**the last dragon**

by thesometimeswarrior

Summary

He thinks it is dawn when they come for him.

Ozai takes things a step further. There are things Iroh regrets never having said.

Inspired by: *our curse* by ohmygodwhy

Notes

This is essentially a fic of another fic: ao3 user ohmygodwhy's beautiful (and sad) piece *our curse*, though this can be read without having read that.

ohmygodwhy was generous enough to let me play around with it, and get into Iroh's head and up the angst factor. (So the couple lines of direct dialogue here are from that.)

You should definitely go check that fic out if you haven't, because it's seriously one of the most beautiful pieces on this entire website. (It's a bit longer than this, and from Zuko's pov.) Please read it!

See the end of the work for more notes

- Inspired by *our curse* by ohmygodwhy
You have no window, so you cannot say for sure, but you are awake when they come for you, have only just awoken, and you have always risen with the sun.

It’s dawn, you think.

The guards say nothing. But you do not need them to. You see the type of chains that they are carrying, have witnessed your fair share of court-martials and presided over the occasional sentencing, have lived in this Nation in wartime for sixty years, and that’s enough to know what they mean.

You do not rise. When they enter your cell, pace to the thin bedroll where you lay, and lift you to your feet, you do not resist, but you do not help them. Your body is a limp object in their grip; if they are to do this, they must exert the effort. You will not assist.

You are surprised and think that perhaps you shouldn’t be. Ozai has never looked kindly on traitors, and you have betrayed what he thinks your country is twice now (and more, though he doesn’t know it), though only once by outright attacking his daughter, his (your) son. The Avatar escaped. You pray to Agni that the Avatar is alive.

You are not ashamed.

They remove your shoes (bare feet are so much more flammable, and that makes it simpler), cuff your ankles and your wrists, lock your hands inside the metal cylinders (one cannot burn through steel; trying only makes it hotter, burns the hands more quickly).

They reach for a steel muzzle, and for an instant you do not understand—you have never seen this before—and then you realize: your reputation precedes you. You are the Dragon of the West, can breathe like the ones who taught you Firebending, and the whole country knows it, even if they don’t know how you learned. Safer, simpler for your mouth to be shut behind metal. They strap it closed on your face.

You are not ashamed.

They grip your arms, begin to walk you from the cell, from the prison. You are not ashamed.

You are not ashamed, but you think of him, of his pleading I’m losing my mind! Please, Uncle, I’m so confused, I need your help, of his anger Forget it! I’ll solve this myself! Waste away in here for all I care, of his fear. You think of Ba Sing Se, of his smile It’s a new day; things are looking up, Uncle, of your back to him as he pleaded, of your silence. He did not see your tears. He does not know, you think, that he has your forgiveness, has always had your forgiveness. You should have told him, you should have told him…

You arrive at the courtyard, and they walk you to the center, place your feet on the prepared pile of wood, attach your hand and leg cuffs to the metal post. Ozai is there, watching from on high, as are the most honored nobles and generals. You look at none of them.

You should have told him.

Someone bends, ignites the wood. You feel the fire on the soles of your feet, as it begins to wrap around your toes, your heels, your ankles. You do not scream, and wouldn’t even if your mouth were not restrained.
You should have told him.

You do not scream, but someone does. “Uncle!”

You look up, and there he is, wriggling in the guards’ grasps. “Stop! What are you doing?! Please, you have to stop!”

You relax, smile even. He is here, you can tell him. Except you can’t, your mouth is restrained, hidden behind the muzzle.

So you catch his eyes with yours, smile wider, hope he can see your dimples rise above the steel. You look at him, his eyes, think I love you, think I forgive you, I forgave you before we left Ba Sing Se--before we even left the catacombs, I love you, I love you, think I am so glad you are here—it means more than you know, I love you, goodbye, I love you...And you will him to understand, pray with everything you have left in you that he understands...

The fire is up to your chest now. He stands there, under the guards’ hands, looks directly at you. He is braver than you. You knew this already. But now again: when it had been him under flame, burning—even briefly—you looked away, a coward, a coward. But he does not look away. He stands, his eyes on you, doing you the dignity and the honor and the kindness of looking at you now. He is braver than you. And you are so thankful. And you are so proud.

And when, in that last moment, the water swells up in your eyes and you close them, when you turn your head from him and up toward the sky, you tell yourself your last lie: that the tears and the closed eyes and the looking away now are because of the flames rapidly rising on your neck.

You draw strength from his gaze.

Goodbye, you think again. I love you.

End Notes

I’m so sorry. Please don’t hate me too much.

I live for comments!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!