asami handed Korra her cutting board and she promptly scraped its contents into the waiting pan. They were immediately enveloped in fragrant steam and Asami breathed it in appreciatively, automatically reaching for the salt and grinning in apology when she collided with Korra’s hand doing the same.
“Sorry about that.” She retreated to her stool, leaving Korra in peace at the stove. “If you’re referring to Wu and Bolin’s brother, we can only hope something positive will arise, one way or another.”

The women had discreetly left them staring nervously at each other, coming to a silent agreement to defer any competition planning to a later date.

Korra shook her head. “That Wu. He’s something else.”

“He appears to be much happier with you,” Asami tapped her fingers on the butcher block. “It makes me a little concerned about our intern vetting process given how much he struggled under our tutelage, but I can honestly say I’m glad we took him.”

Korra flipped the finished omelette onto a plate before glancing over at her. “Yeah? Why’s that?”

Asami accepted Korra’s proffered fork and took a mouthful of the succulent dish to avoid replying immediately. Korra’s raised eyebrow indicated the diversion had been noted, but she merely waited patiently, taking her own bites of food.

“Without Wu and his propensity for ruining beef stock, I would have probably missed out on the best thing that’s ever happened to me.” Asami finally said, her voice soft and shy. “In a very weird and roundabout way, it’s almost like he helped bring us together.”

Korra’s lip curled. “Maybe. I’d like to think even without you guys taping him to a pole, or me washing your dishes, we still would have figured things out.”

Asami’s jaw dropped. “We would never tape anyone to a pole!”

Korra chortled at Asami’s expression. “I’m staying out of this, but you may want to have a chat with Kai. In any case the story was hilarious and Wu certainly doesn’t hold any grudges over it.” She reached out and linked their fingers together. “I will say you people take your beef stock very seriously.”

Asami’s mouth twitched. “I suppose we do. Oh!” She laid down her fork and hurried over to her duffel bag. “I completely forgot. I have a present for you.” After a few moments of rummaging she returned to her seat in triumph, handing over a leather-wrapped bundle. “Ta-da.”

Korra gasped when she opened it up. It was a beautiful chef’s knife. The blade was a perfectly polished dark steel that still had traces of the forging faintly highlighted. The wooden handle was stained dark blue with brass fittings. She looked up in shock.

“It’s the one you helped make,” Asami explained. “Leonardo knew it was for you and finished it for me. I love what he did with the handle. I thought it turned out really well.”

“It’s amazing.” Korra gripped it, testing the balance, the feel of the polished wood in her hand. She ran her thumb along the blade, then tested the sharpness against her forearm. She chuckled at the newly shaved spot on her wrist. “Sharp.”

“As if I would hand you a dull knife.”

Korra looked around for something to slice and reached for an apple, but caught Asami biting her lip out of the corner of her eye. “The thought of me chopping something up is turning you on, isn’t it?”

Asami flushed scarlet. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Oh, come now, Chef,” Korra purred, closing the distance between them with a slow step. “I caught
you checking me out earlier at the stove. You were having naughty thoughts. Admit it.”

Asami shook her head, but her green eyes darkened as Korra approached.

“Mmmmm. Are you sure about that?” They were close enough that their breaths mingled. Korra’s lips twitched as she saw the pulse beating rapidly in the pale throat. “You like to watch me cook.”

Asami swallowed audibly. “Maybe.”

Korra brushed her lips across Asami’s, not allowing their touch to deepen, smiling as she heard the other woman’s whimper of protest. She pressed their cheeks together. “I have a new recipe I’d like to try,” she whispered, her lips caressing an ear.

Asami shivered and closed her eyes. “I can’t wait.”

Korra gently pushed her against the butcher block island, nudging a stool out of the way with her foot. “I call it the ‘Sato Special.’ It’s sort of a dessert.”

“What’s in it?” Asami gulped, her breath catching as Korra ran her tongue down her neck.

“Mmmm, had to taste check my main ingredient,” Korra murmured. “The rest of it will have to be a surprise. Do you care what happens to this shirt?”

“My shirt? No—” Asami broke off as Korra ran the back of her new knife up Asami’s arm. Goosebumps erupted at the touch of the cool metal. “What are you doing?”

Korra paused, the knife blade pressed against Asami’s bicep. “Preparing my ingredients. Still trust me?”

Their eyes met, the heat between them palpable.

“Yes,” she whispered.

Korra’s knowing grin made her knees weak, and she gripped the counter behind her. The blade slid slowly higher, the tip rising until it caught in the fabric of her shirt. The sharp point pierced the thin cotton and sliced it open. Asami gasped, but shook her head as Korra moved to withdraw the knife. Korra peered carefully at her, gauging her comfort levels. Then, reassured, slid the knife up and over Asami’s shoulder and along the back of her neck. The fabric whispered as the knife parted the threads. As Korra finished cutting the shirt away it slid away, leaving Asami leaning bare chested against the butcher block. Korra put the knife aside before smoothly pressing Asami backwards until she was lying fully on the counter.

Korra pressed a kiss to Asami’s breastbone and smiled when she saw her eyes flutter. “Still okay?”

“Very much so,” Asami breathed. A faint smile played about her lips as she watched Korra grab something from a nearby shelf.

“Next ingredient,” Korra announced, opening the jar of honey she’d retrieved. She tipped it over, letting the golden liquid drizzle slowly over Asami’s chest and stomach.

Asami bit back a giggle, then groaned as Korra dipped her head and licked the honey around her belly button. Korra worked her way upwards, her lips and tongue tracing the honey trail until she hovered over Asami’s breasts. She felt Asami’s fingers thread into her hair, wordlessly urging her closer. Her lips encased a taut nipple and Asami moaned, arching into her touch.
“Korra,” she exhaled, her voice throbbing with desire.

Korra dragged her mouth to the other breast. “Sweet, with a hint of salt.” She bit down lightly and smiled when the fingers in her hair clenched hard against her scalp. “I think it needs a little tartness though.” She reached for another jar and with one finger scooped a dollop of blackberry jam out before smearing it across Asami’s breasts. She followed her finger with her tongue, the tangy berry spread blending delectably with the honey. Asami quivered under her touch.

“Mmmm, that’s a lovely flavor profile,” teased Korra.

Asami raised herself up onto her elbows, her pupils blown and a faint pink tinge to her cheeks and neck. She reached out for Korra’s hand and with a devilish glint swirled her tongue over sticky fingers.

“Oh, fuck,” mumbled Korra, closing her eyes at the sensation.

“You’re right, but I think I might be able to improve on this flavor,” Asami whispered as she tugged Korra up to meet her, groaning as their lips met feverishly. The taste of honey and jam on Asami’s tongue lit Korra’s brain on fire. She tore herself away from the kiss and ripped off her shirt before hooking her fingers under the chef’s slacks. Asami licked swollen lips and nodded jerkily at Korra’s questioning gaze. The pants swiftly joined the shirt discarded on the floor. Korra pressed her lips hard against Asami’s pelvis who hissed at the intense sensation but canted her hips upwards, thighs falling apart, her body language clearly inviting Korra to do as she liked.

“Speaking of tastes,” said Korra, her voice rough and shaking and reverent.

At the first touch of a soft tongue between her folds Asami fell back against the countertop with a cry. She felt Korra slide her arms under her thighs, warm hands caressing her sides before rising to cup her breasts. Her stomach clenched as her clit was engulfed in wet heat, and the sensation of Korra’s thumbs brushing softly against her stiffened nipples made her dizzy with desire. Breathy cries filled the room and pale heels contrasted sharply against the strong dark back they dug against. The pressure built inexorably until Asami went rigid, then she screamed in shuddering release before collapsing back against the counter. She reached out her hand blindly and sighed with relief when Korra grasped it.

“Damn, I think that was the best dessert I’ve ever had,” Korra said, her voice a little breathless. She laboriously dragged herself up to rest against Asami’s heaving chest, relishing the pounding heartbeat under her cheek.

Asami chuckled and ran her hands lovingly though chocolate locks. “Is that going to be a permanent addition to the menu?”

“Only for you.” Korra pressed a kiss between Asami’s breasts then leaned back, scooping her up.

“Korra!” Asami squeaked. “What are you doing?”

“We need a shower because we are totally sticky,” Korra announced as she made her way towards the bathroom. “Then I demand cuddles.”

Asami wrapped her arms around Korra’s neck, nuzzling her cheek. “I suppose I can do that.”

“You’re too kind,” said Korra sarcastically. “Think you’ll want to go to work tomorrow?”

“Hopefully. I am the boss, it’s sets a bad precedent if I don’t show up.”
“Hmph. Guess I’ll have to work harder.”

“Oh my god…”

Chapter End Notes

As always, thanks for all the great comments folks have been leaving. I appreciate it!

:)
Chapter 21

Chapter Notes

Oy, the writer's block. I knew where I needed to go but man getting there was strangely rough for this chapter. I know, I know, #firstworldproblems.

:)

Thanks so much to kittymannequin and josy1986 for their kind encouragement and I hope you all enjoy the latest installment.

By the way, oh my god, if you haven't seen it, checkout willoghby's beautiful commission for Food Fight she did for me. I FUCKING LOVE IT!

http://oldvelvet95.tumblr.com/post/137436358533/katanlene-silktum-willoghby

EDIT: fuck it, I'm-a just post the image here:

See the end of the chapter for more notes

FirstRuleAboutFoodFight @FRAFF 20h
Oho friends, hearing some rumors about @FoodTruckMasterNaga and an upcoming showdown!

BLACKSTONE VARRICK @KingVarrick 15h
Hiroshi Sato sat propped up in his hospital bed, beaming at the small crowd surrounding him.

“You’re awfully chipper for a man who’s about to get a hole drilled in his head,” said Simon, his deep voice playful even as his eyes showed his worry.

“Why would I be concerned?” Hiroshi declared. “You are all here with me, and I have no doubt I will be back before you know it.” He reached out and touched Asami’s shoulder comfortingly. “I will be fine. You will see.”

Asami managed to smile and nod, but her eyes glimmered brightly.

Kya leaned forward and pressed a kiss against his forehead. “You old fool,” she said gruffly. “Put me into an early grave one of these days.”

Simon snorted. “That makes two of us.”

Hiroshi chuckled before returning his gaze to his daughter. “I understand you brought somebody for me to meet today, Asami?”

The chef blushed and glared at an unrepentant Kya. “She didn’t want to intrude, she just didn’t want me to come by myself.”

Her father’s grin grew wider. “Please, bring her in.”

Korra approached Hiroshi’s bed with trepidation, blushing under the scrutiny of three pairs of twinkling eyes. She gripped Asami’s hand tightly before coming to stand awkwardly near the IV pole.

“Um, really nice to, um, meet you, sir. I’m Korra.” Korra stammered. Asami ducked her head and bit her lip to hide her grin while Korra took a deep breath and pushed on. “I’m glad to hear you’re getting better?”

Hiroshi waved his hand dismissively. “In theory, if they’d ever come take me away to be fixed!” He leaned back with a sigh. “I certainly look forward to getting out of this hospital.”

“And such a party we’ll throw when you do,” said Kya firmly, patting him on the shoulder.

The door opened and a crew of nurses and orderlies walked in, pushing carts and carrying supplies.

“Good morning, Mister Sato,” said the lead nurse cheerfully. “Time to start getting prepped for
surgery. I’m afraid it’s a little too big of a crowd for what we need to do.” She peered at them all over the top of her glasses, clearly waiting.

Hiroshi sighed. “It begins. Asami, Kya — Simon has insisted on staying for the duration, so he can call you when I’m done. There’s no reason for you to stay.”

“But—” Asami started to protest.

“Please, little one,” he said earnestly. “I will feel better knowing you’re somewhere making something beautiful and delicious that you can bring to me afterwards.”

“No solid foods for at least twenty-hour hours after your surgery, I’m afraid,” the nurse declared as she attached a new bag of fluids to Hiroshi’s IV line.

He glared at her, then turned to Korra. “You I look forward to grilling more properly later. Don’t think you’ve gotten off so easily.”

“Yes, sir! I mean, no sir!”

Simon kissed Kya on the cheek, then gripped Asami firmly on the arm. “I’ll call you as soon as I hear anything, I promise.”

Asami leaned over and pressed her cheek against her father’s. “I’ll see you soon.” Then she wrapped her arms around him as her tears started to fall in earnest. “I just got you back, I’m so scared I’ll lose you again,” she whispered.

Hiroshi stroked her hair before pushing her back far enough to see her face. “I promise you won’t. Not when I have so much to live for.” He raised his eyes to find Korra’s. She met his gaze and nodded with a slight smile before reaching out and running her hand comfortingly along Asami’s shoulders. The chef leaned back, letting Korra wrap her in a warm hug. Hiroshi sat back, satisfied.

“Now,” he winked at the nurses. “Let’s have a surgery!”

Kya felt the nudge against her shoulder but finished plating her delicate mille-feuille in a pool of lemon custard before standing up and raising one eyebrow at Opal.

“Can I help you, Chef?”

“She’s freaking me out,” complained Opal. “I mean, it’s not even my father having brain surgery and I’m a mess. How is she staying so focused?”

They looked over at the stoves where Asami had pushed Kai out of the way, taking over one of the line cook stations.

“She’s distracting herself,” Kya responded. “When was the last time you saw her at the stoves actually cooking and not supervising?”

Opal shrugged. “Okay, fair, but if it were me I probably would have at least dropped two pans by now.”

Kay smiled. “Everyone handles stress differently.” She stepped back as Michael collected her plated pastry and headed for the dining room, a small tray of fresh macarons balanced easily in his other hand. “Is Korra back yet?”
“She said she’d be back by six at the latest. She would have just stayed but Asami convinced her not to lose a day’s income just waiting around.” Opal snagged a macaron from a nearby tray. “God, Michael is getting good at these.”

Kya beamed proudly. “Just don’t let him catch you eating them. He spent hours making all of those.”

“That one was cracked, he wouldn’t have plated it anyway.”

Kya swatted her away. “Away with you, and don’t expect me to—“ she stopped as she heard a loud ringing from her pocket and scrambled for her phone. She flinched as she saw the caller ID. “Simon? Is there news?”

Opal hurried over to the Asami and grabbed the spoon from the chef’s hand. “Kya just got the call. Go.”

Asami’s mouth was dry as she neared the pastry chef, her steps slowing as she saw the tension in Kya’s shoulders. When she saw the tears streaming down Kya’s face she stopped dead, her hand flying to her mouth. The older woman reached out immediately and grabbed her hand, smiling reassuringly.

“He’s finally done. He woke up briefly, asked for a cup of coffee, then went back to sleep.” The older woman tried to sound exasperated but there was a palpable tone of relief in her voice instead. “The old fool.”

“He’s going to be okay,” Asami whispered. She felt the weight she’d been carrying all day drain away, leaving her feeling a little light-headed.

Kya pulled her into a hug, holding her tightly. “It sounds like it. Simon mentioned the doctors want to write his case up in a medical journal and everything.”

“I don’t know if he’ll love the idea or be horrified.” Asami chuckled as she wiped her face with a shaking hand. “I should go to the hospital.”

Kya shook her head. “He’s recovering in the ICU for the next couple of days, so you can’t seem him until tomorrow during visitor hours anyway. I told Simon to come to the restaurant and he’s on his way now.”

Asami took a deep breath and smoothed the front of her chef’s coat as she looked out over the bustling kitchen. Kai was back at his normal spot at the stoves and Opal was reviewing incoming orders. The kitchen buzzed with its usual energy and was comforting in its familiarity, though she stood torn between waiting for Simon to grill him for details and trying to sneak into the hospital to visit her father. She looked over at her office, normally her most sacred place of refuge, and realized it no longer meant that to her; Opal had been using it more than her since she had finally delegated inventory management to the eager sous chef. Her comfort was now wrapped up in an entirely different experience, and when she saw noticed Bolin waving at her from the kitchen door and shy blue eyes peering at her from behind him, she knew exactly where she wanted to be.

“Good news?” Korra breathed into her ear as she fell laughing into strong arms. She could only nod against Korra’s chest, completely content.

“So Simon, what do you do?” Korra’s fork hesitated between seared foie gras, panko-crusted risotto balls, and crab-filled puff pastry. They sat in Korra’s usual spot at the end of the bar, salivating at the small platters Asami kept sending out to them. The foie gras won out and Korra closed her eyes at
the taste, moaning at the rich flavor melting across her tongue. “Oh my god, that’s really good.”

Simon chuckled at her reaction and speared a risotto ball. “Semi-retired now, but I work in the entertainment industry. Producing, mostly.”

Korra blinked. “You’re kidding.”

“Oh my, these little dumplings are also fabulous.” Simon chewed blissfully for a moment. “I was probably one of the few people in our college class to major in theater arts and successfully do something with my degree. Hiroshi was much more practical — business major.”

Asami rejoined them, laying down a plate of prosciutto-wrapped scallops delicately seared and resting on a bed of grilled asparagus.

“So how does being a semi-retired producer work?” Korra asked around a mouthful of puff pastry.

Asami raised one eyebrow. “A producer? Movies, television, or theater?”

“Did my fair share of television and theater, never movies,” said Simon, eying the selection of wine tasters Bolin was lining up behind their plates. “Theater is more interesting of course, but pays far less and is much more work. Movies is where the big money can be made, but I never had the stomach for all the aggravation and drama. Oh my, this cabernet is delicious.”

Bolin grinned. “My personal favorite. Local Napa winery, very limited production every year.”

Asami snorted. “I tried to get them to sell me cases for two years at Bolin’s insistence, but they wouldn’t even talk to us until after I got my Michelin star.”

“Now, Chef,” chided Bolin. “They have more requests than cases to sell. If I recall correctly, they had to cancel their agreement with Le Parisien in order to sell to you.” He topped off Simon’s glass, who nodded in thanks.

“Yes, and I got to be the one who got yelled at for that,” Asami huffed. “I should have made you take that call from Chef Gasteau.”

Bolin smirked and excused himself to take care of patrons further down the bar.

“Le Parisien was a lovely restaurant back in the day,” Simon commented. “They’ve gone downhill over the years.” He sampled a scallop and rolled his eyes in appreciation. “Oh my dear, these are heavenly. Anyway, most of the television work I do is documentaries and the occasional mini-series. Nothing too extravagant, but steady work, and usually less mind-numbing than working in sitcoms or police procedurals and what not. As for being semi-retired, it just means I’m that much pickier about what I take on.”

Asami cocked her head and looked at Simon thoughtfully. “We’ve been asked to take part in a televised cooking competition. I don’t suppose we could ask you some questions about what we might expect?”

Simon beamed. “I’d be delighted, of course!” He deftly speared another scallop. “A cooking competition, very interesting. Who’s producing it?”

Korra sighed. “A jackass named Blackstone Varrick and whoever he’s dug up to help him. He thinks it’s going to be the next big thing.”

“Blackstone Varrick?” Simon sputtered. “I am very familiar with this man. He bought out a theater I
was intending to use for a show in order to stage some horrid avant-guard thing he commissioned some years ago. Thank goodness I was able to find another venue, but I was not pleased. How on earth did you manage to end up working with him?"

“Very long story. We’re not really interested in the television part, or working with him frankly, but the competition allows us to go head to head with some people we’d love to defeat.”

“Oh really,” Simon peered at them before glancing at the scallops again. “Who might this be?”

Korra pulled the plate of scallops towards her. “Hey, you’re supposed to be sharing these. Michael Costantino and possibly Hou-Ting Wong.”

Simon smiled at Korra and took a bite of the foie gras instead. “Michael Costantino I’ve heard of. Who is this other person you mentioned?”

“Hou-Ting Wong runs a gnarly restaurant empire based out of Hong Kong,” Korra explained. “She’s a moderately despicable individual. To be honest she’s probably only going to be peripherally involved.”

Simon sat back, swirling his wine glass thoughtfully. “I find myself currently between projects and if you wouldn’t object, I’d love to work on this with you. At the very least I can provide you with some experienced representation.”

“Varrick will hate that,” said Asami, relishing the thought.

Korra snickered in agreement. “I’d certainly be happy for the help, and anything that keeps Varrick on his toes is good in my book. I don’t trust the guy at all.”

“Nor should you, I expect.”

“Are you sure you don’t mind, Simon?” Asami asked, concerned. “This could get a little crazy, knowing Varrick.”

Simon reached out and covered Asami’s hand with his own. “It would truly be my privilege to do so,” he assured her, his deep voice warm with enthusiasm. “Besides, how could I pass up such an opportunity to get to know the both of you a little better?”

Asami felt the prickle of tears against her eyes as she squeezed his hand in return. “I think that would be wonderful.”

Varrick blustered angrily when Simon was brought in and tried to threaten them with choosing a different team, however Korra assured him they were more than fine not participating and he caved quickly. He wasn’t going to get a better matchup than Korra vs. Costantino and he knew it. For their part Asami and Korra were astonished when Simon transformed from the sweet, genial man they had initially met into a hard-eyed negotiator with nerves of steel who left Varrick and his representatives ultimately agreeing to include him on the production staff.

“Mr. Varrick may be well-versed in the normal treacheries of business,” Simon explained one night as he happily sipped another glass of Bolin’s favorite cabernet. “But I assure you that there is no arena more vicious than the entertainment industry, even if we’re only talking about documentaries. Sadly, I suspect I’ll ultimately be helping with his education and he’ll probably become a heavyweight movie producer after all of this is over, just to spite me.”
Monday nights became their time to practice cooking as a group, using Sato Grill as their practice space. Simon usually stopped by to get tastings and let them know how the planning with Varrick was going. It took a couple of tries before Wu was finally able to relax while cooking with Asami, but finally managed it after Korra hung several rolls of duct tape prominently throughout the kitchen as motivation. Simon had been mystified but Wu’s retelling of the story had them all howling with laughter and cemented their sense of being a team.

It took a little longer for Korra to relax about giving Asami instructions, and even longer for Asami and Korra to control their libidos when cooking together. Wu took to keeping a pocketful of sliced carrots and was extremely adept at head shots any time he saw Korra make a grab for Asami’s ass.

“I’m pretty sure feeling your girlfriend up on national TV is frowned on,” he declared indignantly. “And wash your hands!”

Asami was too discrete to ever get caught but after Korra almost dumped a pan of smoking oil on herself after a mis-timed pinch, teasing was over.

Slowly, they worked out a system. Wu became the carb specialist, taking on any parts of the menu that involved preparing things like rice or starchy vegetables. He spent nearly all of his free evenings perfecting the creation of different types of fresh pasta dough, going so far as to practice reconfiguring pasta makers and stand mixers with the precision and speed of an infantryman breaking down his rifle.

Asami and Korra split duties depending on their main ingredient. Anything involving beef or pork had Korra handling the meat and Asami doing sauces and sides. For fish and poultry they switched. Asami’s near encyclopedic knowledge of ingredients and their cooking requirements meshed perfectly with Korra’s tasting palate and wild menu inspirations.

“I can’t do it anymore,” Simon groaned, dropping his fork in surrender. “Not that I don’t love tasting all this fabulous food, but I’ve gained ten pounds sampling for the past month and I had to buy an extra large bottle of antacids.”

Hiroshi patted him on the shoulder. “It doesn’t show,” he said loyally. It was only his second time joining Simon during the Monday night practice sessions and the first time without the wheelchair. The surgery had done its job, but the recovery was a slow process as his brain healed from all the damage. Asami and Simon had grown very close as they partnered to make sure Hiroshi had in house nursing care, made all of his appointments, and initially took turns spending the night at Hiroshi’s penthouse until Hiroshi shyly asked Simon to just move in already.

“Careful,” Wu warned Simon. “Korra will make you join her hideous gym to work it off.”

Korra threw a towel at him. “I notice you seem to be happy enough to go when Mako is your workout partner. He ask you out yet?”

Wu blushed and stuck out his tongue. “We’re just friends.”

“Uh huh. You guys look real friendly when you’re together.”

Simon cleared his throat and give Korra a meaningful look. She subsided with a smirk. “We need to get you all real practice judges. The competition is coming up quickly, and I think you need more knowledgeable opinions than mine to evaluate your progress.”

Korra caught Asami’s eye and nodded slowly. “Yeah, I’ve kinda been thinking that too. Next week?”
“I don’t see why not,” agreed Asami. “Who were you thinking?”

“Well, your senior crew obviously, because they’re awesome and they’d probably be offended if we didn’t ask.”


“Your crazy Italian?” Korra laughed. “Yeah, he’d be great. I think Liam too. He may run a diner, but he knows flavor. Also, if I don’t let Jinora come she will probably set my truck on fire.”

Wu dropped his head onto the counter with a loud moan. “I’m going to die if you make me cook in front of all those people.”

Asami burst out laughing. “Wu, in less than a month you’re going to be cooking on television in front of millions of people if Varrick has anything to say about it.”

Korra leaned over and clapped him on the back. “Tell you what, you make it through next week without throwing up, setting anything on fire, or dropping any plates on the way to the judges and I’ll officially revoke your rookie status on the truck and Jinora will not be allowed to tease you for the rest of the month.”

Wu tilted his head to peer at Korra with one eye. “You promise?”

“I swear on my dog’s unborn puppies.”

Wu jumped up and started cleaning up the cooking stations with newfound energy. “Mr. Sato, Mr. Rafferty, you are my witnesses! I will totally own next week!”

“Again with the ‘mister’,” said Simon with a withering look at the young chef. “You’re making us feel old, you scoundrel.”

“Aged like fine wine, my dear,” corrected Hiroshi.

Asami beamed at the two men fondly. “You’re both perfect to me. Even if Wu thinks you’re decrepit.”

“You’re too kind,” replied Simon sourly. He placed a steadying hand under Hiroshi’s elbow as he rose to his feet, leaning heavily on his cane. Once he had the smaller man tucked securely against him, he turned back to Asami. “Thank you for a lovely evening as always, but now it’s past bedtime for us decrepit old timers.”

Korra and Asami walked them out, exchanging hugs before helping Hiroshi into Simon’s car.

“It’s good to see him moving around,” Korra commented. “Much better than a couple of weeks ago.”

“Yes, the physical therapy has been great.” Asami felt her phone buzz in her pocket and pulled it out. “Hi Jinora, what’s up?”

“Asami!” cried Jinora, her voice breathless. “I’ve been trying to call Korra. You guys need to get over here, ASAP!”

Asami pulled Korra back into the restaurant and hurried them towards the kitchen. “What’s going on?”
She heard Jinora gulp. “It’s Naga…”

Chapter End Notes

Ironically, I actually enjoy a lot of police procedurals (the lighter ones like NCIS and Rizzoli and Isles, less inclined towards the scary shit like Criminal Minds even if JJ and Prentiss are _hawt_). Anyeay, this clearly goes to show I don’t have nearly the refined taste that Simon does.

Hiroshi finally got to meet Korra in all of her adorkable glory and Asami and Simon are bonding. I’m finally starting to feel less guilty after what I put poor Asami through about 10 chapters or so ago…

:)
Hey everybody. I've had a hellacious couple of weeks and as a result to cheer myself up I wrote this chapter as an unrepentant FLUFF FEST. THE FLUFFIEST.

You are warned.

They Call Me J-No @NagaMinionTwo 10h
Countdown has commenced
#Puppies!

This Is Alice @HotMamaLoveTrucker 8h
@FoodTruckMasterNaga @NagaMinionTwo You fools let Naga get knocked up? I have to sit your white and brown asses down and explain birth control?

Skoochy Skooch @Skoochy 7h
@NagaMinionTwo Boil that water and hang in there @FoodTruckMasterNaga!

They Call Me J-No @NagaMinionTwo 5h
@HotMamaLoveTrucker It’s not our fault. Also she apparently was sweet talked by a big black lab

This Is Alice @HotMamaLoveTrucker 4h
@NagaMinionTwo Once you go black, baby…

Korra burst through her front door in a panic.

“How is she doing?” Korra whispered.

Jinora shrugged. “She started using me as a pillow about ten minutes ago.”

“The vet was sure she was going into labor?” asked Korra.

“Pretty sure. She said she’d call later to see how things were going. Where’s Asami?”

Korra pulled a cushion of the couch so she’d have something to sit on. “She dropped me off then went down to her boat to take care of some stuff. She’s gonna come over after though.”
The two women sat quietly for a while, Naga’s labored breathing the only sound.

“Whoa” Korra looked up at Jinora with a huge grin, her hand resting gently on Naga’s belly. “I can feel something moving around in there.”

“Really? That’s totally cool!” Jinora started to reach out but froze when Naga made a deep rumbling noise and rolled off Jinora’s lap, sitting more upright.

“Oh my god, there’s something happening back here,” said Korra, peering at her dog’s backside. A small bundle slipped quietly onto the blanket. Naga immediately licked it clean, nudging the puppy closer to her belly as she did so. Korra got a quick glimpse to confirm the sex.

“It’s a boy!”

He was a little bigger than Korra’s fist, black with a white blaze on his chest and four white feet. He wriggled his nose as he clumsily sought out a teat.

“That is the cutest little guy I have ever seen!” Jinora squeaked. Her hands were clasped in front her mouth, eyes wide as she watched him begin to nurse. “There should be three, right?”

“That’s what they told me.” Korra was barely breathing as she watched Naga continue to lick her pup.

Jinora craned her neck to peer at Naga’s backside. “Anybody else coming?”

“Not yet.”

Korra looked up at the sound of the front door opening. “Asami?”

The chef poked her head around the corner of the food truck, a wide smile on her face as she took in the sight of the two women hovering anxiously over the laboring malemute.

“Come see the first puppy!” Jinora whispered excitedly.

Asami sank down next to Korra on the cushion. “Oh my goodness, he’s adorable,” she murmured, wrapping an arm around Korra’s waist as she leaned against her.

Naga blew out her breath as she shifted, grunting as another pup slipped out. This one was a speckled gray with with black paws.

“Ooh, a girl! Good job, Naga,” crooned Korra ecstatically, watching the new pup get a thorough cleaning from her mother. Next to her Asami squeaked, and Korra bumped her affectionately.

“I can’t believe we get to see them actually be born,” Asami breathed, her face alight with glee. “This is amazing!”

Jinora leaned forward. “One more, girl. You can do it,” she encouraged. Naga’s body was tense, and she let out a low rumble. She pushed herself up a little more, her chest heaving. Next to her the puppies mewled as they lost their holds on her teats, casting about blindly trying to recover them.

“Aww,” cooed Jinora, wriggling onto her stomach to watch them.

“Korra,” said Asami, a note of urgency in her voice. She was staring at the wet lump only partially emerged as Naga strained. “I think this one’s stuck.”

Korra was up and behind Naga instantly. “I think he’s trying to come out backwards.”
Jinora shot up, a look of panic on her face. “What do we do?”

“Pull him out,” Asami suggested. “I remember my mom telling me how she did that for one of her mother’s dogs. They bred Cocker Spaniels or something.”

“Um,” Korra looked around, then jumped to her feet and ran for the kitchen. She returned a moment later pulling on latex gloves. “Okay, this is probably better then the unknown sanitary state of my hands.” She looked at the puppy, still only halfway out, then over at Asami with a worried expression. “Are you sure about this?”

Naga gave a deep shuddering moan, and the puppy’s hind legs kicked weekly.

“Pretty sure he needs to be out now!” Asami said sharply.

Korra gulped, grabbed the puppy carefully around his belly, and pulled. After a brief struggle he came out with a small pop. Naga immediately plopped back down, cleaning him roughly. His coat was black like his brother’s, but his paws and muzzle were his sister’s speckled gray rather than white. The women held their breath, then sighed in collective relief as she dragged him over to his siblings and all three managed to each latch onto a swollen teat.

Korra looked down at her bloody gloves and carefully pulled them off, discarding them to one side. She gazed fondly at the new family as she stroked Naga’s back. “You are the most amazing dog ever, Mama Naga.”

“Yeah, she is,” agreed Jinora. She stood up and stretched. “I didn’t think I’d be a midwife when I got up this morning. I think these guys needs some quiet and I need a drink.”

Korra pulled Asami up and the chef retrieved her discarded duffle bag. “It’s a good thing I brought a little something to celebrate with then,” she smirked as they entered the kitchen.

Korra and Jinora stared at the gold-labeled champagne bottle in shock.

“Oh my god, is that Cristal?” Jinora squealed.

“Nothing but the best for Naga, of course.”

Jinora deftly extracted it from Asami’s grip and hurriedly started ripping the foil away from the cork while Korra rummaged through one of her cupboards in search of champagne flutes.

“Damn, Korra,” she announced. “You need to marry this woman if she’s gonna be bringing Cristal around.”

Korra banged her head against the cupboard door as she whirled around in shock. Asami’s eyes were wide, but there was an amused curl to her lip as their gazes locked.

“I’ll keep that under advisement,” Korra finally croaked, holding out the flutes. “And you need to start filling these now.”

The bottle was eventually finished, and Kai came by to pick up Jinora. She was clearly torn at the thought of leaving the puppies, and kept dragging Kai back to look at them.

“Jay, I promise they’ll be here tomorrow, okay?” Korra said, amused at her assistant’s paranoia.

Kai put an arm around her shoulders and coaxed her outside. “Come on, babe. I’ll bring you back first thing okay?”
She finally acquiesced with extreme reluctance after she watched Korra surround the slumbering dog pile with all the cushions off the couch in the off chance one of the puppies went for a roll. Once she was safely gone Korra staggered up to the sleeping loft with Asami in tow and they collapsed onto the bed.

“What are you going to name them?” Asami asked sleepily. She felt a soft kiss against her forehead as she snuggled onto Korra’s chest.

“Dunno. I’m still in shock that they’re even here.” Korra yawned and pulled the blankets around them. “Also, I don’t think I can really keep four dogs, so I’ll probably need to find homes for them eventually.”

Asami slid her hand under Korra’s tank top and caressed warm skin. She smiled as she heard the quick intake of breath.

“As tempting as that is,” Korra grumbled, placing her hand over Asami’s. “We’re both exhausted and you have to work tomorrow.”

Asami pouted briefly even as her eyes fluttered shut. “Mmmm, I know. You’re just warm. And sexy.” She yawned. “And way too comfy.” Her voice trailed off and the deep, slow breaths that followed indicated she had fallen asleep.

Korra buried her face in Asami’s sweet-smelling hair and relished the feeling of the raven-haired chef relaxed in her arms. Below them she heard the soft snores of Naga and the occasional whimper of her pups and grinned in the darkness. She wasn’t sure what she had done to deserve such happiness, but as she herself slid into unconsciousness she cast out a prayer of gratitude to whoever was listening, utterly content.

Asami opened her eyes, blinking in the morning light. She turned to find herself alone in the bed and sat up, looking around. There was a low chuckle down below and she leaned over the railing to see Korra sprawled next to Naga, stroking the little pups cuddled against her with a gentle finger. The gray pup was attempting to suckle her knuckle, to Korra’s amusement.

“That’s not what you want, little one,” Korra murmured, guiding the tiny muzzle to Naga’s nearby teat. “There you go.”

Asami felt as if her heart would burst at the adorable scene. “Good morning.”

Korra looked up at her with a grin. “Good morning, beautiful girl!”

“I think this is the first time you’ve ever woken up before me,” Asami teased. “We should make a note of the date and time.”

“Shush you,” Korra gingerly extracted herself from the nest then sprinted up the stairs to the loft. Asami shrieked as Korra tackled her back against the pillows and kissed her soundly.

“For your information, Naga had to go to the bathroom,” Korra mumbled against Asami’s lips.

“I see.” Asami ran her hands up Korra’s sides before sliding her fingers into Korra’s messy hair and deepening the kiss. Tongues met and their hips started a slow roll against each other. Korra trailed kisses down a porcelain jaw as Asami’s fingers found their way back under Korra’s tank top.
The front door banged open and they flinched.

“Rise and shine!” Jinora called. “We brought breakfast, so get your ass out of bed!”

Korra groaned and dropped her forehead against Asami’s shoulder. “Can I kill her? I swear it’s like she has radar.”

Asami snickered and pressed a kiss against Korra’s cheek. “I’m afraid not, honey. Besides, as much as I would have really liked to continue, I do need to get up. I want to hit the farmer’s market this morning before I go to the restaurant.”

“Fine.” Korra pouted. “See if I care that you’d rather haggle over organic produce with ugly old farmers than make out with your girlfr—MMMMM.”

Asami’s searing kiss cut her off, leaving her light-headed with a goofy smile plastered on her face.

“Koooooraaaannnnaaaa,” Jinora threatened from the foot of the stairs. “Don’t make me come up there!”

“Alright, alright, I’m coming!” Korra growled and leveled a glare at a very smug Asami as she pulled on her clothes. She pointed an accusatory finger at the smirking chef. “Not a word from you.”

Asami flipped her hair over her shoulder as she turned away, giving Korra a saucy wink before descending. Korra threw one arm over her face and sighed heavily.

Oh my god that wench is going to be the death of me…

After breakfast, Asami dragged a disgruntled Kai off to the farmer’s market. Jinora gave him only a perfunctory kiss goodbye before climbing in with the puppies, a look of ecstasy on her face. Wu arrived soon after with a small pot of flower-shaped dog treats and baby blue balloons covered with pink paw prints.

“I love this city,” he said at Korra’s raised eyebrow. “You can buy anything for any occasion.”

Korra: The issue of what to do with the puppies has apparently been solved for me

Asami: ?

Korra: Pups had many visitors today

Korra: Jinora wants the girl Madison wants the black and white boy Bolin wants the black and gray boy

Asami: That makes it easy though I suspect Opal has to ratify

Korra: I figured

Korra: Anyway vet says they won’t be weaned for a while so I have time to think about this

Asami: Give them a kiss for me

Korra: I see how it is

Korra: You just love me for my dogs :P
Asami: I love you for a whole slew of reasons Korra

Korra: …

Asami: Shit I didn’t mean to tell you the first time in text, I’m sorry

Korra: Don’t you dare apologize

Korra: I love you too so fucking much

Korra: Come over tonight and I’ll show you

Asami paused before the door to Korra’s warehouse. She clutched a bouquet of flowers in one hand and in the other she thumped herself in the head as she muttered to herself. “You told her you love her in a text, you idiot!” She looked down at the flowers and felt ridiculous.

“You know, you have a key now,” Korra commented from behind her. “You don’t have to wait out here.”

Asami whirled around to see Korra grinning at her. Next to her Naga strained against her leash, tail wagging furiously. Asami immediately knelt and hugged the big dog. “Hi, Mama. How are you feeling today?”

Korra snorted. “She’s gotten even bossier. I swear she was giving the pups instructions to stay put before I took her out, and she bit my ass when she thought I wasn’t moving fast enough to get her leash.” She unlocked the door and ushered them all inside.

Naga gave both women one more rub against their legs then trotted back to the nest of puppies. She settled herself down next to them and sighed as the puppies wriggled back over to her, latching onto to engorged teats.

“So, are those for me for for Naga?” Korra teased, bumping their shoulders together.

Asami looked at the flowers still clutched in her hand. “Um, they’re for you. I—“ she stuttered to a stop and stared at the ground, her face hot. “Korra…” She forced herself to look up and meet Korra’s gaze. Cerulean blue eyes that never failed to make her breathless gazed back at her, filled with warmth and affection. She swallowed hard and licked her lips. “You’ve been my first for so many things, and you’ve always been so patient with me, through everything. I wasn’t even sure I’d ever know what it meant to be in love.” She felt tears prickling her eyes, and her voice trembled. “I’m pretty sure I know now.”

Korra cupped her face tenderly with both hands, bringing their foreheads together.

“So you’re my world, Asami Sato,” she whispered.

Somehow, they made it upstairs. Asami lay back against the cool sheets as Korra peeled her clothes off of her, laying kisses against every inch of exposed skin.

“Fuck, how can you be so beautiful,” sighed Korra against Asami’s abdomen. She started to sink lower, but paused when she felt Asami’s hand touch her face.

“I want to see you,” Asami whispered, pulling Korra up. They groaned as their bare torsos pressed together. Korra slid her hand down to cup Asami’s heat, smirking as hips jerked against her touch.
Her fingers trailed lightly through damp curls, dipping only slightly into slick warmth.

“You’re… teasing… me,” Asami moaned.

“Patience is a virtue.” Korra kissed her way up Asami’s neck. “I love you,” she hummed against her ear. “I love you so much.” She captured Asami’s lips in a fierce kiss, her tongue thrusting between parted lips as she slammed her hand down, fingers buried deep and palm pressed hard against Asami’s clit.

“Oh fuck,” the chef cried, tearing herself away from the kiss and desperately rocking her hips into Korra’s thrusts. She shoved her own hand between them, searching, then slid her fingers home into a velvet flood with a sigh of relief. Korra cried out, burying her face against Asami’s sweaty neck. They strained against each other, free hands clutching each other tightly.

“God, Korra,” Asami gasped as their movements became more frantic. The pressure built until she arched her back in a spasm of release. “I love you, I love you, I love you,” she chanted in ecstasy. Above her Korra’s body went rigid and Asami relished the spasms she felt clenching at her fingers. Korra collapsed on top of her and they lay silently together, luxuriating in the warm afterglow.

Finally Korra rolled off Asami onto her back. Asami rolled with her, burying her face in Korra’s neck as was enveloped in a tight embrace.

“I love it when you hold me like this,” Asami murmured against warm skin.

“I love holding you. I love everything about you.”

Asami gripped Korra tighter. “You’ll never let me go, right?”

Korra kissed her head, breathing in the sweet scent of her. “No fucking way I’m ever letting you go.”

Chapter End Notes

And for those who were begging for puppies, you’re welcome...

:)
Chapter 23

Chapter Notes

So sorry for the long delay, thank you all for being patient. Between prepping for my conference and having to write one shots for the writing competition, I've had to fight to get sufficient head down time for our chefs.

:)  

Big huge thanks to fabioanto79 for helping me with Leonardo's Italian (translations below), and thanks everyone for the lovely reviews.

Prepare to get hungry!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

They Call Me J-No @NagaMinionTwo 6h  
THESE PUPPIES ARE SO FREAKING ADORBS  
#Puppies!

Skoochy Skooch @Skoochy 7h  
puppypuppypuppypuppypuppypuppypuppypuppypuppypuppy  
#Puppies!

They Call Me J-No @NagaMinionTwo 6h  
@Skoochy catch a breath there dude

Opal and Jinora welcomed everyone through the door to Sato Grill with broad smiles, collecting jackets and purses from the visitors.

“Welcome to the madhouse!” said Bolin cheerfully as he handed out flutes of champagne.

“Buonasera a tutti!” called Leonardo as kissed Kya on both cheeks before turning to greet a striking red-headed woman standing nearby. He took her her hand and pressed his lips against it. “Sei una visione di splendore, mia cara. E’ passato troppo tempo da quando ho potuto ammirare la tua bellezza.”

“You’ll want to be keeping your lips to yourself if you want to keep them attached to your face,” growled Liam, coming up to hover protectively near his wife who was blushing furiously.

Moira O’Shaughnesssey laughed indulgently and patted Liam on the arm. “It’s lovely to see you, Leonardo. Ignore the old grouch.”

Leonardo beamed and winked. “As you say. I need to come enjoy breakfast at your excellent cafe soon.”

“If you’re lucky you’ll coffee in your cup instead of your lap,” sniffed Liam.
“Excuse us,” came a raspy voice behind them.

“Mom, Aunt Lin!” exclaimed Opal. She hurried forward and threw her arms around the two steel-haired women. “So glad you could make it.”

Lin cast an appraising eye around the restaurant. “Like we would miss out on an opportunity to critique Sato’s food, hey Su?”

Her sister shook her head and gave her sister a light smack on the shoulder. “Don’t listen to her. Oh look, there’s Kya.”

Lin coughed and quickly downed her champagne as the pastry chef approached. “Hello Kya, it’s been a while.”

Kya smiled warmly. “Hello, Lin, Suyin. It’s nice to see you.”

“Lin’s been complaining that we haven’t had you make an appearance at the school lately,” Su confided as Lin sputtered.

Opal smirked at the faint pink that bloomed on her aunt’s cheeks, sharing a knowing look with her mother.

“Has she now?” Kya murmured, looking surprised and pleased. “I guess I’ll need to come visit soon.”

“Ladies, what a nice surprise,” said Asami from behind them, one elegant eyebrow raised.

Opal had the grace to blush but her grin was unrepentant. “Sorry I forgot to tell you. Bolin totally gushed about tonight’s session at Mom’s Sunday brunch yesterday and they demanded to come. I thought you wouldn’t mind.”

Asami smiled, her eyes twinkling. “I’m more than happy to have the famous Beifong chef instructors in attendance, but Wu might be a little less enthusiastic.”

“He needs the practice,” said Opal, waving her hand dismissively. “If he can manage tonight, being on television is going to be a walk in the park.”

The group made their way back to the kitchen where Korra and Kai were arranging stools around the plating counter. From there the ‘judges’ would be able to observe the cooking as would happen during the actual competition. Korra and Kai laughed uproariously at something Wu was saying, his hands waving dramatically in the air as he spoke.

“Our guests have arrived,” Asami called.

Wu turned to greet the newcomers and paled at the sight of his former instructors. Korra noticed immediately and looked over at Asami with a questioning look on her face, but the chef merely smiled and shrugged, her relaxed stance reassuring her over-protective girlfriend that all was well.

“Ch-Chefs,” he stuttered. He stood straighter and tugged nervously at his apron.

“I’m surprised Sato lets you in her kitchen, Wu,” declared Lin brusquely, her face stern. “Didn’t you burn it down or something?”

Suyin hung her purse on the back of a nearby stool. “I’m sure it was only a little fire, Lin,” she murmured with a perfectly straight face. “No one died, did they?”
Kai valiantly fought back a laugh as Wu’s face turned purple, but lost the battle when Opal could no longer constrain her giggles.

“Oh my god, I did not burn anything down!” Wu said indignantly, pointing an accusing finger at the chortling Kai. “You duct-taped me to a pole!”

Lin blinked, then burst out laughing. “Quite the kitchen you’re running here, Sato,” she chortled. “If duct-taping works we may have to try it at the school.”

Wu huffed then smiled, shaking his head ruefully.

Asami nudged Korra in the arm. “You’ve been great for him,” she whispered. “A month ago he probably would have had a panic attack and passed out.”

“That’s probably Jinora’s doing more than mine,” Korra replied with a slight smile. “All that bickering they do has toughened him up.”

Simon appeared at the kitchen door and beamed. “Excellent, we seem to have a full house. Shall we get things going?”

“Fifteen minutes, Boss,” Jinora shouted back.

“Chicken ready, Asami?”

“Here, Chef.”

Korra scowled at Asami’s use of the the title, but the black-haired chef merely smiled and passed her a metal bowl filled with freshly shredded chicken which Korra folded into the sauce. She slapped a lid onto the bot and turned down the heat.

On the far side of the counter Wu placed slabs of mozzarella onto slices of baguette before cutting a chiffonade of basil. “Ready for the bruschetta topping, Chef,” he announced.

Korra peered into another pot. “It’s done. Come and get it.”

The blender roared to life and Korra glanced over at where Asami was drizzling oil into the top of the mixing jar to make her vinaigrette.

“I’m going to get blue tongue from that dressing, eh Asami?” Leonardo teased.

Liam eyed the nearby ice cream maker with suspicion. “I’m a wee bit more concerned about that bacon I saw go into the ice-cream.”

Suyin leaned towards Simon. “Whose idea was it to make blueberries the secret ingredient?”

“Asami’s father. It’s currently his favorite snack, and he thought having to use fruit to make savory dishes would be more interesting.”

“I’m sorry he’s not here to partake,” said Suyin, looking around.

Simon sighed. “Me too. He really wanted to come, but his physical therapy session today really wore
him out.”

Lin grunted. “I’m still not sure how I feel about this whole cooking competition thing.”

“My dear Chef,” said Simon, his eyes twinkling. “While I generally despise Varrick Blackstone, I have been thinking a lot about this idea of his and talking to some of my colleagues in the entertainment industry. I suspect you and your sister will need to enlarge your school to accommodate all the new students who will be rushing to take cooking classes if this goes the way we all suspect it will.”

“Ugg,” Lin groaned. “I can barely stand the students we already have.”

Suyin laughed and swatted at her sister. “Just ignore Chef Grumpy over here. I think it would be lovely to see more people excited about cooking.”

Bolin and Kya pushed their way through the doors holding more bottles of champagne and sparkling water.

“Are they done yet?” Bolin looked over at Jinora who was peering at her stopwatch.

“Three minutes!”

“Wu!” Korra barked. “Plates!”

The three chefs worked swiftly and in concert, constructing each setting with careful precision.

“Three, two, one, and done!” Jinora shouted, waving her stopwatch with glee.

Korra threw up her arms in triumph, then pulled Asami and Wu into a group hug and kissing them each on the cheek. “FUCK, YEAH,” she bellowed, her eyes shining. “WHO’S HUNGRY?”

“Feeeeeed meeee,” whined Jinora, brandishing a fork.

Opal chuckled and shoved her in the shoulder as Asami approached carrying the first course. “What are we eating, Chef?”

Korra wiped her face with a dish towel then straightened her shoulders. “For our first dish we have a simple soup and salad combo. Mixed spring greens, blueberries, strawberries and a nice chèvre, topped with a blueberry vinaigrette. The soup is a chilled blueberry with a yogurt and chive garnish.”

“This is soup?” Leonardo asked suspiciously, holding up the small ramekin filled with bright blue liquid.

Asami rolled her eyes. “Just try it, Leonardo. Food can be good even if it’s not Italian.”

Liam’s spoon hovered hesitantly until he saw the look of surprise on the Italian’s face.

“È sorprendentemente deliziosa! Liam, mio amico, you have to try this.”

The Irishman cautiously spooned the concoction into his mouth then blinked in shock. He looked over at Korra, watching him with a small on her face. “This is good, lass!”

Korra rolled her eyes. “So glad you approve, Mister O’Shaughnessy.” She looked over to see Asami watch Wu watch the Beifongs. The two women said nothing, but their faces showed their approval. “Everyone ready for the next course?”
The group murmured assent and Wu approached holding his tray with apprehension stamped on his face. Korra patted him on the back encouragingly. “For our next dish we have blueberry bruschetta with mozzarella, Parma ham, and arugula.” She winked at Wu. “This excellent dish was really the brain child of Chef Wu, by the way, so please enjoy.”

Wu glared at her, his face beet red with embarrassment. He started to protest, but his jaw snapped shut as he saw Lin Beifong take a bite of the bruschetta, the melted cheese and berries coating her lips. Korra held her breath and looked over at Asami. The raven-haired chef had her lower lip between her teeth, also waiting for Lin and Suyin’s reaction. She caught Korra’s gaze and nodded slightly before looking over at Wu. They both knew this was critical for Wu’s confidence.

Lin sat back and stared at the ceiling for a few minutes. Suyin chewed slowly, staring at her plate. After a long moment she shared a glance with her sister, then looked over at the sweating young chef.

“Chef Wong,” she said formally. “My sister and I have long despaired of you ever fully unlocking the talent we both suspected you had.” She took another dainty nibble of the bruschetta and smiled. “I am glad to see you seem to have discovered it.”

Lin nodded, a tiny smirk visible on her lips as she nodded her agreement. “Well done, Chef.”

Korra threw an arm around Wu’s shoulders as tears tracked down his cheeks. “Thank you, Chefs,” he said hoarsely. “You have no idea how much that means to me.”

Jinora shoved the last of her bruschetta into her mouth and ran over to wrap her arms around him. “I’m so proud of you, rookie,” she declared, kissing him on the cheek.

“No a rookie any more,” corrected Korra as she took off her apron. “Wu, you did not throw up, nor set anything on fire, nor did you drop any plates. You also got a nice compliment from extremely qualified judges. As of tonight, you are now a bonafide member of the Nagamobile crew, rookie no more.”

Jinora huffed playfully. “Okay, fine. No more rookie jokes.”

Wu’s tears fell faster, but he laughed through them. “Fuck, you guys are making me cry. Stop it.”

Kai sniffed loudly, then tapped his fork on the counter. “Okay, that’s nice and all, but there’s more food to taste!”

Korra huffed at him. “Okay, coming up.” Asami and Wu set new plates down in front of the judges who held their forks poised with eagerness. “Okay, folks. Here we have a nice southern fusion dish; chicken in blueberry adobo sauce over coconut grits. It’s a mix of sweet and spicy, but not too much of either.” She reached out to pull Asami against her, resting her chin on her girlfriend’s shoulder as she watched their judges do their tastings. The adobo steamed delectably, the rich sauce coating the shredded chicken and instantly making everyone’s mouth water in expectation.

“Holy shit!” Kai exclaimed, sauce dribbling down his chin. “This is awesome, damn.”

Opal and Jinora both groaned with delight as they savored their mouthfuls. Simon merely grinned as he chewed, amused by the blissful expressions on everyone’s face.

Leonardo moaned in delight and quickly claimed another forkful. “Questo cibo è una meraviglia.”

“Oh my,” breathed Moira to Liam. “We should have this on the menu.”
Liam’s eyes were closed, his expression rapturous. “I’m not sure I could do this fine mouthful justice, lovey.”

“Save room, people,” admonished Simon. “There’s one more course, I think.”

Korra tore herself away from her girlfriend’s side and retrieved the chilled bowls holding desert, placing them on the judging counter.

“Bacon caramel ice cream with salted blueberry compote,” she declared with a grin. “You haven’t lived until you’ve tried this.”

A collective sigh rose from the judges, spoons flourished in anticipation.

“I didn’t get a spoon,” grumped Lin.

Kya leaned over and held up her spoon. “Here, cranky. I’ll share mine.” Lin made to grab it, but Kya held it out of reach with a playful expression. Lin finally gave up with an irritated look on her face but as she tasted the ice cream Kya fed her, she relaxed into a smile.

“Quite something, the kids these days,” teased Kya with a bump of her shoulder against Lin’s.

Lin snorted and ignored the smirk on her sister’s face as she accepted another taste of the dripping ice cream from the silver haired woman. “Guess they’re not hopeless after all.”

Their gazes met — Kya’s eyes warm with a hint of mischief, Lin’s wary but softening. The pastry chef bit her lip and held up another spoonful, waving it slightly as a temptation. Wu nudged Asami, nodding in the direction of the two women. Asami’s eyes widened before she turned her head to hide her smile.

“So what do you think, everyone?” Simon called over the whimpers of delight coming from the judges.

Leonardo sat back and rubbed his belly. “I think I am dead and this is heaven. Cibo fantastico, amici miei!”

There was a murmur of assent.

Asami laughed. “Grazie, Leonardo. I’m glad you came.”

Lin crossed her arms. “The adobo was excellent, but I’m not sure how I felt about the grits. A rice is more traditional though perhaps you felt it was too boring? Also, I know you said there was coconut in there somewhere but damn if I could taste it through the sauce.”

Korra nodded and shrugged. “I also considered fresh tortillas but couldn’t think of something interesting to do with them fast enough.”

“I have some ideas, Korra,” said Wu eagerly.

“Awesome, bring me some samples.”

Suyin took a sip of her champagne. “I think the salad needed more crunch.”

“You always say that,” laughed Opal.

“And I’m never wrong,” Suyin retorted. “A little candied walnuts or slivered almonds would have gone a long way.”
Asami winced. “We had the walnuts, but we were worried it would have been too sweet.”

“A radicchio maybe, in addition to the greens,” Kai murmured. “To add some bite.”

Jinora sighed lustily as she licked her spoon clean. “Don’t change anything about the ice cream.”

There was a general rumble of assent to this statement.

“Well, we thought it was all bloody perfect,” said Liam, his arm around his wife. “Even more so if I could get a cup of coffee?”

“Show of hands, please,” said Opal briskly, rising from her stool. She did a quick count then turned for the kitchen door. “Coming right up — let’s go, Bolin.”

Jinora pushed herself up as well. “I’ll help, too.”

Asami noticed Korra staring thoughtfully at the ceiling. “What are you thinking about?”

Korra blinked and focused on Asami. “We have to fly to New York soon.”

“Yes.” Asami cocked her head. “I would think you’d be feeling pretty good about our prospects.”

Korra sighed and rubbed the back of her neck. “It’s just…” She hesitated, struggling to articulate what she felt. “It’s sort of like when I bought the food truck. I really love cooking with you and Wu, and I’ve loved doing the local competitions because they’re fun.”

“But?” Asami prompted.

“Now I’m worried I’m doing this for the wrong reasons. I’m ultimately doing this because I’m gonna try and do a culinary vigilante job on a jerk, on national TV.” Korra mumbled. “When I think about it like that, I feel kind of like an asshole.” She sighed as she felt Asami’s arms wrap firmly around her.

“You’re doing this because you always stand up for the little guy, and because you possibly have an overly developed sense of justice,” Asami said against her cheek, her breath warm against Korra’s ear. “I also have known you long enough to know that you when you make food it’s all about loving the art of cooking for the purpose of making people happy.” She pulled back enough to rest her forehead against Korra’s, her green eyes capturing Korra’s guileless blue ones. “And that’s what you’re going to show everyone on TV. Costantino is merely helping you spread your message, whether he knows that or not.”

Korra chuckled, then slid her hands up to cradle Asami’s face, placing a chaste kiss against perfect ruby lips. “Thanks, babe.”

Asami kissed her nose. “Anything for you, Chef.”

The stood quietly for a moment.

“We are totally going to kick his ass.”

“Yes, yes we are.”

Chapter End Notes
Buonasera a tutti - Good evening everyone

"Sei una visione di splendore, mia cara. E’ passato troppo tempo da quando ho potuto ammirare la tua bellezza - You are a vision of perfection, it has been too long since I have seen your beauty

è sorprendentemente deliziosa - This is surprisingly delicious

Questo cibo è una meraviglia - This food is a wonder

Cibo fantastico, amici miei! - Fantastic food, my friends!
Chapter 24

Chapter Notes

And they're off to see the Wizard! Our intrepid crew touches down in Gotham City ready to do battle, and maybe have a little fun along the way...

:)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Great White Fluff @FoodTruckMasterNaga 15h
Sorry everyone, the Nagamobile is taking a week off while we represent SF in a nat’l Food Fight! #FoodTrucks4Life #FRAFF

They Call Me J-No @NagaMinionTwo 10h
@FoodTruckMasterNaga Kick ass Boss Lady! Show them how its done! #FoodTrucks4Life #FRAFF

This Is Alice @HotMamaLoveTrucker 8h
@FoodTruckMasterNaga We will have you up on the big screen at The Dockyards - Make us proud! #FoodTrucks4Life #FRAFF #DockyardsBBQ

Skoochy Skooch @Skoochy 7h
@HotMamaLoveTrucker Hope UR ready for a big crowd :) #FoodTrucks4Life #FRAFF #DockyardsBBQ

“Ladies and gentlemen, welcome aboard Flight 302 non-stop from San Francisco to New York City. This is Captain Frank assisted by First Officer Linda and we’re glad to have you flying with us today. Weather in the Big Apple is a beautiful and sunny sixty-five degrees, and we’ll have clear skies all the way across the country.”

Korra turned to Asami, a grin on her face. “You know, I’ve never flown first class before.”

“It was nice of Simon to arrange, and Varrick can certainly afford it.” Asami took a sip of the complimentary champagne and sighed happily.

Across the aisle Wu’s knee was bouncing at a fast clip and he had a death grip on his arm rests.

“What’s the matter, Wu?” Korra teased. “Surely you’ve flown before.”

“I hate flying,” he gritted through clenched teeth. “Last time I was on a plane I threw up three times.”

The flight attendant standing nearby raised his eyebrows at this comment before rummaging in a nearby drawer. “Here you are, sir,” he said cheerfully, handing Wu a large stack of air sickness bags. “We’ll try to keep the path to the restroom clear.”
“You’re too kind,” Wu grumbled, but he carefully stowed the bags in the seat pocket in front of him, just in case. The flight attendant smirked then turned towards Korra and Asami. “May I collect your champagne flutes before take-off ladies?”

Korra handed over her glass with some reluctance. “What hotel are we staying at again?”

“The Plaza, I believe. There’s going to be a car picking us up that will take us there.” Asami perused a sheaf of papers Simon had pressed into her hand when he dropped them off; he was going to follow the next day. “He’s going to meet us tomorrow at the studio.”

“Cabin crew please prepare for takeoff.”

“Oh fuck,” Wu moaned as the plane took off down the runway, pressing them into the back of their seats.

“Just keep breathing, Wu,” Asami said reaching across the aisle to pat his arm.

Korra looked out the window, peering at the distant landscape speeding away below them. “I just hope all of our stuff shows up.”

Asami rested her head against Korra’s shoulder. “Stop worrying. That’s Simon’s job, as he keeps reminding us. And now I’m going to take a nap, because somebody kept me up really late last night.”

“I don’t remember you complaining at the time.”

Wu groaned and reached for his headphones. “Keep it PG over there please. And no hogging the bathroom just so you can join the Mile High Club.”

Korra stuck her tongue out at him before snuggling closer to Asami and closing her eyes. “Don’t worry Wu. I need more room to work my magic.” She yawned, cutting off his spluttering and Asami’s embarrassed hiss. “Wake me up when we get there.”

An olive-skinned man with graying hair and wearing a black suit stood patiently in the baggage claim area. He held a “Team Korra” sign in one hand and was eyeing the milling passengers.

“Hey, that’s us!” Korra waved and the man smiled briefly and approached them, greeting them in a strong accent that had Asami biting back a smile and Wu staring in shock.

“Welcome to Noo Yawk,” he said brusquely. “My name is Vincent and I’ll be your drivah while yous guys are heah.”

“Hey Vincent, thanks for picking us up,” said Korra with a grin. “And since it sounds like you might be a local, can you recommend a place for us to get some good food? I’m starving.”

“What, you don’ think yous guys are gonna like the food at the hotel?” Vincent looked over at them with one eyebrow raised, his arms full of luggage.

“Man, I own a food truck and am a grilled meat specialist. This loser,” waving at Wu who smacked her hard on the arm with a glare, “works for me.” She kissed Asami on the cheek. “This magical creature is the best chef in the country but knows the joys of good street food.” She turned back to Vincent. “So, no, we don’t want to eat at the hotel. We want some real New York food.”
Vincent finished loading their bags and boxes into the back of a huge black SUV. His face was thoughtful as he considered their request. “Alright, I got it. Yous guys in a hurry?”

“I personally would love to soak in a nice bath and go to sleep on thousand count sheets,” said Wu in a resigned tone of voice. “But I’m sure I’m not allowed to have an opinion.”

Korra pushed him into the front seat. “Live a little, Chef. We’re in New York, the city that never sleeps!” She helped Asami into the back seat and climbed in after her. “Whatever you have in mind I’m sure will be great, Vincent. We put ourselves in your good hands.”

Vincent chuckled. “We’ll see. My family come ovah from Napoli so I take you to Little Italy for somethin’ good from the home country, okay?”

“Sound delicious,” said Asami enthusiastically. She looked at Korra. “You know, I don’t think we’ve ever done Italian food.”

“That’s not true!” Korra retorted. “We’ve eaten with Leonardo many times.”

Asami rolled her eyes. “I meant, neither you nor I have ever cooked Italian food for each other.”

Vincent scoffed. “Some cooks you are. There’s no bettah food in this world, and you want the best, yeah? I take you to my cousin Angelo. He makes the best pie in the city.”

“I didn’t know Italians were known for pie,” Wu commented.

Vincent burst out laughing. “Oh my gawd, getta loada this comedian,” he chortled. “Pizza pie, like you nevah had in your life. The Napoletanos invented it, brought it ovah heah.”

“Well, Leonardo and I still need to do our pizza showdown at the forge,” said Korra with a gleam in her eye. “Maybe Vincent’s cousin Angelo will give me some inspiration.”

“Oooh,” interrupted Wu in excitement, pointing. “What bridge is that?”

“Brooklyn Bridge.”

Wu bounced. “Do we get to cross it?”

“Nah,” said Vincent, casually flipping off a nearby Honda that was trying to merge into his lane. “We’re takin’ the Manhattan Bridge. Dumps us three blocks from Angelo’s.” He growled as the Honda made another attempt at encroachment and laid on the horn. “Che cazzo!”

The Honda successful blocked they began their trek over the bridge, the Californians looking in awe at the spectacular enormity of the approaching Manhattan skyline.

“So, are all New Yorkers this intense?” asked Wu, a little nonplussed at Vincent's driving technique.

“Whaddyaw talkin’ about?” Vincent demanded. “I’m Mistah Calm ovah heah.”

“You ever been here before, Asami?” asked Korra, leaning over her girlfriend to better see the Statue of Liberty off in the distance.

“Many times, but not recently. My father was often here on business and sometimes my mother and I would come with him.” Asami smiled faintly at the memory. “My favorite was to come in the wintertime to see the Christmas tree at Lincoln Center and go shopping at FAO Schwarz.”

“Was that the toy store from that Tom Hanks movie?” Korra asked curiously.
Asami nodded. “They had the keyboard on the floor and everything.”

“Okay, heah we are,” Vincent announced, double parking the SUV in front of an old brick-fronted building with a worn awning hovering precariously over the entrance. “Go in there, ask for Angelo and tell ’em Cousin Vinnie sent you.”

The chefs wiggled out of their seats and onto the sidewalk.

“Can we bring you anything, Cousin Vinnie?” Korra asked impudently.

Vincent barked out a short laugh. “Yeah, sure. Bring me a slice of whatever he’s got handy.”

The walls of Angelo’s restaurant were exposed brick and the ceiling was covered in tin tiles. Along one wall a battered bar was three deep with locals drinking beer and chewing happily on their slices of pizza. A heavily tattooed woman in a tank top was pulling four pints at a time and yelling good naturally back and forth with her customers. At the far end of the restaurant an impressive brick oven loomed over the wooden counter that served as the prep area. A small man wearing a plain white undershirt and a long white apron wrapped around flour dusted khakis stood casually twirling dough over his head. With a slap the flattened dough landed on the counter and with impressive speed he ladled sauce, tossed on slabs of mozzarella and a few leaves of basil then flipped it with practiced skill into the oven with a long wooden paddle. He poked the paddle into a different section of oven and pulled out a fully baked pizza, this one covered in pepperoni and mushrooms in addition to the cheese. He slid it onto a platter and ran the cutter over it, dividing it into eight pieces.

Korra’s mouth started watering and as she glanced at her companions saw they were similarly focused on the steaming pie. The crust was golden brown with dusky char marks and the toppings looked perfectly done. They arranged themselves at the counter and the man looked up, startled to suddenly see three strangers beaming at him.

“Whaddya want?”

Korra cleared her throat. “Are you Angelo?”

“Who wants ta know?”

“We just flew in from San Francisco, and your Cousin Vinnie brought us here to try your pizza.”

Angelo stared. “Fuckoutaheah. He never brings nobody heah when he’s drivin’.”

Korra grinned at him. “First time for everything.”

“Hold on a sec.” Angelo turned away and pulled a second pizza out of his oven, this one covered only in white cheese. He reached for a small bottle and drizzled oil over it before slicing it up. All three chefs instantly straightened and took deep breaths as the heat of the pizza released the smell of the oil. He blinked and waved the bottle at them. “You know what this is?”

Korra nodded happily. “Oh yeah we do. Tell him, honey.”

“White truffle oil, very nice,” murmured Asami, her nostrils flaring.

“And a lovely sharp romano cheese on the pizza,” Korra added. “Those probably go fabulously together. I can’t wait to try it.”

Angelo laughed loudly, and the noise levels dropped briefly as everybody turned to stare at them. “Yous guys know about food, and you’re from California, who knew?” He shook his head then
grinned wickedly at them. “You won’t get anything this good out west, I guarantee it.”

“Is that margherita ready yet?” Korra asked. “I think we should take two of each.” She looked at Asami and Wu to confirm and they both nodded eagerly.

Angelo checked, then pulled the last pizza from the oven. “Six slices huh? Yous guys are hungry.” He pulled a box from under the counter and slid their selection into it, handing it to the waiting Wu.

Korra eyed the price guide on the wall and handed over a twenty while Asami deftly snagged a pile of napkins from a nearby box. “Starving, but at least one of these is for Vincent. It was really nice to meet you, by the way!”

“Same here,” Angelo waved at them. “And tell Vinnie he still owes me fifty bucks from the last Jets game, the cheap bastard!”

———

The SUV pulled up to the main entrance of the Plaza hotel and two bell hops approached immediately, one pulling a luggage cart to the rear and another opening the doors to welcome the occupants. He fell back in surprise as the three chefs fell out of the vehicle moaning, faces slightly greasy and eyes glazed.

“Welcome to the Plaza?” he began uncertainly.

“Oh thank all the gods,” muttered Wu. “I’m going to fall into a coma any second.”

Vincent swaggered around the side of the SUV, dabbing at the corners of his mouth with a crumpled napkin and beaming proudly. “Whaddya think — I wasn’t lyin’ was I?”

Korra took a deep breath, her expression blissful. “No lie, that was seriously the best pizza I’ve ever had.” She eyed him speculatively. “You’re our driver for our whole stay?”

“That’s what they tell me.”

“Sweet, you can think of another true New York food experience for us.”

Vincent pursed his lips thoughtfully. “Yeah, okay. I got some ideas.” He pressed a card into her hand. “I’m on call for yous guys, so call me whenevah, okay?”

Korra carefully stowed the card in her wallet. “Awesome, thanks Vincent! You’re the best.”

He chuckled and winked at them. “Aw, my friends call me Vinnie.” He waved and drove off.

Asami led the way into the gleaming lobby, Korra and Wu trailing along behind and staring at the marble columns and gilt furniture.

“God I hope this place has a spa,” said Wu after a moment. “I’m going to need a facial.”

“They do have a spa,” Asami announced, joining them and waving card keys at them. “Apparently Varrick put us in a suite and he’s going to meet us there for breakfast tomorrow.”

“Dibs on the bathtub,” called Wu, hurrying to the elevators.

Asami shook her head. “Trust me, Wu, that’s not going to be a problem. Every bedroom in the suite has its own bath.” She punched their floor number and slid her hand into Korra’s, giving it a squeeze.
Korra smiled tiredly. “We made it.”

“We did. Are you nervous?”

Korra shook her head. “Too tired right now, but ask me again tomorrow.”

With a ding they exited the elevator. The carpet in the hallway was plush, muffling their footsteps. Asami slipped a key card into the lock and they stopped. And stared.

“Daaaaaaaamn,” said Korra in amazement.

“The decor is borderline gauche,” sniffed Wu. “But that’s a pretty nice view.”

Asami approached the huge windows along the far wall. “That view is *amazing.*”

Below them the Central Park lay like a dark blanket between the twinkling lights of the upper east and west sides of the city.

Korra slid her arm around Asami. “Okay, I’ll give Varrick one bonus point for this.”

“Only one?”

“Maybe two.”

Behind them there was a polite knock. Korra opened the door to admit the bellhop and their cart of luggage. He unloaded everything into a neat pile, smiled as Korra tipped him generously, then silently departed.

Wu yawned hugely and pulled his bags out of the pile. “Okay this has been fun but I’m done. See you ladies tomorrow, and don’t you dare keep me up with your screaming and moaning and what not. I need my beauty sleep.” He disappeared into one of the bedrooms, closing the door behind him.

Asami turned to Korra, with a certain gleam in her eye. “I’m exhausted, but I definitely need a shower before bed.” She sauntered towards a bedroom on the opposite side of the suite from Wu’s, then looked back over her shoulder with a wink. “Are you coming?”

Korra scooped up the rest of the luggage pile and hurried after her. “Not yet, but I suspect I’m about to be.”

Asami groaned. “Korra, you dork!”

Chapter End Notes

Sorry (but not really) for the insanity of Vincent and Angelo’s accents. I spent a lot of time watching youtube videos of Action Bronson, Danny Aiello and Joe Pesci (and giggling a lot).

"Che cazzo" -- "what the fuck?"

Also, Tom Hanks movie reference is "Big", a fabulous flick...
Chapter 25

Chapter Notes

Oh my food loving peoples I'm so sorry at the delay (but I hope maybe you enjoyed some of the one shots in the meantime). We've got some more Noo Yawk action as we get ready for our EPIC THROWDOWN.

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Great White Fluff @FoodTruckMasterNaga 3h
I think I might have to break up with you, San Francisco. It’s not you it’s me. And the PIZZA. #IHEARTNY

They Call Me J-No @NagaMinionTwo 2h
Don’t even joke - I’m holding puppies hostage until you get home #Puppies! #SF>NY

This Is Alice @HotMamaLoveTrucker 1h
@FoodTruckMasterNaga @NagaMinionTwo DON’T MAKE ME COME OVER THERE KORRA, YOU GET YO ASS HOME #SF>NY

Korra yawned as she accepted a large cup of coffee from Varrick’s assistant, a young woman in a power suit with a very serious expression.

“Thank you,” Asami murmured as she accepted her own cup. “This is a little fancier than the basement used for the last Food Fight you were in.”

“I’ll say.”

They wandered around the huge studio, looking with curiosity at the beautifully laid out kitchen stations, the impressive assortment of lights and camera rigs, and the two sets of raised seating for the spectators and judges.

“Check this out,” called Wu. He stood near a huge set of swinging doors that appeared to be backlit with blue neon.

“There’s smoke machines behind there too,” commented Simon from behind them. “Terribly gaudy, but that sort of thing plays well on television.”

“Hey!” said Korra enthusiastically, throwing her arms around the older man. “Thank God you’re here. We had to deal with Varrick all by ourselves at breakfast.”

“I am sorry about that,” Simon said grinning. “I trust he behaved himself?”

“Not really,” said Asami, her eyes twinkling. “But any time he suggested any hypothetical changes
we insisted he just talk to you. He finally gave up after his third cup of coffee.”

Simon snickered. “Excellent, and yes, I received three pages of amendments when I walked in the door. I’m still reviewing it.”

“Well, well, well, the monkey mob showed up,” came a sarcastic voice from behind them. “Still slumming, Sato?”

Mario Costantino stood glaring at them with his arms crossed, flanked by a short, swarthy man with heavily tattooed arms and a tall, dark-haired woman who was clearly giving Asami an appreciative look.

Korra scowled and took one menacing step forward before she halted at Asami’s gentle touch. She clenched her fists but stayed put. “Better a monkey than a pig, Costantino.”

“Oh, how delicious,” gloated Varrick as Costantino sputtered angrily. The flamboyant businessman was standing on the judges platform sipping espresso with his pinky sticking out. “If only the cameras were running now.”

Simon’s teeth were gritted but to his credit he kept his voice calm. “Each team was going to have dedicated time to review the facilities, Varrick, but I see you continue to have issues adhering to contractual agreements.”

“My bad,” said Varrick blandly, handing off his empty cup to his silent assistant standing behind him. “I must have gotten the times mixed up.” He jumped off the platform and strolled over. “However, since we’re all here we might as well get the introductions out of the way. Chef Korra, you know Chef Mario already.” He blithely ignored the glares they both leveled at him. “His assistants are Chef Chen Wong and Chef Kuvira Beifong. Korra’s assistants are Chef Asami Sato and Chef Wu Wong.”

“Beifong?” Asami asked, her eyebrow raised. “Related to—“

“Yes, but we’re… not close,” Kuvira said with a certain finality.

Wu stared with ill-disguised hatred at Chen.

The tattooed man merely smirked. “Hello Cousin. Or shall we use our childhood nickname for you, eh, Wonang Fei?

Kuvira raised an eyebrow at this even as Wu’s face darkened and his fists started to curl. Korra wrapped an arm around his shoulders as she whispered in his ear, “If I’m not allowed to start a brawl, you’re not allowed to start a brawl.”

Simon glanced at Wu with concern, then fixed Varrick with an angry glare. “So now I see why your memory is so forgetful, Mister Varrick. Your obsession with having dramatic side stories is going to cause problems.”

Varrick seemed a little taken aback at the hostilities escalating so dramatically, but he quickly recovered. “Your point is taken as always, Mister Rafferty. Chef Mario, if I may escort your team to my office for the time being? I’m sure we have much to discuss.” He shooed them out a side door, the door closing behind them with a reassuring click.

Simon blew out his breath and shook his head. “I swear that man is certifiably insane.” He looked more closely at Wu. “Are you okay, son?”
Wu didn’t respond immediately, then ran his hands through his hair before crossing his arms. “Loser.”

“What?”

“My nickname. Wonang Fei. It means ‘loser,’ more or less.” He stared at the far wall, lost in thought. “Even my mother called me that.”

“Shit,” Korra muttered. “Your mom is a piece of work.” She grabbed his shoulders and shook him gently. “Wu, listen. You told me a couple of months ago you didn’t want to inherit her stupid empire. Is that still true?”

Wu finally met her gaze after a long moment. “Desperately true. I want nothing to do with any of it.”

“Good, good. You also mentioned a cousin who would inherit if you didn’t. Was that the guy?”

Wu’s eyes narrowed. “Yes, that’s him.”

Korra shook him again. “Imagine this — we beat that team into a pulp. This makes your smug bastard of a cousin look bad. Maybe even bad enough that your mom wants to kiss and make up and leave things to you at which point you can tell her to piss up a rope.” Korra grinned. “Tell me how awesome that scenario sounds.”

Wu’s smile was slow to arrive, but got there eventually. “It sounds amazing, actually.”

Korra clapped him on the back. “Good man.” She stepped back and watched in satisfaction as he stood straighter with a look of determination on his face. “So. We’re gonna come back later and do a practice run, right?”

Simon nodded. “Yes, we’re scheduled for three o’clock.”

“Awesome!” Korra slid her arm around Asami’s waist. “What say we call Vinnie? We can go putz around town and get some food.”

Simon looked at them blankly. “Who’s Vinnie?”

Simon’s introduction to Vinnie went swimmingly and the older man sat happily in the passenger seat of Vinnie’s SUV, enthralled with their driver’s accent and encyclopedic knowledge of New York City.

“Okay yous guys, I gotta ‘notha place you’re gonna like,” said Vinnie as they drove through Midtown Manhattan. “So sit back cause this will take a little while with all the freakin traffic.”

“Where are we going?” asked Korra, intrigued.

“Queens.”

“What are we eating?”

“Best dumplings in Noo Yawk.”

“Isn’t Chinatown in Manhattan?” Asami asked curiously.

Vinnie laughed. “Funny thing about that. In Noo Yawk the Chinese people live in more places than
Asami sputtered as Vinnie smirked at her. “Anyway, Manhattan has the best noodles. But for dumplings, we gotta go to Queens. Trust me, you gonna love it.”

Korra sighed in contentment. “If it’s anything like your pizza suggestion, I’m certainly to willing to have a little faith.”

Next to her, Wu crossed his arms. “I don’t know. As the token Chinese person I’m withholding judgement until tasting.”

Forty-five minutes and many hard fought miles later, Vinnie eased his SUV into a magically available parking space near a large warehouse where huge crowds of people streamed back and forth through the entrance.

“This heah is the Golden Dragon Market,” Simon announced. “We gotta go to the middle of it.” As he ushered them inside they were met with a wall of sights, sounds and smells. The interior of the warehouse was a maze of tables and little stalls selling everything imaginable. As they made their way through the crowds Korra’s jaw dropped as she saw a tiny old woman with a face that was mostly wrinkles sling a cured pig carcass that probably weighed as much as she did onto a table and start chopping at it with a cleaver.

“Damn,” she muttered in awe.

Wu noticed where she was looking. “She sort of looks my grandmother. She was handy with a cleaver too. She apparently used to throw them at my grandfather when he was bothering her in the kitchen.”

Korra shook her head. “The women in your family are fierce.”

Wu rolled his eyes. “You have no idea.”

A few turns later and Korra wasn’t sure she’d ever find her way out again but Vinnie finally came to a halt before a rickety stall draped with faded red ribbons. Wrapped around the stall was a low counter and wooden stools, about half of which were occupied. Behind the counter two younger women worked feverishly, rolling out dough and assembling dumplings by hand. An older woman either loaded the assembled dumplings into a large bamboo steamer or dumped them into an even larger pot of boiling broth to cook. Vinnie waved at the women in greeting. To everyone’s shock they waved back and started giggling.

“Vinnie! You bring your friends here!” called the older one manning the cooking station, smiling coquettishly. Then her expression hardened and she started shouting instructions in rapid Mandarin waving her hands at the people at her counter still huddled over their bowls. The customers obligingly all shifted seats to one side, freeing up enough stools that they could all sit down together.

“Nice,” said Wu in appreciation. “She’s old school.”

“Come, come, sit,” the woman ordered and they hurried to obey. “Welcome to Pudong Palace!”

“They’re from San Francisco, Mrs. Lee,” Vinnie winked. “Hadda bring ‘em heah, of course.”

“Good, good. We feed you! Especially you,” she said sternly, looking at Wu. “You too skinny.”

Asami bit her lip to hold back a laugh, but Korra chortled and poked Wu in the shoulder.
Bowls of dumplings started appearing in front of them, delightful mouthfuls of savory pork, beef, or lamb mixed with an egg, mushrooms, scallions, squash, and other ingredients even Korra had trouble identifying. Accompanying the bowls were delectable sauces and pots of jasmine tea in beautiful ceramic cups.

“Oh my God,” Korra moaned, relishing the perfect chewiness of the wraps and intense flavors of the fillings.

Asami closed her eyes as she chewed. “Fantastic,” she mumbled around her chopsticks.

Wu and Simon said nothing, their attention wholly focused on their meal. Vinnie grinned as he watched them, winking at Mrs. Lee.

Finally even Korra’s huge appetite was sated and she leaned back with a happy groan. “You’re going to have to carry me out of here,” she murmured to Asami, who snorted.

“I don’t think I can walk, let alone carry you out,” the dark-haired chef replied, rubbing her stomach gingerly.

Simon clutched his cup of tea desperately. “Oh, why did you let me eat so much,” he moaned.

Vinnie laughed. “So, am I two for two on food?”

“This is some of the best food I have ever eaten,” said Asami seriously, turning to the women who continued to churn out dumplings to the endless stream of hungry customers. “Thank you so much.”

Mrs. Lee grinned and spoke over her shoulder at the other two women in Mandarin.

One of the other women said something back which caused Wu to start giggling. He replied in the same language, gesturing with his hands and nodding in response to the questions they posed him. They then turned and bowed to Asami to her surprise. She raised an eyebrow and looked at Wu for an explanation.

“These women are sisters. That woman is Fang, and she said you looked familiar. Her sister Jie agreed then asked if you were the great Asami Sato. Apparently their Uncle is a businessman who often eats at the Grill and gave them one of your cookbooks as a present. They are very honored by your compliment.”

To the delight of the three women, Asami stood and returned their bow. Jie shyly rummaged below the counter and produced a carefully wrapped copy of The Sato Grill Cookbook that she handed to Asami with a pen and a hopeful expression. Asami smiled warmly and signed the book, conscripting Wu to help her personalize it with precise Chinese calligraphy. The women practically swooned and Asami blushed.

“Aww, check you out, my little rock star,” Korra teased.

“Quiet, you,” Asami whispered, her cheeks pink with embarrassment.

Simon huffed quietly as he checked his watch. “As much as the thought of stuffing myself back into the car does not appeal, we should be heading back to the studio.” He glanced at Vinnie. “I hope the traffic isn’t too bad.”

“I’ll get you back on time, no problem,” promised Vinnie. “Even if I have to break out my Uzi.”

They all stared at him.
“Your what?” Wu finally squeaked.

Vinnie cracked up. “Aw, man. Yous guys are too easy.”

Korra and Asami relaxed on their suite’s balcony, cuddled together on a lounge chair under a blanket. Their weeks of work in the Sato Grill kitchen ensured that they were still comfortably efficient working together despite the newness of the studio kitchen, and their practice session had gone well. Asami ran her hand through Korra’s tousled locks and frowned. The mocha-skinned chef was too quiet for her liking.

“You’re tense,” Asami murmured against Korra’s ear. “You’re worried about something.”

Her warm breath made Korra shiver and she snuggled more firmly into Asami’s embrace. She didn’t answer immediately, then sighed. “I’m nervous. I don’t care if I lose. Well,” she amended. “I care, and I will totally hate it if I lose and probably pout for days, but it would still just be annoying.”

“But?” Asami prodded as Korra hesitated again.

“I’m worried what will happen to you and Wu if we lose,” Korra blurted. She sat up and started pacing across the flagstones. “I mean, you’re Asami Freakin’ Sato! I already feel like you being my sous chef is bad enough. And Wu, his family sucks and now he’s having to deal with it instead of just having fun. If we lose to that asshole—” She slumped miserably against the railing. “I don’t want anything bad to happen to your reputation.”

Korra was not expecting the smack she felt on the back of her head and blinked in shock at the determined expression on Asami’s face.

“I can manage my own reputation,” Asami said fiercely. “You’re not allowed to start wallowing in negativity now, when I know for a fact you’re one of the most optimistic people I’ve ever met.” She grabbed Korra’s hands and squeezed. “Wu has become a totally new person since you took him under your wing and tomorrow isn’t going to change that even if we lose, because he’ll have all of us supporting him and he knows that. And I—,” Asami bit her lip and blushed hard. “I would lose a hundred competitions if it meant you were still in my life.”

Korra grinned and tugged on Asami’s hands, bringing their bodies flush against each other. “You would, huh? And here I thought you were smart.”

“Shut up,” Asami growled as Korra nipped playfully at her jaw. “I’m very smart.”

“You think so?”

“I know so. After all, I managed to land the hottest chef in the country, and I do mean hot.” Korra gasped when Asami’s hands slid under her shirt and caressed her skin.

Korra rumbled a laugh. “And I landed the biggest nerd.”

“Better a smart nerd than big dork,” Asami replied with a hiss as Korra’s nails raked across her lower back.

“Well then take me to bed, Chef Smartypants,” Korra husked against Asami’s throat. “I think we need to work out some more tension.”
Chapter End Notes

Next up - the mother of all Food Fights, and a surprise visit from unexpected guests...
Chapter 26

Chapter Notes

Quick chapter before I get sucked into my other writing commitments. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

They Call Me J-No @NagaMinionTwo 2h
En Route to NY to see Boss Lady kick ass!
#FoodTrucks4Life #SF>NY

Steve The Man @FortMasonStud15 Yesterday
@FoodTruckMasterNaga @NagaMinionTwo Good luck guys! We’ll be rooting for you from Fort Mason!
#FoodTrucks4Life #SF>NY

They Call Me J-No @NagaMinionTwo 2h
@FortMasonStud15 Did you tweet something like a normal person? Who are you and what did you do with the real Steve?
#FoodTrucks4Life #SF>NY

Thousand count sheets had nothing on Asami’s skin, Korra decided, sliding her hand down creamy thighs. Each touch was deliberate and designed to inflame. She bent and trailed kisses up Asami’s neck, smirking as she felt the rapid heartbeat pulsing under her lips.

Asami arched into her touch, whimpering at the sensation of Korra’s hand caressing her skin. “Korra,” she moaned huskily. “I thought I was supposed to be relaxing you.”

“Shh,” Korra replied, her breath hot under Asami’s jaw. “I promise that I’m feeling less tense already.”

Asami’s breath caught as Korra hit a particularly sensitive spot. “Mmmm, so it appears.”

Korra worked her way back down her girlfriend’s heaving body, lavishing attention on every inch of available skin. The scent of arousal filled her nostrils and she shuddered in anticipation as she slid between parted legs—

There was loud pounding on their bedroom door.

“Hey you two, stop having sex and get out here,” demanded a familiar voice.

Asami groaned. “Tell me that’s not Jinora.”

Korra collapsed onto Asami’s chest, defeated. “I would, but I swore I’d never lie to you.”
“Hmmm.”

They lay quietly for a few more moments before Korra rolled over and reached for her discarded t-shirt. “If you want I can barricade the door while you stay in here.”

Asami sat up and pressed a lingering kiss to the corner of Korra’s mouth before stealthily stealing the shirt out of her hand. “Wither thou goest…”

Korra closed her eyes as she ran her hand up the warm skin of Asami’s back. “Don’t think I didn’t see that, you thief.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Asami smirked as she slid herself into the Nagamobile t-shirt then sauntered over to the dresser and pulled out a pair of yoga pants. On her taller frame Korra’s shirt left a hint of her midriff exposed and Korra’s mind went blank at the sight, barely flinching as a new t-shirt and a pair of boxers sailed into her face.

“Come on, Chef Dorky Hotness,” chuckled the raven-haired chef. “Let’s get this over with.”

“Ha!” Jinora crowed in triumph when she saw their disgruntled expressions. “They were having sex. Pay up, Kya!”

Kya chuckled.

Korra sighed in exasperation. “What the hell are you guys doing here? I thought your flight was coming in tomorrow. And where’s everybody else?”

Kya inspected the wet bar contents carefully, then poured herself a healthy amount of whiskey. “There was a problem with the flight and we had to reschedule, and of course getting enough seats for all of us on one new flight wasn’t going to happen that last minute. Opal, Kai and Bolin were going to finish dinner service then catch the red-eye. They’re probably somewhere over Nebraska by now.”

“And my family was happy to take Naga and the pups early,” Jinora announced from her own inspection of the bottles at the wet bar. “Honestly, you may never get them back.”

“Not funny, Jay,” Korra growled.

Kya sank gratefully into a plush wingback chair, glass in hand. “You’ll be pleased to know that the mayor tried booking the wine room for another campaign fundraiser on Tuesday.”

Asami blinked. “But the Grill is closed until Thursday because of the competition.”

“Exactly.” Kya took a long sip and signed in contentment. “He was very upset — apparently he’d promised a big potential donor dinner at the best restaurant in the city. I’ve never heard Sarah be so smug before.”

“A tragedy,” intoned Asami solemnly before they both burst out in snickers — they both knew how much the Sato Grill hostess loathed the current mayor.

Wu emerged from his room, dressed in purple silk pajamas. He looked reproachfully at the two newcomers. “Sorry, Korra. They captured me on my way back to the suite from the gym and forced me to let them in.”

Jinora blew a raspberry in his direction. “Don’t deny you’re ecstatic to see us.”
“As ecstatic as if you were my proctologist.”

“Ew.”

“Seriously ew.”

“Good grief, did you have to go there?”

Wu beamed at them, enjoying the women’s discomfiture. “Okay, that was fun, but now I’m going to bed. See you guys tomorrow!” He closed the door firmly behind him and there was a collective rolling of the eyes at the loud click of the lock.

Jinora plopped down on the couch, turning to Korra and Asami with an eager expression.

“So! You guys ready for tomorrow?”

“I guess so. I’m trying not to think about it.” Korra yawned, then eyed the pile of luggage.

Kya caught her glance. “Simon said there were extra rooms in the suite, and the rooms we’re supposed to have aren’t available until tomorrow. I hope this is okay.”

“Of course it is,” Asami assured them. “Don’t mind Korra. She’s just tense.”

“Hey, I was trying not to be,” Korra grumbled.

Asami ran her hand up a muscular thigh. “I’m sure I can get you back into a very relaxed state, honey,” she murmured, her eyes twinkling.

Jinora leapt up from the couch, a look of horror on her face. “Okay! Well, I’m going to bed! See you guys tomorrow!”

Kya laughed lightly, taking one last sip of her whisky. “I think I will retire as well. I’m looking forward to tomorrow.” She leaned over and hugged Korra and Asami tightly. “You three are going to be amazing tomorrow,” she said with pride. “Just don’t stay up too late relaxing.”

“Oh my God.” Korra blushed furiously. “Good night, Kya!”

“Holy shit,” Wu breathed. He stopped dead in the hallway and Korra tripped trying to avoid him.

“Wu, what the hell?”

He clutched Korra’s shirt desperately. “He’s here!”

“Who’s here?” Asami asked from behind them.

Korra peered through the door leading into the studio kitchen and saw their friends seating themselves, talking excitedly. A tall man in a dark gray suit and red tie sat tensely next to Bolin, a bouquet of flowers in his hand and his knee bouncing furiously.

Korra started laughing. “Not dating my ass, Wu!” She turned her head to smirk at Asami. “Mako is here.”

Asami smiled broadly. “That’s so sweet.”
“Don’t say anything!” warned Wu. “Either of you!” He hung his head. “I can’t do this.”


“I just—” Wu trailed, his face flushed.

Asami wrapped one arm around him. “He makes you nervous.”

“Yes,” he whispered.

“You might like him.”

“I— yeah.”

Asami pressed a sisterly kiss on to the top of his head. “He flew three thousand miles across the country to bring you flowers,” she said carefully. “I think it’s a safe guess that he might like you too.”

He looked up at her with a hopeful expression.

She let him go and stood up straight, her arms crossed in full executive chef mode. She fixed him with a stern expression. “And now Commis, you’re going to go out there and show him what you’re made of! We have food to prepare!”

He blinked, then snapped up straight. “Yes, Chef!” He turned and strode into the waiting area, his face determined.

“Our little boy is growing up,” Korra sniffed theatrically. “Also, you are fucking hot when you use your head chef voice.”

Asami raised one eyebrow. “I thought you hated head chefs.”

Korra smiled and shook her head. “I’m starting to feel like the concept is not a complete lost cause.”

Simon emerged from a side door and hurried over to them as they entered the waiting area. He wore a headset with built-in microphone and had a walkie talkie in one hand.

“Two minutes,” he announced. He peered at them, a smile warming his face. “I trust you’re ready.”

Wu bounced lightly on his toes. “We are going to own these guys,” he declared, a new fire in his eyes Korra had never seen before.

“Yeah, we are,” replied Korra with a grin. She held out her hand, palm down. Wu slapped his hand over hers and looked at Asami expectantly. She shook her head with a small smile and rested her hand on top.

Korra looked at them both, her chest swelling with pride. “Let’s do this!”

Simon waved frantically from where he was lurking near the entryway to the kitchen. The smoke machines were blowing full tilt and the neon lights around the doorway were glowing brightly.

The overhead speakers blared to life and the brazen tone of Varrick Blackstone filled the room.

“Hailing from the great metropolis of New York City we have Team East Coast headed up by Chef Mario Costantino, along with Sous Chef Kuvira Beifong and Demi-Chef Chen Wong!”
There was cheering and applause from the studio, and Korra caught a glimpse of the black chef’s coats Team Mario wore and scowled.

“Figures they’d wear black,” she muttered at Asami who merely smiled. She looked down at the blue grey coats Asami had ordered for them, a bright blue dog’s paw stitched on the left chest panel. In the center of the paw was a small representation of the Sato Grill logo, at Korra’s insistence. She brushed her fingers across it softly, then reached out and laced her fingers with Asami’s, drawing the porcelain hand up to her lips before releasing it.

Asami’s eyes glowed with affection and she brushed her thumb against Korra’s cheek. “We got this,” she whispered.

Korra swallowed hard and nodded.

“And from the City by the Bay, we bring you the pride of San Francisco, Team West Coast! Captained by Chef Korra of Kodiak, assisted by Chef Asami Sato and Chef Wu Wong!”

Wu raised his eyebrow at Korra.

“What?” she retorted irritably. “We don’t use last names where I come from! And you know I hate titles. We’re all just chefs here.” She gave a brief scowl at the sight of Asami holding back a laugh and strode through the entryway into the spotlights of the studio. Wu and Asami followed and came to a stop on either side of her, as Simon had instructed. She crossed her arms and pointedly ignored her nemesis despite his glare from the other kitchen station.

Between them, near the judges seats, stood Varrick. He held his arm aloft in an exaggerated pose, a small wire microphone rig barely visible against his cheek.

“Welcome, everyone, to the first National Food Fight!” His arm dropped and he twirled to gesture at the judges behind him. Thankfully somebody had managed to make him lose the cape. “Culinary glory awaits the victor, and the chance to compete on an international level!”

Korra blinked and bit back a groan.Focus. She tuned out the rest of Varrick’s showboating until a huge steel box was lowered from the ceiling, mini spotlights flashing wildly. Wu snickered under his breath, but he, too, was focused on the box.

“Our secret ingredient,” Varrick paused dramatically as he opened the lid with annoying deliberation, “is Ostrich!” He flung the lid back revealing different cuts of butchered ostrich meat. Korra caught the pan Wu tossed at her and sprinted for the box. She sidestepped Mario as he tried to cut in front of her and deftly grabbed as many choice cuts as she could manage.

“You’re going down, you wannabe bitch,” he growled under his breath.

Korra’s fingers clenched her pan but she reigned in her anger and kept her voice equally low. “You just keep telling yourself that.” With that she turned and hurried away, eager to put some distance between them.

“Fuck that guy is an asshole,” she muttered to Asami and Wu as they joined her at the prep counter.

“What did I say about focusing, Chef,” scolded Asami, her eyes narrowed.
Korra nodded and eyed the camera crew approaching them. She pulled them into a tight huddle. “Okay, here’s the plan—“

Chapter End Notes

I know this was shorter than usual, sorry guys, but this was the logical cutoff. Stay tuned for the menu!

Also nerd moment: "Commis" == "Junior Chef" or "Assistant Chef", very traditional way to describe Wu’s role that of course they would both know, being classically trained chefs... :)

Chapter 27

Chapter Notes

It's finally here, the battle to end all battles!

Also, the return of some minor OCs along with less-minor OCs to add some color to the festivities.

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

This Is Alice @HotMamaLoveTrucker 6h
@FRAFF Don’t forget all, Food Fight broadcast at the Dockyards tonight! #FoodTrucks4Life #FRAFF #DockyardsBBQ

Steve The Man @FortMasonStud15 4h
@HotMamaLoveTrucker I’m so there! #FoodTrucks4Life #FRAFF #DockyardsBBQ

This Is Alice @HotMamaLoveTrucker 6h
@FortMasonStud15 The more the merrier!

Steve The Man @FortMasonStud15 4h
@HotMamaLoveTrucker Wait, really?

The Dockyards was packed, yet strangely quiet compared to its usual roar. Four huge projection screens dangled from the shipping container walls tuned to the Food Fight broadcast. The patrons drank their beer and ate their barbecue while listening closely to the color commentary.

“This is a very auspicious day, viewers. Some of the best chefs in the country are cooking for you live!”

“I’m particularly impressed with the variety of cuts I see being used.”

“Hrm, did I just see sweetbreads get pulled out by Chef Wu?”

“I think you did! I just saw a carton of uni in Chef Kuvira’s hand.”

“Uni, huh? That’s... interesting.”

“You mean, ‘that’s delicious!’”

“Some daring ingredients getting utilized by both teams, but will they pull these dishes off? Find out
“Man,” complained Alice as she looked over at her brother Langston. “I hate commercials. Maya! We need more beer over here!”

“Can’t you see I’m busy?” her sister retorted loudly from next to the beer keg, a long line of patrons waiting patiently for their turn. “Come get it your damn self!”

“Bring us another round while you’re at it, Alice!” called Madison from where she lounged with Rich and Carlos at a nearby table, having adopted the two kitchen interns after their night of drinking games at Swamp Bottom.

Alice rolled her eyes. “Girl, how many hands you think I got? Send your minions over here to help me.”

“Boys, you heard her.”

The interns chuckled ruefully and got up to follow the dreadlocked food trucker.

The cheering section was relentless, Jinora and Bolin the loudest.

“Woo! Go Team West Coast!”

“I’m getting hungry, girls!”

At that last comment, Wu rolled his eyes. “I’m not girly, I’m fabulous,” he dead-panned.

Korra shook her head and grinned as she wiped sweat from her temple with a practiced roll of her shoulder. Kya and Opal waved little flags emblazoned with dog paws and Sato Grill logos. Everyone except Mako wore Bolin-designed t-shirts with the silhouettes of all three chefs standing like a culinary Charlie’s Angels, brandishing cooking utensils like weapons.

Team East coast’s supporters sat silently on the other side of the bleachers, dressed in business attire and looking disdainfully at the antics of the West Coast crew. Thankfully Hou-Ting Wong was not among them; Wu’s nerves could only be expected to take so much.

“How is the tenderloin looking, Asami?” Korra called.

Asami gave it a quick poke with the tongs. “A few more minutes.”

“Soup’s chugging away in the pressure cooker, Chef,” called Wu from his station.

“Awesome, how about the other stuff?”

“Starting to assemble now, Chef.”

Korra hurried over to examine the various bots bubbling behind the soup pot. “Looks perfect.” She stuck a spoon into the batter Wu was stirring and gave it a quick taste, then clapped him on the shoulder. “Doing great, Wu. Just don’t overcook anything.”
He rolled his eyes. “Thanks for the vote of confidence.”

“Anytime.”


“Shit!”

Korra pulled the basket from the fryer, relieved to see the delicate morsels weren’t burned. She left them draining on a rack and ran back to check her root vegetables, happy to see they were done. She carefully drained them then spooned them into a blender along with some ostrich stock, heavy cream, and butter.

“Making smoothies over there, Intern?” called Constantino mockingly from where he was basting medallions of ostrich with hot duck fat. “That seems about up your alley.”

Korra ignored him, rolling her eyes at Asami who merely smirked and shook her head.

His eyes narrowed at the lack of response. “Silent treatment, eh? Guess that hasn’t changed much.”

“Chef, the medallions,” warned Kuvira, looking with concern at the pan. It was starting to smoke and it wouldn’t take much for the oil to flash over.

His face flushed in annoyance and he slung the handle towards Kuvira abruptly. “Here, you finish it off.” She jumped back as some of the oil sloshed over the side and flared as it hit the flames underneath.

There was a sudden silence as everyone in the kitchen stared in shock at the carelessness at the move.

“Ha, at least you’re faster than my old intern,” said Constantino loudly, his eyes fixed on Korra. “She couldn’t dodge worth—”

“THIRTY MINUTES JUDGES,” screamed Varrick as he waved his arms, sensing the looming potential for a disaster.

Asami grabbed Korra as the blue-eyed chef stalked towards the other cooking station.

“Not worth it,” she hissed under her breath. “And I do not want to have to try and bail you out from a murder charge.”

Suddenly Wu was there as well. “He’s trying to rattle you, Korra,” he whispered urgently. “Don’t let him.”

“We can only hope your friend Lily is watching,” Asami murmured. “Do this for her.”

Korra took a deep breath and nodded. “Okay, I’m good. I promise.” She squeezed both of their hands, trying to convey her sincerity. “Thanks, guys.”

Wu peered at her closely, then trotted back to his food. Asami pressed a quick kiss against her cheek and smiled before returning to her own station.

“Okay, Korra,” she whispered to herself. “Game face.”

A loud argument came from Team East Coast’s station; Kuvira and Chen were apparently not taking kindly to the possibility of disfiguring burns.
“Just cook the fucking food,” Costantino finally shouted in exasperation. “How hard can it be?”

Korra snickered as she saw Varrick’s face go pale, and the immature part of her hoped they weren’t broadcasting with a time delay for that to get bleeped; from what Simon had told them, the authorities really didn’t like it when people swore on television and Varrick would be liable for a potentially nasty fine.

She tuned all of that out, focusing solely on the food her team was preparing. Wu was in charge of the appetizer, Asami overseeing the first course, and Korra the second. They were all contributing to the desert effort, given the number of ingredients involved. All of their weeks of hard work was in full display; hands switched smoothly from basting to stirring to chopping. Quick status updates passed between them, ingredients were handed off and received. It was a ballet of culinary precision and Korra was ready to scream from the pure joy of it.

“Looks like things are a little tense with Team East Coast.”

“I’m sure it was only a minor disagreement.”

Madison threw a napkin at the screen. “Are you kidding me? Somebody needs to punch that asshole!”

“Careful, girl,” drawled Langston. “Your red-headedness is showing again.”

“You wanna see a redhead?” she slammed her beer down and stood on the table, fumbling at her pants. Langston shrieked and covered his eyes. “Yeah, that’s what I thought barbecue-boy. Didn’t know a black man could turn that color…”

“BUUUUURRRRRRN,” shouted the bikers sitting nearby, pointing at the blushing man and howling.

Alice and Maya collapsed in laughter.

“Looks like that disagreement was put aside, and I must say there are some pretty interesting things going on down there, judges.”

“I’ll say! I’m wondering what Team East Coast is doing with that ostrich egg!”

“Are you checking out Team West Coast? I swear they’re making cake batter!”

“They just threw something small in the fryer too, can’t see what it is from here…”

Behind her she heard the clank of ceramic hitting the counter as Wu prepped his soup dish and
smelled the waft of garlic as Asami sautéed a huge pan of escarole. Korra shook her pan of shallots, then poured in the wine to deglaze before adding the ostrich stock, butter, and pinch of herbs, stirring slowly.

“Time, please!” she shouted.

Varrick held up his large gold pocket watch. “Fifteen minutes judges!”

Korra put her sauce on simmer and joined Wu and Asami on the far end of their cooking station where their dessert ingredients were assembled. “Okay, let’s get these puppies cooking.” They hastily assembled their ingredients into the waiting ramekins and slid them into the oven.

“Those,” said Wu with reverence, “are going to blow people’s minds.”

There was a loud crash from the other cooking station, but none of them turned to look, though they all smiled when they heard the subsequent flood of Chinese from Wu’s cousin Chen.

“Do we want to know?” Korra asked Wu as he struggled to hold back a laugh.

Wu shook his head. “Let’s just say that Chen is making some very interesting claims to Kuvira as to Chef Constantino’s ancestry and hygiene habits.”

Asami and Korra shuddered. “You’re right,” said Asami firmly. “I don’t want to know.”

“Me either,” said Korra before rubbing her hands together with relish. “Let’s start plating!”

Wu topped each of his soup bowls with a huge crostini and slice of smoked gouda and shoved them under the broiler to caramelize. Asami assembled her plates with her usual efficiency, including well placed smears of sauce, expertly placed.

“One minute, Chefs!” bellowed Varrick.

“Wu, check the desert!” Korra bit her lip, moving as fast as she dared to finish her own plating. “Asami, give me a hand?”

“They’re good, Chef,” Wu called out reassuringly. “I’ll finish plating them.”

Korra nodded and moved over to give Asami room to work. The two women worked in concert as Varrick began an annoying countdown.

“…Five, four, three, two, one and STEP AWAY CHEFS!”

Hands raised, Korra and Asami stepped back, both looking over at Wu and seeing him do the same. He raced over and flung his arms around them both. “That was so epic!”

They bounced together in a group hug, the adrenaline still racing through them. Finally Korra stepped back and steeled herself before walking over to shake her opponent’s hand. He snorted and turned away in disgust as she approached but Kuvira stepped forward instead, frowning at him as she took Korra’s hand.

“My boss is going to owe me for this,” she said sourly.

Korra grinned. “Maybe you need a new boss or better yet, be your own boss.”

Kuvira blinked, then her lips curled in a slight smile and she nodded. “I’ll keep that in mind.”
Korra retreated to her side of the studio as crew came out to collect the plates and present them to the judges. Varrick seated himself at the head of the judges table and daintily tucked a napkin under his chin.

“First serving, the home team, East Coast! Chef, what was your team’s theme for the evening?”

Costantino stepped up, a smirk on his face that Korra instantly wanted to punch. Instead she gritted her teeth and crossed her arms, waiting.

“Our theme? Just fine eating, as I’m sure you’ll see.” Varrick nodded pleasantly and gestured for the first course to be served. “For our first dish, we have Japanese-style ostrich three ways, with tataki ostrich, ostrich tomago, and ostrich skin and uni temaki.”

Asami gave a low humming noise under her breathe. “Look at Chef Kuvira,” she whispered. “I’m pretty sure that was her dish.”

I looked and saw Kuvira watching the judges intently, her fingers tapping nervously against her thighs. “I think you’re right. Nice idea.”

“Mmm-hmm. Very inventive,” Asami agreed.

After a few minutes, Varrick waved for Costantino to continue. “Next up, we have fresh arugula and frisee salad with ostrich confit, almonds and ostrich egg.”

Korra rolled her eyes. “He had the exact same thing on the menu at his restaurant, just with duck instead of ostrich. How boring.” She caught Wu shyly waving at the audience out of the corner of her eye and elbowed him. “Hey, stop flirting with your boyfriend and pay attention here.”

“Pay attention to their boring food when I’ve got something pretty to look at? Please.”

Asami silenced them both with a stern look, jerking her head towards where the next dish was being presented.

“Ostrich, charred eggplant and bok choy stir fry over fresh made garlic noodles.”

“That looks good,” Korra admitted. “Never tried to grill bok choy before.”

Wu snorted. “Put in beef instead of ostrich and you’ve got one of the signature dishes from my mom’s restaurant in Hong Kong.” He clasped his hands behind his back and bounced in glee. “Ten bucks says Chen overcooked the ostrich.”

“Shh,” Korra cautioned. “Don’t jinx us!” To her chagrin, the faces of the judges gave nothing away as they took careful notes.

“Finally, we have bacon wrapped ostrich filet mignon with blue cheese sauce, served with garlic mashed potatoes and grilled asparagus.”

“Booooring,” Korra sang under her breath.

Asami nudged her playfully. “You’d eat that in a heartbeat.”

“Well, yeah,” Korra retorted. “But I wouldn’t cook it in a competition like this, come on! Kuvira is apparently the only one with creative chops over there.”

The studio staff collected the plates as the judges scribbled more notes.
“Shut up, they’re about to give the feedback!”

The crowd at the Dockyards leaned forward collectively.

“Thank you, Chef Mario, for the dishes you presented. We found the appetizer to be particularly creative, each sushi selection prepared perfectly.”

“Agreed, the tetaki in particular stood out for me. The smooth texture of the uni was surprisingly good against the salty crispness of the skin.”

“The salad was very good. I seem to recall a similar dish on the menu at your former restaurant?”

“I do like a good piece of duck.”

Back in the studio, Korra coughed and stared hard at the ground. Only Wu and Asami could tell that her shoulders were shaking with repressed giggles.

“This stir fry is delicious. The use of the grilled vegetables is a nice touch, balances out the smokiness of the ostrich. The meat does seem to be slightly overcooked however.”

“Yes, my ostrich was a bit chewy.”

“BUUUUURRRRRRN,” shouted Rich and Carlos, brandishing their beer cups.

“The idea of an ostrich filet mignon is always delicious when cooked correctly.”

“Yes, ostrich gets tough quickly if overcooked. This however was done perfectly. The bacon fat I’m sure helps.”

“It’s a very traditional sort of dish, don’t you think?”

“Agreed, a bit of a surprise to see it here.”

“Well, I’m a bit of traditionalist, and I thought it was delicious. However I have to admit the strong flavor of the blue cheese sauce and the bacon overwhelmed the taste of the ostrich perhaps more than you intended.”

“Look at his face!” crowed Alice gleefully, pointing at the screen and Costantino’s sour expression. His earlier smugness was long gone. “He looks like he swallowed a lemon!”
Varrick gestured towards the studio crew who presented him with a fresh napkin. Then he beamed as he turned to Korra. “Now serving, Team West Coast! Chef, what was your team’s theme today?”

Their cheering section roared their approval. Korra willed her hands to stop shaking as she stepped forward.

“Greetings, judges,” she began a little hoarsely, then cleared her throat. “Our theme was ‘Opposites Attract’ since the makeup of our team is a little unusual.”

The spectators whooped it up again, and Korra blushed.

“Anyway,” she hurried on, “For our first dish we have French Onion soup with an ostrich stock base, topped with a toasted garlic crostini and smoked gouda. For an added West Coast kick we have just a hint of Serrano peppers in the broth for a little zing.”

Korra held her breath as the judges tasted. She noted a couple of raised eyebrows, but as before they held their faces as impassive as possible. She heard a scoffing noise from Costantino but took great pleasure in ignoring him.

Varrick waved her on, his eyes gleaming.

“Next up we have salt crusted ostrich tenderloin on a bed of sautéed escarole and cooked farro grains. To balance the savory we have with a fig compote.”

The judge opposite Varrick bit off a moan, his face blissful. The other judges quickly shushed him, and Korra snuck a glance behind her to see Asami beaming. She flashed her a quick thumbs up before turning her attention back to the tasting. The judges seemed to be lingering over their plates, so she waited patiently until Varrick finally gave her the okay to continue.

“Our next course is pan roasted ostrich with fried sweetbreads, served with potato and salsify puree and glace des medoc made with ostrich stock, another fun blend of sweet and savory.” Korra felt sweat beading on her forehead; this dish was her crazed brainchild and could sink them if she hadn’t pulled it off. She snuck another glance back at Asami and Wu, and they both flashed her surreptitious thumb’s up, nodding in encouragement.

“Oh my.” Varrick moaned under his breath. After a struggle to recover his composure, he turned back to Korra “Did you have a fourth course, Chef?”

“Yes, we have dessert!”

The judges stared in shock. Korra grinned as she saw Jinora having a quiet fit out of the corner of her eye.

“What we have before you is ostrich cupcakes — chocolate and butterscotch cake with a molten caramel core topped with salted ostrich cracklins to represent the feathers! A beautiful blend of sweet and salty!”

Varrick stared at her. “Excuse me, what are cracklins?”

She beamed at him. “Deep fried ostrich fat. Normally pork is used but, well, this recipe required
“ostrich.”

The judges took hesitant bites, then immediately took second, larger, tastes. Korra watched eagerly, and when she saw their eyes start to roll back she let herself relax. Win or lose, she had at least made the judges react.

Madison plunked down a bottle of her favorite whiskey and box of shot glasses. “Okay, every dish the judges like, we do shots.”

“Lord have mercy, you gonna kill us,” snorted Maya, but she took a glass and held it out to be filled. Langston waved at them frantically. “Shh! Here we go!”

The Dockyards was eerily silent, waiting.

“Starting with the appetizer, I’m a bit surprised at your ability to get such a full flavored broth so quickly.”

“Clearly I need to get a pressure cooker, because the broth is amazingly rich, and the cheese crostini topper was lovely.”

“I thought Serrano added just enough heat, a ‘zing’ as you said. Delicious.”

“Yes, very well done.”

“Drink up!” crowed Madison over the growing murmur of the crowd.

Behind her the flustered figure of Skoochy hurried up to the table. “Hey, sorry I’m late, What did I miss?”

“Your drink!” yelled Madison, slinging him a shot. “Catch up, man!”

“The tenderloin was amazing! So incredibly tender and juicy…”

“The combination of the escarole, the farro, and the compote with the salt crusted meat — absolutely superb.”

“I was originally worried about the number of ingredients, but they do combine amazingly well.”

Rich and Carlos groaned as they downed the second shot.

“Them white boys are a bit feeble with the drinking,” Langston observed in amusement.

“Hey!” gasped out Carlos as he recovered from his shot. “I’m half Puerto Rican!”
Alice grinned. “Would you rather be ‘beige boy’?”

“Oh, maybe not.”

“Oh well, we like you anyway,” teased Maya. “Even if you can’t drink.”

Rich guffawed and elbowed Carlos in the ribs.

“We switch to rum, and I’ll show you drinking,” retorted Carlos, smiling despite himself.

“God, no rum,” said Skoochy, horrified. “It’s worse than tequila…”

“The **pan seared ostrich** was astounding. *The combination of the crispiness of the sweetbreads and the creaminess of the puree really added a lovely texture profile without overwhelming the flavor of the ostrich.*”

“The **glace** was a lovely touch, tying all the various ingredients together.”

“I would love to see this on a menu.”

“Bam!” Madison giggled, slamming her glass down.

Rich and Carlos were slumped over the table.

“I don’t think I can take another good review,” groaned Rich.

Langston clapped him on the back. “It’s okay, son. I’d rather you stopped than throw up on my floor.”

“Amen to that,” agreed Maya, eyeing the interns with some concern.

“I don’t know where to start with these cupcakes.”

“I know what you mean. I don’t think I’ve ever eaten anything so… heavenly.”

“The **cranklin topping** was shockingly good!”

“I completely agree — it added both a salty texture contrast to the sweet softness of the cake.”

“Thank you judges, and stay tuned viewers! We’ll be back with the verdict!”

Both teams had retreated to their kitchen stations to await the verdict. The winning chef was supposed to join Varrick on the red carpet.

“We did good, guys,” she said. “I couldn’t be prouder than to be part of this team.”
“Shut up, you’re going to make me cry,” complained Wu.

Asami chuckled and ruffled his hair. “This whole experience has been far more satisfying than I ever would have guessed.”

“Who knows, maybe you’ll start competing at the SF Food Fights, eh?” Korra teased.

Asami shrugged and smiled. “Maybe.” She straightened as Varrick strode to the center of the studio.

The lights dimmed and he was illuminated by a single spotlight.

“The judges have made their decision! We judge in three categories — flavor, presentation, and originality, each with a potential score of five points. These teams have battled bravely, but it’s time for one captain to be crowned National Food Fight champion!”

Korra felt Asami’s fingers slip into hers and she squeezed tightly. She gripped Wu’s shoulder and he patted her hand in reassurance.

“With a perfect score of forty-five points, the National Food Fight Champion is…”

Wu groaned at Varrick’s insistence on dramatic pauses.

“Team West Coast!”

Korra let out a whoop and kissed Asami soundly before wrapping Wu in a bear hug. Studio crew appeared around them, subtly trying to herd Korra towards the red carpet where Varrick waited.

“Chef Korra!” he exclaimed. “An amazing performance, truly a outst—“

“This is bullshit,” roared Costantino. “She made soup for crying out loud. What’s so special about soup?” He shrugged off Kuvira and Chen’s attempts to restrain him. “And cupcakes? This whole thing was a joke!” Behind him the contingent of suited East Coast supporters were hurrying down the steps, several with cell phones out and all of them with worried expressions.

Korra heard a similar stampede behind her, and Jinora appeared next to Wu, her arms crossed and her eyes narrowed.

“Friggin’ food trucks, are you kidding me?” Costantino continued, oblivious to the urgent murmurings from his companions.

“Food trucks for life!” Jinora yelled in defiance.

Costantino grabbed an eggplant and threw it at them, grabbing at his crotch and screaming, “I’ve got your food truck RIGHT HERE!”

Dead silence fell over the studio as remains of eggplant dripped down Opal’s t-shirt.

Then, with a scream of rage, Bolin grabbed a potato and yelled, “OH, IT’S ON, YOU BASTARD!”
“We appear to have had a breakdown in diplomacy at the kitchen studio today.”

“I think so, yes! Ooh, who knew Chef Asami Sato would be so deadly accurate with root vegetables?”

“The gentleman in the Armani with the cellphone is equally impressive, I have to say. One-handed, even.”

“Chef Chen Wong seems to be a bit timid and is now hiding under the prep counter.”

“Bad show, old man, no character there.”

“Chef Kuvira Beifong appears to have joined the enemy.”

“I did seem to hear her say ‘I quit’, at one point, yes.”

The Dockyards dissolved into pandemonium.

Chapter End Notes

I spent DAYS coming up with the dishes for this battle. Some were found on the internet, some I pulled out of my ass, but hopefully it all sounds at least intriguing, eh?

Also, HAPPY CUPCAKES ARE BACK, w00t!

:)  

Finally, for that one reader who asked about the names (tho’ I can’t remember who it was), the BBQ siblings are named in honor of Alice Walker, Langston Hughes, and Maya Angelou. American literary greats serving great American food... :)
Korra took a deep breath, inhaling the sharp morning air of New York City on the balcony of their suite. Far below the sounds of the morning commute was ramping up and the early morning joggers in Central Park were out in force. Through the window leading into the living area various still forms lay sprawled where they had fallen, including their driver Vinnie and the hotel bell hop Jinora and Opal had talked into ditching work and joining them for celebratory shots. The whole evening was a delightful blur.

She pondered picking her way over the prone bodies in an attempt to reach the hotel’s gym, then shook her head ruefully and returned through the smaller door into the bedroom she shared with Asami. Skoochy might kill her for skipping so many workouts, but suddenly the thought of Asami waking up alone in bed was distasteful. She shed her workout clothes and carefully slid back between the sheets, curling her body around her raven-haired beauty and pressing soft kisses to warm skin.

Asami purred as she awoke, stretching languorously in Korra’s embrace before turning around to face her. “Mmmmm, good morning.”

“Didn’t mean to wake you,” Korra apologized, a smile playing across her lips. “Just couldn’t help
myself.”

Asami kissed her, a gentle yet serious sort of kiss. “I can never complain about waking up like this.” She trailed her lips down Korra’s jaw and pulled the caramel-skinned woman more tightly to her.

“As much as I would dearly love to continue in this particular vein,” Korra gasped, her body shuddering under Asami’s attention. “We apparently have about ten people just outside our door.” She chuckled when she saw a disappointed pout on Asami’s face. “Oh my God, you’re adorable when you do that.”

“Do what?”

“Pout.”

Asami gasped, her eyes narrowing. “I do not pout.”

Korra tickled her sides. “There is no cuter pout in the world than yours, and I am helpless before it,” she said extravagantly. She grunted as Asami pushed her off the bed in an offended huff. She smirked up at her glowering girlfriend. “And here I was going to say, but there’s a second door we can lock between us and the horde if you wanted to, I don’t know, take a shower?”

Asami hauled Korra to her feet before chasing her into the bathroom with a resounding smack to a bare ass cheek, laughing at Korra’s yelp of outrage.

“Oh, it’s on, Sato!”

“Bring it, Food Truck Cook.”

They emerged from their room an hour later feeling refreshed and very relaxed. Around them moaning figures were beginning to stir, hands pressed delicately to temples and eyes squinting against the morning sun.

“Good morning, everyone,” Korra called cheerfully. “It’s a beautiful day and time to get some breakfast!”

Loud groans erupted around her.

“Korra, that’s cruel,” Asami admonished, but the twinkle in her eyes belied her scolding.

Jinora pushed herself up from the couch, her hair in complete disarray and her eyes puffy. “I hate you so much right now, J,” Korra retorted. She noticed the fact that Jinora was alone on the couch. “Did you lose your boyfriend?”

Jinora looked around blearily, then chortled. “Looks like he made a new friend.” She pointed towards the far wall, here Kai lay with his head pillowed on the back of the unconscious bell hop. She looked around, then suddenly she pushed herself up and stormed into Wu’s room, a devious look on her face. Loud screaming soon ensued and she rushed back out again, cackling madly.
Moments later a very flustered Wu appeared in the doorway.

“You are such a bitch!” Wu yelled as he tightened the sash of his robe.

“I see you had company last night!” Jinora doubled over with laughter as everyone else in the room stared at her. Then, at the sound of an embarrassed cough, they all turned to stare at a sheepish-looking Detective Mako standing in the doorway behind Wu, wrapped in a sheet and his face a bright red.

“I, uh—“ Mako cleared his throat. “I can’t find my clothes.”

Korra fought hard, her jaw clenched tight, but then she took a sideways glance to see Asami biting her lap and gave up, letting out a choked guffaw. Soon the whole room was cheering Wu and Mako on, and they both looked a mixture of proud and mortified.

The bedroom door across from them opened and to every one’s shock, Lin Beifong stomped out. “What’s with all the commotion?” she demanded. She at first appeared stern, then softened noticeably when two hands slid into view around her waist and a familiar, albeit sleepy, face peered over her shoulder.

“Looks like the party started again,” Kya murmured. “Aren’t you glad I made you fly out after all?”

Jaws dropped collectively, and Asami gasped. Kya and Lin blushed as they saw her staring at them, one hand to her mouth in surprise. Just as Kya started to look worried at her reaction, Asami hurried over and threw her arms around the older women.

“I’m so happy for you, Kya,” she said earnestly. “Really and truly.”

Kya immediately relaxed and dropped her head to rest against Lin’s shoulder.

“And you!” Asami said, glaring at the steel haired instructor. “You treat her right or I will demonstrate at length how sharp I keep my knives.”

Lin blinked, then she nodded as she chuckled. “Duly noted, Chef Sato.”

The rest of the room still stood silently with mouths open, none more shocked than Wu. He stared at his former cooking instructor cuddling with the Sato Grill’s pastry chef in complete disbelief, then turned to Mako and pinched his arm.

“Hey!” said Mako in outrage. “What was that for?”

Wu shrugged. “Just making sure you’re not a hallucination. Things are getting weird.”

Bolin and Opal sauntered out of the last bedroom. Bolin smirked sleepily at the two men. “With all the noise you guys were making last night, I can assure you it was no dream.”

“Oh my God, shut up.”

Korra’s stomach grumbled loudly, interrupting the banter. “This is adorable and all but I need to feast. Vinnie!”

The driver bolted up from his position behind the couch and rubbed his face. “Huh, wha?”

“We need a proper New York breakfast, Vinnie!”

The New Yorker looked around the room with bloodshot eyes then looked at his watch. “Fuck my
wife is gonna kill me.”

“Nah, we’ll pay you extra,” Korra reassured him. “Buy her something nice, and tell her you were kidnapped by the crazy Californians.”

Vinnie snorted, then pondered for a moment. “Well, yous in luck. One of the best breakfasts in Noo Yawk is a block away, which is good because you won’t all fit in the car.”

They turned at the sound of a horrified gasp to watch as the bell hop wriggled himself out from underneath a groaning Kai. “I’ll, uh,” he stammered. “I’ll have the concierge call ahead, assuming you mean Hilda’s.” At Vinnie’s nod he hurriedly continued. “I, uh, had a great time last night, I think.” He avoided looking at any of them while he frantically attempted to straighten his uniform. “Enjoy therest ofyourstayatthePlazaHotel,” he blurted before bolting out the door.

“Dang,” commented Opal. “I was going to give him a nice tip.”

“I don’t know, sounded like Bolin gave you a nice tip last night,” said Kya with a truly wicked smirk, waggling her eyebrows.

Opal gasped and reached around Lin to smack her fellow chef, while Bolin collapsed against the wall, sniggering.

Jinora looked disgruntled. “Well, sounds like there was a ridiculous amount of fornication last night and I didn’t get any.” She stalked over and kicked Kai’s thigh. “You owe me big time, Kai!”

Asami sighed loudly over the giggling and stepped forward, her hands clapping for attention. “Okay children, rise and shine,” she announced in her head chef voice. “Please disperse to wherever you need to go to get ready for breakfast. Meet in the lobby in thirty minutes.”

Most of the room responded automatically with a flurry of movement and an automatic, “Yes, Chef!”

Vinnie turned from the mirror where he was straightening his tie and smoothing his hair down, a grin on his face. “Are you sure you not a Noo Yawker?”

“Nope,” Korra said, kissing Asami on the cheek. “She’s my California Dream Girl.”

Retching sounds emerged from the various bedrooms.

“Good grief!”

“Can you get any cheesier?”

“Gross, Korra!”

Korra laughed uproariously. “Deal with it, people!”

“So, was I three for three?” Vinnie asked as he pulled their suitcases from the back of his SUV. The airport terminal was teeming with people, and behind them a couple of taxi cabs were discharging the rest of their party.

Korra grinned. “Those were the most expensive pancakes I’ve ever had, but I will admit they were
amazingly good.”

“Told ya.”

Asami hugged him warmly. “If you ever come out to San Francisco, look us up.”

“Yeah,” Korra piped up. “We’d be glad to return the favor.”

Vinnie clapped Korra on the back. “We’ll see. The missus always picks our vacation spots, but I’ll mention it to her.” He stepped back and tossed them a jaunty salute. “Have a safe flight!”

“Thanks, Vinnie!”

Bolin came up, his arms full of luggage. “Are we ready?”

“I am,” replied Jinora. “This city is too crazy for me.” She grinned at the sight of Wu tucking his arm into Mako’s, each of them sporting a flower from Wu’s bouquet tucked into a button hole. “Aww, they’re so cute.”

“Shh,” cautioned Opal. “Don’t freak Mako out.”


Bolin beamed proudly at his brother, a suspicious glimmer in his eyes. “My big bro finally grew a pair.” He sniffed loudly. “I’m so proud.”

Opal rolled her eyes. “Come on, let’s get checked in before he starts blubbery.”

“Korra! Asami!” They turned to see Simon hurrying up to them. “I was starting to get worried.”

“Sorry, Simon,” Asami apologized. “It was hard to get everyone going this morning.”

His eyes twinkled merrily. “I’m almost sorry I missed the after-party, but this old queen is well past the days of late night revelry.”

Korra snorted. “That’s not what Hiroshi says.”

“Korra!” Asami smacked her hard on the arm.

“Ow! I was just kidding, I swear.”

Simon chuckled and rolled his eyes.

The San Franciscans strolled through the terminal, a slow moving horde compared to the rest of the bustling travelers. The ticket agent raised one eyebrow as they approached en masse.

“You’re a little early for the flight to Las Vegas,” she said drily.

Korra looked around and grinned. “You’d think that’s where we were going, wouldn’t you? In this case, no, we’re going home to San Francisco.”

Another ticket agent glanced over then clapped her hands in glee. “You’re Team West Coast! Lynn, don’t you recognize them? These were the chefs on TV!”

Lynn, the first ticket agent, peered at them more closely, then her face brightened. “Congratulations! Technically we were rooting for Team East Coast, but honestly he was such a jerk our hearts weren’t
in it.”

“We agree,” said Asami blandly.

The agent smiled, handing over a stack of boarding passes. “Here you go, enjoy your flight home!”

“Home sounds nice right about now,” Korra replied, lacing her fingers with Asami.

Asami squeezed back. “I agree. We have restaurants, food trucks, and puppies to take care of.”

After their plane reached cruising altitude, Korra flipped up the arm rest between them and pulled Asami against her. “I require more cuddles. Also, I have sort of an important question to ask you.”

Asami nestled against Korra’s chest. “There’s certainly plenty of time for both cuddles and conversation on a six hour flight. What did you have in mind?”

“I, um, wanted to ask you—” Korra stuttered to a stop.

Asami tilted her head up in curiosity, then smiled as she saw Korra’s blush. “Korra, are you okay?”

Korra blew out her breath. “I know that technically, um, I mean, it hasn’t been all that long, and you’ve got a nice setup and I don’t, and you know what, maybe this was a bad idea—”

Asami kissed the babbling woman, tugging on her bottom lip with her teeth. “You’re so sexy when you get flustered. I promise there’s nothing you can say that will make me mad.”

There was a pause while Asami waited for Korra to gather her nerve.

“Will you move in with me?” Korra finally blurted. “I know your boat is way nicer than my warehouse but there’s Naga, and I swear I’ll remodel it however you want, or maybe we could find a better place that you like more and I…” she caught her breath and closed her eyes. “I just can’t imagine not falling asleep with you every night.”

“Yes.”

Korra’s eyes flew open. “Wait, yes?”

"Of course," Asami kissed her again, her grin widening. "Did you really think I was going to say no? I spent most of my life not really understanding what it meant to truly live, or love for that matter. Now that I’ve met you I feel like I’m up for anything."

Korra hugged her tighter and buried her face in raven hair. "I was really hoping you'd say yes, but I have a stack of post-it notes in my pocket in case I needed more reasons to convince you."

"You really are a dork, you know that?"

"But I'm your dork," Korra smirked. "Love you, Chef."

"I love you too, Food Truck Cook."

Chapter End Notes

Phew, after over a year our story is just about wrapped up. Epilogue is coming soon,
and thanks to everyone who's followed along!

:)
Chapter Notes

And we come to the end of our story. This was the first fic I ever attempted to write and it's incredibly dear to my heart. I still am grateful for A_Fazey and the other Korrasami authors for inspiring me to give it a try and for all my readers over the past year who have given me encouragement and criticism.

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The smell of paint permeated the air and the bouncy sounds of the Jackson Five filled the newly created room. What once was space open to the garage and holding only Naga’s couch and metal storage shelves was now an enclosed living space with cathedral ceilings. The old wooden stairs had been replaced by an ornate cast iron spiral staircase and new windows had been cut into the walls, lighting up the interior. The bedroom loft had been enlarged and a second bathroom added including a large claw foot bathtub, the selection of which was motivated by the extremely lecherous descriptions Korra whispered in Asami’s ear for how she planned to put the tub to use. The kitchen itself was untouched, but a new pantry space had been added for storage allowing the boxes that had been cluttering up the kitchen to be cleared up.

“I’m not sure about these colors you guys have picked,” said Jinora from her perch on a nearby ladder. She waved her paint roller at Korra, splattering small droplets of pale blue-gray paint across the concrete floor and Korra’s bare arms. “Kinda boring.”

“Hey! Watch it!” Korra growled. “I’m not so sure about this music you’ve chosen, so there.”

“Don’t knock Baby Michael and the Jacksonettes. It doesn’t get any better than this.”

“Asami,” Korra whined piteously in the direction of the kitchen. “Make her stop.”

“You did say she could pick the music if she helped paint,” Asami called back. The chef ambled through the doorway, holding two spoons. “Here, try this.”

Korra groaned around the spoon as she tasted. “It’s glorious. What are you making?”

“This is the sauce for baked mac and cheese.”

Jinora licked her spoon carefully before handing it back. “Korra, you have the best girlfriend ever.”

“Back off, wench,” Korra teased. “Get your own Chef.”

“I have one, but he specializes in licking the chocolate off my—“

“STOP” Korra covered her ears as Jinora howled in laughter.

Asami smirked and kissed the tip of Korra’s nose before returning to the kitchen. “Lunch will be in about thirty minutes, ladies. I’ll come help once I get everything into the oven.”
“Alright fellow paint slave,” said Jinora, flicking more paint onto Korra. “Let’s get to work!”

Korra wiped the paint from her cheek and glowered at her assistant. “You’re lucky I like you.”

“Hello, everyone!” Wu pushed past the plastic sheeting, holding a flat of coffee cups. “I know I’m late, but I bring tribute.”

“Is there a latte in there?” Korra demanded. “If so, you may live.”

Wu snorted and handed over a cup. “Here you go, O Demanding One. Also, there’s someone here to see you. She’s outside.”

Korra took a happy swallow of her latte and beamed. “Why didn’t you bring her in?”

Wu shrugged. “She didn’t want to come.”

Korra handed him her paint brush and made her way to the front door where a small figure in a hooded sweatshirt stood looking out over the street. “Can I help you?”

The figure turned, and she gasped as she recognized the person before her. “Lily?”

The former student chef smiled tentatively. “Hello, Korra. It’s been a long time.”

“Where have you been? You stopped answering my calls, I was so worried—” Korra took a deep breath. “I’m sorry, I just wasn’t expecting you to show up here.”

There was an awkward pause, then Lily blurted, “I saw the Food Fight, on TV.”

Korra grinned. “Yeah, I won’t lie. It felt really good kicking that guy’s ass.” Her grin faded. “How have you been, really?”

Lily dropped her gaze. “I wasn’t good for a long time, but I’m okay now. Really good, actually.”

Korra peered at her with concern. “Yeah?”

“Definitely. After the trial I was so depressed and I couldn’t handle seeing anyone.” She looked at Korra apologetically. “Not even my best friend.”

Korra gestured to a nearby bench. “What did you do?”

Lily smiled as she sat down. “Stayed with my parents while I recuperated, then I travelled a bit. Turns out the school also made some kind of agreement with their insurance company and that helped sort out the last of my bills. With the school’s help I ended up having a bit of settlement money left over so I bought a train pass and did the backpacker hostel thing around Europe for a while, once my burns healed.” She pulled up her pants leg to show the healed streaks of burn scars.

“Wow,” Korra marveled, “those look a lot better than I thought they would.”

“I know, right?” Lily smiled. “They looked so bad for such a long time.” Her face fell. “I kept wanting to send you postcards or something, but I thought…” she trailed off.

Korra sipped her latte and waited.

“I didn’t want you to be disappointed in me that I ran away,” said Lily finally. “You were such a good friend and fought so hard for me—“
“What? No!” Korra exclaimed. She threw her arms around her friend and hugged her tightly. “I could never be disappointed in you, I swear! You’ll always be my friend, Lily.”

Tears streamed down both their faces as they embraced. Finally they leaned back and laughed. Lily pulled a small package of tissue from her pocket and shared them with Korra. Then she started giggling. “After I saw the show, I just knew I had to stop being an idiot and find you again. Turns out you’re pretty easy to find, Miss Food Truck Master.”

Korra scoffed, her eyes still glimmering. “I’m really glad you did, and I’m so glad you’re okay.”

“Hey, is everything alright out here?”

Korra turned to see Asami standing in the doorway, her face showing her surprise and confusion. She waved Asami over as she stood up. “Hey Sweetheart, I want you to meet someone.”

Lily also rose, blushing a bit under Asami’s scrutiny.

Korra grinned happily. “Lily Armstrong, this is my girlfriend, Asami Sato.”

“Hello, Lily,” Asami’s brow furrowed. “Wait, Lily the intern from Costantino’s Lily?” She looked at Korra for confirmation.

“That’s me!” replied Lily brightly.

Asami beamed. “You watched didn’t you? I knew you would.”

“You did,” Korra confirmed. She turned back to Lily. “Hey, it’s kind of a mess in here but would you like to come in?”

Lily’s face fell slightly. “I’d really like to but I can’t today.” She turned as a slightly battered car pulled up to the curb next to them and a pleasant looking sandy-haired young man stepped out. “This is Pete. We met in Europe.” She blushed again.

Pete walked up and threw an arm around her waist as he held out his hand. “Hi! You must be Korra. I’ve heard lots about you and your crazy ways.”

“Very crazy,” murmured Asami.

Korra poked her the side. “Quiet, you.”

“Did Lily and I tell you we’re going to open a bakery?” Pete asked proudly. “Just a couple of blocks from here actually.”

Lily’s face grew even redder under Korra’s raised eyebrow. “I was about to,” she protested weakly. She laughed as she pressed her hands to her flaming cheeks. “After I while I realized I really missed cooking, but I don’t know that I’ll ever feel truly comfortable in front of a stove anymore.” She swallowed but after a moment continued. “Turns out if you spend enough time in France, suddenly baking becomes an interesting option.”

“That’s how we met!” Pete said cheerfully. “She swooned at me over the baguette dough.”

They all laughed as Lily swatted Pete’s arm in embarrassment. “Who was swooning over who?” she demanded as he laughingly begged for mercy.

“Alright, alright,” he chuckled. “I was the swooning one. Speaking of baguettes though,” he looked at his watch. “We have to run if we’re going to sign papers today and get the keys to the bakery.”
“Okay,” said Lily, sighing. She turned back to Korra. “Can I get a raincheck?”

Korra fumbled in her pockets before she finally pulled out a slightly battered business card and pressed it firmly into Lily’s hand. “You better call me, or I will hunt you down.” She pulled Lily back into a ferocious hug. “I’m so, so glad you came to see me.”

“Me too,” Lily whispered.

Korra finally stepped back and glared at Pete. “Just so you know, both Asami and I are black belts, and I have a really big, scary, dog.”

Pete laughed good-naturedly as he held up his hands. “Don’t worry. I’m wrapped very firmly around her finger.” He shook Korra’s hand then opened the passenger door for Lily. “Be sure to come get some bread when we open!”

Korra waved as the car drove down the street, wiping new tears away as she felt Asami wrap her up in a warm embrace.

“We definitely will.”

Six months later…

“How do people tie these things anyway?” Korra groused as she fumbled with her bow tie.

“Why do I always end up tying these for you?” Wu slapped her hands out of the way. “Here, let me do it.” His fingers deftly tied a perfect bow. He stepped back to make sure it was straight. “Very handsome.”

Korra tugged on her vest as she stared at herself in the mirror. “Thanks, Wu. Guess I look okay.”

“Surprisingly, you do clean up nicely,” he teased, then deftly dodged the kick she aimed at him.

There was a brief knock then Bolin stuck his head in. “Are you guys ready? I think it’s about to start.”

“Yeah, where’s Simon?”

“He waiting for you in the hallway.”

Wu pushed Korra through the door. “So have you seen Asami’s dress?”

“No,” Korra grumped. “She wanted it to be a surprise.”

“She looks amazing. You may need Mako to shoot off all the challengers for her affections.”

“Really, Wu? You’re not helping right now.”

Simon beamed as they approached. “Are we ready?” He gestured to the the nearby table where boutonnieres were arranged. “Let’s get dolled up shall we?”

“Ow!” Wu sucked his thumb as he tried affix his flowers.
“That part’s supposed to go in your vest, not your skin, Wu,” she said sarcastically.

“Yeah, yeah, yeah.” Wu waved away Simon’s offer of assistance as Bolin peeked through the door into main room to see Opal waving at him. “They’re ready for you,” he announced and then disappeared.

Korra took a deep breath and smiled at her friends.

“Let’s do this.”

Simon and Korra led the way, walking up the aisle to stand in front of the minister. Wu followed them, all hints of the previously bumbling intern long gone. He strode gracefully forward, offering a dapper bow and then his arm to a beautifully dressed Kya who kissed him fondly on the cheek. They walked slowly up the aisle together then separated, Wu joining Simon and Korra, Kya stepping to the opposite side.

Korra stared back towards the head of the aisle, nerves thrumming. After a long moment the crowd rose, and Asami and Hiroshi came into view. Korra’s heart pounded at the sight of her girlfriend, arm in arm with her father. She wore a magnificent dress, pale pink and cream. Her hair was swept up into an elegant bun and her mother’s diamond jewelry, carefully retrieved from a long sealed safety deposit box, sparkled on her ears and chest. Beside her stood Hiroshi, his face alight with a broad smile. His vest matched Asami’s dress perfectly, and instead of a bowtie, he wore an elegant cravat with a matching diamond stud.

Beside Korra, Simon’s breath caught. She nudged him and as he glanced over at her, she nodded encouragingly. He smiled and nodded back. All eyes were focused on the striking couple making their way up the aisle. Months of determined effort in his physical therapy had strengthened Hiroshi’s limbs and eliminated his limp, and he walked proudly at Asami’s side. As they reached the waiting attendants, Asami leaned over and kissed her father lovingly on the cheek, then took his hand and joined it with Simon’s before stepping back to stand with Kya. She caught Korra watching her with a look of awed adoration and smiled affectionately back at her.

The minister stepped up and cleared her throat as the crowd seated themselves.

“Welcome to you all, to what most would call the incredibly long overdue marriage of Hiroshi Sato and Simon Rafferty, two wonderful men I have come to know, who both have overcome so many challenges, heartaches, and fear, to finally stand before you all today to exchange their vows of holy matrimony…”

As the minister continued Asami looked back at Kya. Both women had tears streaming down their faces, and Kya reached forward to squeeze her hand. She gripped it in gratitude, then turned her attention back to her father. His face was filled with wonder, as if he still couldn’t believe that this was actually happening. Simon’s eyes twinkled warmly at him, the blush on his cheeks belying his age.

“Do you Simon, take this man as your lawfully wedded husband?”

“I do.” Simon’s normally deep voice was high with emotion, and out of the corner of her eye she saw most of the audience starting to sniffle.

“Do you Hiroshi, take this man as our lawfully wedded husband?”

“I do.” Hiroshi’s voice cracked as he bit back a sob.

The minister turned to Korra. “The rings, please.”
Asami grinned as saw Korra fumble in her pocket before whipping out the velvet box in triumph to the general amusement of the audience.

“Hiroshi, with this ring, I thee wed.”

Asami handed over the second ring before her gaze was captured again by the reverence she saw reflected in Korra’s cerulean blue eyes. Her breath caught in her throat.

“Simon, with this ring, I thee wed.”

Asami gripped Kya’s hand even more tightly as the minister gave her final benediction. She felt at that moment between Korra’s loving gaze, the minister’s beautiful words, and Kya’s hand gripped tightly in her own, that it was as if the last weight of her past was falling away; the pain caused by years of silence, and secrets, and painful repression, was now healed. Her family had finally found their salvation.

“…Ladies and Gentlemen, I present Hiroshi and Simon Rafferty-Sato!”

The clear ring of a steel fork against a crystal glass quieted the room. Korra stood nervously with a microphone in her hand, looking out at the expectant faces seated around the heavily decorated dining room of Sato Grill. Jinora caught her eye and gave her a thumb’s up, smiling. She took a deep breath and raised the microphone.

“This is a special night,” said Korra, looking around with a grin. “Not sure what the hell Simon was thinking when he asked me to do this but he did so he gets what’s coming to him.”

A chuckle washed over the room.

“I met Simon because I met Hiroshi, and I met Hiroshi because I met Asami, the greatest human being on the planet,” Korra began. “Possibly the universe.”

Asami flushed and ducked her head as Opal poked her amidst more laughter.

Korra’s face became more serious. “Everyone here knows the story of Simon and Hiroshi. They grew up in a time far less forgiving of people who were different, of those who marched to their own drum, or who danced to their own song. I don’t think I could have handled those circumstances with the same amount of grace and courage that he has shown his whole life.” She looked over to where Simon sat clutching Hiroshi’s hand, tears once again in his pale blue eyes. “In the time that I have known him I have felt grateful for his wisdom, his kindness, his generosity, but most of all for the way he makes Hiroshi and Asami smile.” Then she smirked, and raised an eyebrow at Hiroshi. “It doesn’t hurt that he’s a handsome hunk of love, you lucky, lucky boy, Hiroshi.”

More laughter washed through the room and Hiroshi sputtered in shock as Asami collapsed against him in laughter.

“We are all blessed for these lovely men in our life,” Korra announced, holding up her glass. “May we have them with us for many long years to come. To Simon and Hiroshi!”

“Cheers!” The room roared in approval.
Korra sat down and blew a kiss at the two blushing men, both of them shaking their heads ruefully at her. “I will be thinking of a sufficient response to this, Chef Korra, just you wait,” Simon threatened with a grin.

“Ha, I’ll be waiting.” Korra stuck out her tongue at him, then watched as Asami rose gracefully from her chair. She pressed a kiss to her father’s head and then accepted the microphone from the DJ. The crowd settled down again in anticipation.

“A year ago I would not have imagined this day,” she said, her eyes bright. “I would not have imagined that my father and I would ever be able to rebuild our relationship into something so amazing, sometimes I wonder if I’m dreaming.” She smiled at her father and he blew her a kiss, his face filled with love. “And even better once I got to know him again I was introduced to Simon, one of the great loves of his life that previously he was kept from. I feel incredibly privileged to have come to know Simon and the truly wonderful man that he is. I am so pleased to call him my new dad.” She paused, turning her smile to Simon as he brought his hand to his chest, tears streaking his cheeks. Korra saw the knuckles on her hand whiten as she gripped the microphone more tightly and took a deep breath. She glanced at her father, then her gaze fell on Kya, sitting nearby with Lin’s arm wrapped around her. “The other love of my father’s life was my mother Yasuko, his best friend, but it took me a long time to realize that was true. Looking back, I now can see his lifelong devotion to her, and I know that wherever she may be now, she is also looking down at them and blessing both of these wonderful men with the boundless love I knew her to possess, as she blesses all of us and inspires us to reach past our perceived limitations and live our lives as fully as we can.” She took another deep breath and steadied herself as Hiroshi leaned against Simon, crying quietly. “I am so grateful that my father and Simon have finally achieved their happy ending, and I wish them the very best from the bottom of my heart.”

Hiroshi pushed himself up, still sobbing, and threw his arms around Asami. After a moment Kya joined them, and they clung to each other as the surrounding crowd rose to a standing ovation. Korra whistled loudly, her own cheeks damp from the emotion. “Damn, this is amazing as always, Chef,” Korra moaned around her mouthful of Kobe beef and seared scallops — Asami’s version of Surf ‘n Turf.

Asami and her staff had spent days planning the menu, and then to everyone’s shock Asami had brought in Kuvira Beifong to oversee the catering so the Grill’s senior cooking staff could all attend the wedding. It was a essentially a final employment interview, she explained later to Korra, as she had kept in touch with the young chef after the show and had in fact helped mediate her reunion with the rest of the Beifong clan. Su and Lin had been ecstatic to welcome her back, and Opal was enjoying getting reacquainted with the adopted sister she hadn’t seen since she was a kid. Asami herself planned on cutting back her hours at the restaurant and she needed someone like Kuvira as another sous chef along with Kai after promoting Opal to co-executive chef of Sato Grill. Korra had been beside herself with excitement at the thought of more free time with Asami and they spent most of that night ‘celebrating’ at their newly renovated home before sheepishly helping clean up the kitchen the following day with much teasing and ribald commentary from Jinora and Wu.
“After seeing you and Simon the night he first came to the Grill, it was pretty clear I needed something like this on the menu,” replied Asami, spearing a bacon glazed brussell sprout. “However, the Cherry Duck Bombs were all Opal, and Kya of course did the wedding cake.” She pointed at the far wall to where a four-tier wedding cake rose in stupendous glory, Hiroshi and Simon recreated in whimsical fondant as cake toppers.

Bolin popped another Bomb into his mouth, a strip of duck filet wrapped around a liquor soaked cherry and coated in panko. His face was blissful as he chewed. “I swear this is the best thing I’ve ever had ever,” he mumbled.

Opal laughed. “I’m glad, honey. Perhaps something for the Grill’s menu, Asami?”

Asami nodded and smiled. “Your menu now, Chef. Do as you will.”

Kai lifted his glass in salute of his friend. “To Executive Chef Opal!”

“Cheers!”

“Sit, Pabu! Sit! Pabu, sit!” Bolin kneeled next to his puppy and dangled the treat over his head. Opal rolled her eyes as the puppy flopped over and exposed his tummy, his tongue lolling out the side of this mouth. “Oh well, have a treat anyway.”

Pabu swallowed the treat whole then leaped into Bolin’s arms and covered his face with slobbering dog kisses.

“You better take a shower if you expect me to ever kiss you again,” said Opal wryly. “Also, I think you need some help with this whole dog training thing.”

Bolin ignored her and crooned at the puppy in his arms. “Such a good boy, aren’t you Pabu? You’re the best dog ever.”

Jinora giggled from where she lounged with her own puppy, Xena, sleeping blissfully on her lap. “Sorry Opal, you’re just doomed.”

Opal sighed and looked over at where Korra stood at the grill basting her ribs and zucchini halves; it was her and Asami’s turn to host their family’s new tradition of Monday Night Feasting. Last week had been skewer-your-own-kabob’s at Opal and Bolin’s new house out by the beach that Bolin had insisted moving to so Pabu would have more room to romp. The week before had been Kai’s excellent coq a vin at his apartment with Jinora making some wickedly strong cocktail recipes she had picked up from Madison. The bartender was currently on a road trip with her new puppy, Bouncer, but was expected back at the next Feast.

Kya joined them on the patio, a pitcher of sangria in her hand. She was followed by Simon carrying a tray of glasses.

“Lin and Hiroshi are still fussing over the peach cobbler. I of course was not allowed to participate in this discussion,” she said drily.

Asami snorted from her perch in the hammock. “Heaven forbid a pastry chef having an opinion on peach cobbler,” she agreed. She accepted Kya’s offer of a glass of sangria and sipped in
contentment.

The doorbell rang.

“What the hell? Who rings the doorbell?” Korra closed the lid and headed for the front door. As she approached the front of the warehouse she heard angry shouting and sped up, throwing open the door to a tense scene.

“—throwing your life away with this nonsense!”

Wu stood stiffly with his back to Korra’s door. Mako stood next to him, one hand pressed against the small of Wu’s back.

“And you!” A well-coiffed older woman stood flanked by two heavily muscled and impassive men in matching black suits and sunglasses. She pointed angrily at Mako. “You have dragged my son into your filthy lifestyle!”

Mako started to take one menacing step forward but stopped at Wu’s hand against his chest. Korra heard footsteps hurrying up behind her; the shouting had apparently reached the patio.

“Don’t you dare talk to him like that, and I am not going with you. Not ever, Mother!” Wu shouted. Korra blinked.

“That’s Hou-Ting Wong?” Asami whispered, having just arrived.

“Guess so,” Korra whispered back. “She looks sorta… severe.”

“It is your duty!” Hou-Ting Wong shrieked. Her bun was started to unravel as she gesticulated wildly. “You are an ungrateful son!”

Wu slid his fingers into Mako’s defiantly. “You spent my entire life telling me I was worthless, that your precious nephew Chen was better than me.” He looked back, and his face lit up when he saw the crowd piled in the doorway behind him. He stood even taller as he turned back to his mother. “Well, I have made my own way, and that doesn’t include your stupid restaurants and sucking at the triad tit. And by the way, he’s a total loser and you deserve each other!”

Korra burst out in laughter, joined by the rest of the crowd. Wu’s mother turned red with rage, and she screamed in rapid Chinese at her two escorts. They nodded and moved towards Wu. Instantly Mako shoved Wu behind him, pushed his suit jacket open and smoothly pulled out his gun, his gold detective’s badge gleaming in the streetlight.

“Don’t do anything you’re going to regret,” he growled, his voice dripping menace.

The two men stopped and raised their hands in surrender.

“I don’t believe you’ve been invited this party,” Korra called out, her voice filled with glee. “Mako, Wu, you guys coming? Ribs are just about done.”

The men gently pushed their fuming boss into her limo, her angry sputtering shut off by the slam of the door.

As the car drove away, Wu whirled and leapt into Mako’s arms, kissing him deeply. “You are fucking hot,” he exclaimed once they broke apart to catch their breath.

Mako blushed but pulled Wu even closer. “And you’re amazing.”
“Awwwwwwww,” chorused everyone watching. Mako blinked, then grinned, not loosening his grip.

Bolin sniffed loudly.

“Gawd, you guys are giving me cavities,” called out Jinora, grinning with pride at Wu’s showdown. “Come on, people, I’m hungry.”

Asami caught Korra as she turned to follow the crowd back into the warehouse and pulled her close. “I love you,” she murmured.

Korra brushed a soft kiss against crimson lips. “And I adore you immensely, but what brought this on?”

“Since I met you, the world has become a better place, everywhere.”

Korra ducked her head. “That’s not me. Everybody finds their own path.”

“Well, for people like me and Wu” Asami kissed her again, her tongue caressing Korra’s before breaking apart again. “You helped us find our path, and helped us find the strength to follow it.”

Korra shook her head. “I’m a mess of flaws welded to good intentions, just like everybody else.”

Asami smiled as she captured Korra’s lips again. “Those welds look good on you, babe.” They shared one last kiss before Asami pulled Korra through the door. “Come on. Your ribs are going to be overcooked.”

“Shush, they are not.”

They closed the door behind them, heading back to the patio, their huge, crazy, family, and a whole load of love.

Chapter End Notes

I'm a sucker for closing out all story lines (I think I got them all). I'm also a sucker for redemption arcs, and I'm feeling really pleased that my little chefs (and chef's assistants) are on their way to their own individual happy endings. I'm going to miss my little Foodiverse, but I hope I brought you all joy, and made you really hungry.

:)

Should you feel so inspired, City of Lights is still in progress, R.A.a.V.A. Part II is coming along in the next couple of months, and a few one shots are pending this summer. I may also be branching out into other fandoms just to see what happens - after over a dozen LOK fics that well is starting to run a little dry. However, prompts and requests are of course considered (City of Light is reader requested, e.g.) so send me any thoughts in PMs or at my tumblr:
http://oldvelvet95.tumblr.com/

Happy reading!
Chapter 30

In case you didn't see it, check out Appetizers from the Foodiverse, *a series of one shots about our favorite chefs, bartenders, cops, dogs, and the rest of the sundry cast of characters from the San Francisco food scene*...

:)

Please [drop by the archive and comment](https://example.com) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!