

If Only It Could Be.

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/32232388) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/32232388>.

Rating:	General Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Categories:	F/M , Gen
Fandom:	Avatar: The Last Airbender
Relationships:	Aang/Katara (Avatar) , Aang & Gyatso (Avatar) , Aang & Zuko (Avatar) , Aang & Toph Beifong , Aang & Katara (Avatar) , Mai/Zuko (Avatar) , Sokka/Yue (Avatar)
Characters:	Aang (Avatar) , Katara (Avatar) , Toph Beifong , Zuko (Avatar) , Gyatso (Avatar) , Jeong Jeong (Avatar) , Pasang (Avatar) , Original Characters , Original Female Character(s) , Original Male Character(s)
Additional Tags:	Alternate Universe - Modern with Bending (Avatar) , Air Nomads (Avatar) , Earth Kingdom (Avatar) , Fire Nation (Avatar) , Firelord Iroh (Avatar) , Air Temples (Avatar) , Aang (Avatar)-centric , Pansexual Aang (Avatar)
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2021-06-28 Updated: 2021-09-25 Words: 13,918 Chapters: 6/?

If Only It Could Be.

by [ur_local_aang_kinnie](#)

Summary

Modern AU.

When Aang began his training as the Avatar, he was forbidden from making relationships with others, for fear that the world would once more be threatened by the Avatars inability to choose between those they loved and the world they protected. However, even if it's against the rules set for him, Aang is desperate to have someone around he could talk to, just a friend was all he wanted! When he meets Katara, though, he discovers much more than friendship.

Notes

I genuinely have no idea how often I'm gonna update this fic but I'll try to update as often as I can! Sorry if it's inconsistent tho :/

Also this is more of a prologue than a real chapter but whatever

Reminiscing.

five years ago...

Aang's whole body shook like a leaf as he sat in his room, unsure whether it was because of the cold winter air that was blowing in through his window, or because of how nervous he was. At thirteen, Aang had traveled just as much as any other Air nomad would have at his age. He'd seen the bustling city of Omashu in the Earth Kingdom and the flower lined streets of Caldera in the Fire Nation. He'd been to Agna Qel'a and seen the water roads- and now he was going back. Normally, he'd be excited for a trip, even if it was to a place he'd been before, but tonight? He couldn't be. He wasn't.

They'd taken practically everything from him already, and now they were taking him from his home? Gyatso was the last thing he had left, and Aang wasn't even allowed to stay with him. He felt tears sting at his eyes as he thought about everything he'd lost, just in the past few months. The Elder Monks had cut off his contact with Bumi and Kuzon, they'd refused to let him eat his meals or train with the other novice monks, they'd even moved him into a different room, far away from the other kids at the monastery. Now, Aang slept next to the Elder monks in one of the guest rooms they reserved for the rare occasion that an important adult would visit the monastery.

'That's what they think of me,' Aang suddenly thought, the realization hitting him like a punch in the stomach. *'They think I'm an adult!'* Aang stood up, suddenly feeling very angry. His thirteenth birthday had only been two months ago! The fact that Aang had gotten his mastery tattoos didn't make him an adult! The fact that he was the Avatar didn't make him an adult! He was a child! He was just a normal kid, why didn't they understand that!?

Now Aang was crying, hard. The hot tears that poured down his face contrasted the swift rain that blew in from the window, but they did not serve any kind of comfort. He stood up, grabbing his staff. He rubbed his thumb across the wood, the smooth surface offering just a bit of familiarity, even as he felt like a stranger in the place he'd spent his whole life. As he looked at the window, a thought crossed his mind.

Appa was somewhere out there, past the rain and clouds, at the stables- resting among the other bison. It was cold and wet outside, but Aang really didn't care. *'If the elder monks are so convinced that I'm adult enough to go train in Water Bending at the North Pole all by myself that I'm sure they think I'll be just fine in a little storm...'* his fists clenched around his staff and even in the dark of night, Aang could tell his knuckles had paled. Aang took a step forward, careful not to slip on the wet ground. With each step, each movement, Aang felt heavier than he ever had before; as though a weight was dragging his foot back down to the wet floor each time he moved it. Just before he got to the window though, he heard the door open. Aang whipped around on instinct, only to see Gyatso, standing there looking concerned and gentle as he often did when Aang was frustrated with his circumstances (which was often). The old man wasn't wearing his sleepwear, which Aang found a bit strange considering how late it was, but looking down at himself, he remembered that he hadn't bothered to change out of his acolyte robes either. *'Oh.'*

"Aang?" Gyatso asked softly, taking a step forward and closing the door behind him. He spoke in the Southern Air Temple dialect, as he often did with Aang. The other elders all spoke the Ba Sing Se dialect of Earth Kingdom speak, since that was what most people considered to be the universal language. *'Aang needs to learn it faster, as the Avatar he needs to be able to communicate with all people,'* they had decided, so now the only time Aang ever got to speak his native tongue was with Gyatso. "Were you going somewhere?"

Aang paused for a moment, but when he went to answer, he couldn't. All that came out was a pathetic whimper before the boy couldn't hold back the flood gates anymore and started sobbing uncontrollably. Just as his knees gave out, though, Gyatso rushed forward, catching Aang with one swift movement.

"I- Gyatso-" Aang tried to find the words but they wouldn't form correctly in his mouth, leaving him with no way to explain himself through his tears. Gyatso didn't seem to mind though.

"I was just coming to tell you," the elder monk said softly, guiding Aang towards the bed so that they could both sit down. "the other elders and I had..." he paused for a moment, trying to find the words. "A late night meeting, so to speak. I convinced them that, since you're so young and you're starting your training earlier than most Avatars did, you should be allowed to have your guardian with you to help you through the process," Aang's head shot up, his eyes wide and excited. "So, tomorrow morning, when you leave for the North Pole, I'll be coming with you," Gyatso smiled down at his pupil, who just barely managed to smile back.

"...Thank you..." Aang said quietly, burying his face in Gyatso's robes. He didn't feel any less upset, really, but at least he wouldn't be alone.

four years ago...

After just over a year, Aang had mastered Water Bending and moved on to Earth Bending. Gyatso and his student had moved from the Northern Water Tribe to Gaoling, where they would begin Aang's training in Earth Bending.

"Earth is your opposite element, Aang," Gyatso had said on the way there, looking back at Aang from his position at the Bison's reigns. The two were riding on the back of Gyatso's bison, Gonpo, meanwhile Appa was following close behind. "I don't want you to expect that you will pick up the element of Earth as fast as you did Water," the older man released the reigns before moving over to where Aang sat on the Bison's saddle.

"I know," Aang replied, fidgeting with the marbles he kept in his pocket. "I just wish we could have gone to Omashu instead of Gaoling so I could have learned with Bumi..." he sighed, placing the toys back inside his shirt. Gyatso furrowed his brow, and Aang was unsure whether it was out of disappointment or pity.

"Aang, you know you aren't allowed to contact Prince Bumi, at least not until you're done with your training," Aang resisted the urge to roll his eyes, knowing these words all too well from when the other monks had said the same thing. "I know it's difficult for you, and if I could allow you to see him I would but if I did that-"

"They would try to separate us again," Aang continued solemnly.

"Not just try," Gyatso replied softly. He gave his pupil a supportive pat on the shoulder before moving back to his place on Gonpo's head. The two didn't talk much for the rest of the ride.

...

"Your stance is awful," Aang jumped at the sudden voice behind him, his heart beat racing. It was late, the sun had long since left its position in the sky. The boy had only wanted to practice on his own for a few more hours- just to try one more time to move the stupid rock he'd been given. The stone was just small enough to hold in his hand, and he could throw it just fine, but moving it with Earth Bending seemed impossible. As he turned around, he was confronted by a girl, maybe half a foot shorter than he was. Her hair was cropped fairly short to her face, but she had two buns on each side of her head, kept in place by two green hair bands. She wore what looked to be boys clothes- an emerald sweatshirt with the arms cut off, the center showing the symbol of Earth, along with a pair of brown shorts and green sneakers. The only light near by was a few lanterns that hung a few feet away from the courtyard where Aang was practicing, but even in the dim light, Aang got the impression that this girl was stronger than he was.

"W-who-how did-" He had so many questions, but before he could ask, the small girl jabbed him in the abdomen, causing him to fall back onto the concrete floor with a thud.

"See?" She tilted her head in amusement and disapproval. "You aren't grounding yourself right. In order to bend Earth, you have to be firmer than that," Aang pushed himself up off the ground with a puff of air. She didn't seem fazed by his use of Air Bending, instead, just coming behind him and roughly adjusting his posture. Aang cringed internally as she straightened his back and bent his knees more. "Holy shit, dude-" she laughed. "Your legs are shaking! How weak are you?!" As the girl continued to laugh, Aang looked down, and sure enough, his legs shook under his own weight. "You seriously need help," she crossed her arms.

"I..." Aang swallowed his pride, looking down. "I guess so. Could you...uh...help me out then...?" He smiled at her awkwardly, but as he went to make eye contact, he realized she was blind. She seemed to think it over, her brows furrowed as he tried his best not to fall over.

"I guess so," she shrugged. "You clearly need it. Meet me here every night at 10 Pm, you got that?" Aang shook his head yes- but before he could correct himself into speaking, she nodded back. "Good. I have to get back to my place before my parents realize I'm gone, but

you keep practicing your form until tomorrow and maybe we'll actually be able to do something with you," she snickered before walking off and out of the courtyard.

"W-wait!" Aang called after her, turning around and making his way towards her. "I'm Aang, by the way," he smiled awkwardly. She stopped, but didn't turn around. There was a pause before she replied, a slight smile on her face.

"I'm Toph," before Aang could reply, she used Earth Bending to vault herself over the wall that separated the house Aang and Gyatso had been given from the street outside. Aang smiled softly, grateful to have made a new friend- or at least something close to it.

two years ago...

Aang had been studying Fire Bending for one month now, and honestly he was enjoying it much more than he had Earth Bending. It had taken him two years to master his opposite element- an entire twelve months more than how long it had taken to master Water. Similarly to water, Aang found that the element of fire came much more naturally to him. It was fairly similar to Air Bending- just easier to lose control over. Aang's new master, Sifu Jeong Jeong, was difficult to work with- but sometimes Aang really did feel like he was the problem, not the older man who taught him. Aang was trying though- he really was! At least, now that Aang was getting older and, according to the Southern Temple's elders, 'more mature', they didn't monitor him as closely as they had his first and second years of training. So, Aang had managed to make a new friend- several in fact!

He'd been on his way back to the house he was sharing with Gyatso when he'd- quite literally - bumped into someone. He stumbled backwards, quite shaken up by the taller person's presence. "O-oh- shoot, I'm really sorry!" He laughed awkwardly, just barely having caught himself with his air bending.

"Oh- uh..." The person Aang had bumped into stuttered, clearly uncomfortable at having to talk to him. He looked older than Aang- probably by a few years. His skin was a slightly tanned color, his eyes a brilliant golden brown. Over the left side of his face, partially covered by his ebony hair, was a massive scar, stretching from his eyebrow to the bottom of his jaw. The eye that fell right in the center of the scar looked to be damaged, and probably blind. He looked a bit familiar, but Aang wasn't sure where from. He went to continue, but was cut off by a woman who stood next to him. She looked a bit younger, but nearly identical to the man next to her, making it fairly obvious that they were siblings- or at least related in some way.

"Watch where you're going next time, dumbass!" she was only a few inches taller than Aang, but her demeanor made her seem much taller, or maybe Aang was just feeling small in her presence. "Do you even know who we are?!"

"Uh..." Aang swallowed hard before answering. "N-no...? Sorry, I've only been staying here for a few months and I've spent most of that time training so..." he rubbed the back of his neck, silently hoping that he hadn't made any grave mistake by not knowing the identities of these strangers. The girl laughed, rolling her eyes.

"You're an Air Bender, why the hell would you be training for anything in the Fire Nation?" It was more of a rhetorical question, but Aang answered anyways, a slight smile creeping up onto his face.

"That's cause I'm the Avatar!" He grinned, but all four of the people he'd bumped into didn't seem to believe him, so he created a puff of fire in his palm to prove it. The girl looked surprised, just a bit, before mumbling something and walking off.

"Sorry about her," the man with the scar said. "that's my sister she's just...like that. I'm Zuko, by the way," he glanced over at the other two. "and this is Mai and Ty Lee," one of the girls, wearing a pink sweater and white skirt, waved excitedly, while the other, who wore all black said nothing. Suddenly, something clicked in Aang's mind and he connected the dots.

"Oh! I do know who you are- you're the crown prince aren't you?!" Aang grinned. Zuko flushed slightly and motioned for Aang to keep his voice down.

"Well don't say it so loud, people will freak out if they realize I'm here," Zuko frowned.

"Oh, sorry," Aang chuckled. "Well, I gotta get going, it was nice talking to you!" Zuko nodded, and followed after his sister, the other two girls following close behind him.

...

In the coming weeks, Aang nearly forgot about his encounter with the royal siblings and their friends- that was until Gyatso woke him up on one of the days he didn't have training to attend with the news that the two of them would be meeting with Fire Lord Iroh and Crown Prince Zuko. Apparently, Aang was being given approval by the other elders of the Southern Temple to make what they called '*formal acquaintances*' with the Fire Lord and Crown Prince, on account of the fact that once his training was done, he'd have to work with them on all sorts of political issues and such.

Later, as they were preparing to leave for the meeting, Aang heard Gyatso talking on the phone. He probably wouldn't have noticed, but for a moment he thought Gyatso was trying to talk to him, since he was speaking in the Southern Temple's dialect. He didn't mean to eavesdrop, he knew it was rude, but once he realized he was on the phone with another one of the elders, he also knew they were talking about him. '*Nothing more than acquaintances, Gyatso*' Aang had heard one of the other monks (he assumed Pasang) say on the other line.

"I know, but-" Gyatso tried to argue, but was shut down immediately.

'There can be no exceptions, Gyatso. Have you already forgotten what happened the last time an Avatar became too attached to individual mortals? We cannot let this happen again,' now Aang was confused. What did they mean by that?

"Pasang, you have to understand," Gyatso was starting to sound more desperate as he debated with his colleague. "Aang is so desperate to have a real friend, I've spent his whole life with him and it's all he's ever wanted! I know that you're worried but you and I both know Aang will want to get closer with the Prince," Gyatso sighed quietly.

'Then stop him,' with that, Pasang hung up, and Aang hurried back to his own room, pretending to adjust his formal wear in the mirror as he thought about what he'd heard.

Even with Gyatso's half-hearted attempts to stop them, and Zuko's slight aversion to social situations, Aang and Zuko became very close. Zuko gifted his new friend a cell phone in secret, one of the fancy ones made in the Fire Nation, so that they could talk as much as they wanted. Gyatso pretended not to notice the bright light of the phone from underneath Aang's sheets when he was supposedly "asleep", and he stayed quiet while Aang talked with his new friend on the phone for hours. Gyatso wasn't a stupid man- he knew what had happened to his dear friend all those years ago, and he knew that the other monks just wanted to protect him- to protect the world. At the same time, though, Gyatso saw Aang as his own son. He saw the boy for who he was as a person, not just as the Avatar, and as a person, Gyatso knew Aang needed real friendship in his life.

now...

Aang stood in front of his mirror anxiously. After a full year of spiritual training at the Eastern Air Temple, Aang was finally considered a fully realized Avatar. Now, he was about to have his first public appearance with that title. It would be the first time the world would see him- the first time the press was allowed to speak with him and take pictures of him. He'd get to meet all the world leaders from every nation that he'd spent so much time being prepared to talk to.

"And maybe," Aang said softly to himself. "if I'm lucky, the elders will let me make some new friends," he smiled, just a bit, before leaving his room to go find Gyatso.

If only he could have known...

New Beginnings.

Chapter Summary

Aang presents himself to the world as the Avatar.

Chapter Notes

sorry this is so short ghfkjsgfj

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

"Oh, Aang..." Gyatso looked over his student proudly, walking towards him. "you've grown up so much," the older man was now just a few inches shorter than his pupil, and Aang had grown into a young adult. At 18 years old, he had grown to be 5 feet and ten inches, and after five years of training his body was muscular and lean. Aang still kept his head shaved, as nearly all Air Nomad men did, showing off his arrows proudly.

Gyatso leaned forward and adjusted the collar to Aang's shirt. It was made from satin and bison wool, providing a silky exterior and a warmer interior. The tailor had told Aang he would need it, since the ceremony at which he would be presented would be held in the South Poles capital city. Aang's shirt was long, reaching down to his knees in full length. The outside was a bright orangey-yellow, the shade of a ripe mango. It was decorated with clouds and swirls, the clasps that held it together a shimmery white. He wore a set of pants underneath that matched the same design, and draped over his shoulder was a darker red shawl. It was a more traditional addition to the rather modern outfit. Darker reds were a symbol of importance and power in Air Nomad culture. They were usually only worn by temple elders, and even then, were only worn on special occasions. Around his neck, he wore a set of mala beads made specifically for him. At four different placements on the necklace sat the symbols of the four elements, each one sitting proudly upon his shoulders and chest.

"You look nervous," Gyatso commented, placing a hand on his pupils upper arm. Aang laughed a bit, looking away.

"Anyone would be," he replied, running a hand over his freshly shaven head. He knew that was a bad habit, that touching the freshly shaven skin was a bad idea and could lead to acne and other obnoxious things, but he didn't care. He liked how it felt against his hand. "I'm about to meet..." he paused for a moment. "Pretty much the whole world. Isn't this being aired on television?" Aang grimaced at the thought of that many people watching him, all across the globe. "It's been a long time since the world has had an Air Nomad Avatar- not since

Yangchen. I have to represent our people too," Aang sighed. Gyatso was quite for a moment before he replied.

"Aang," Gyatso said softly. "Do you remember your tattoo ceremony?" Aang nodded.

"How could I forget, I can still feel the pain if I think about it hard enough," Gyatso laughed, and slowly, Aang did the same.

"That's not what I meant," Gyatso continued. "I mean, the ceremony itself. There were just under one thousand people there," Aang thought about it for a moment.

"I guess there were..." He said slowly. "Aren't there usually way less than that...?" Gyatso nodded.

"Yes, there usually are, but at that point we already knew you were the Avatar because of your toy ceremony, so there were representatives from other temples there as well. It was quite an exciting moment for us," Gyatso smiled. "but that's not my point either. My point is that we have been preparing you for this very day since you were a toddler. It will be no different from your tattoo ceremony, really," he smiled, and after a moment Aang smiled back. "Your tattoos are made up of thousands of tiny pricks, and each one has a prayer embedded into it, prayers written thousands of years ago. As the Avatar, you carry the legacy of every Avatar who came before you. However, as an Air Nomad, you also carry with you every Air Nomad who has ever had those prayers bestowed on them as well. You carry them with you and they will guide you- I can promise you that," Gyatso paused, and went to say something else, but he was cut off by someone entering the room. Both Air Benders turned, only to find a young woman, dressed in the armor of a Southern Water Tribe Guard.

"I hate to interrupt," she said, bowing her head in respect. "but it's been requested that the Avatar prepare to be presented," she quickly ducked out after that, and Gyatso turned to Aang once more.

"You're going to do great, Aang," the older man beamed up at the boy, who smiled back as he enveloped his master in a hug. With that, Aang left, making his way out of the room and toward the doors that led to the stage that sat towards the end of the venue the event would be hosted in. Aang hadn't seen it all too well, but he knew it was a fairly large building. He remembered the guard who was showing them around mentioning it being a community center, but Aang hadn't gotten much other information before being rushed off to prepare. The architecture was beautiful, though. Before arriving, Aang had assumed it would be nearly identical to the Northern Water Tribe, but so far it was actually very different. He'd been hoping he would be allowed to stay in the South Pole a little longer- it's not like there was any dire emergency that the Avatar would be needed for just yet. Besides, he liked it here. He could probably convince the elders to let him stay, but only if he spends most of his time training and studying. Aang sighed, unsure whether that was a sacrifice he was willing to make.

Aang nearly walked right into the large door at the end of the hallway, but he caught himself just in time to stop. He was beginning to understand what the elder monks had told him about thinking too much. Aang sighed and pressed his ear against the door. He could hear people out there- probably a lot. He swallowed hard, pulling out the folded up piece of paper that

held his speech. He unfolded it carefully, trying his best to smooth out the words with his fingers. Some of the Elder Monks at the temple had tried to insist he let one of them write the speech for him, but Aang had declined, insisting that he write it himself. After all, this was his first address to the public as a fully realized Avatar, he wanted what he said tonight to be taken seriously. He wanted to be honest, too. Being the Avatar wasn't a job he wanted, nor necessarily one he enjoyed, but it wasn't a title he held lightly either. Aang understood that the world had put its trust in him- and now it was time to show them that he was ready to fulfill his duties.

"I think they're nearly ready for you, Avatar Aang," one of the guards standing next to the door had commented. Aang nearly jumped at the sound of the older man's voice. He hadn't even noticed the guards were there.

"O-oh, thank you," Aang replied, smiling awkwardly at him. The guard remained stoic, but nodded. Aang felt the earpiece in his pocket vibrate as sound went through it. 'Shit...' he thought, quickly taking it out of his pocket and tucking it into his ear. He had nearly forgotten about that. He'd gotten it on just in time to hear one of the technicians working on the event explain that the doors would open in ten seconds. Aang felt the blood drain out of his face as the countdown began.

ten...

He could hear someone outside the door, talking, seemingly finishing up a speech.

nine...

It sounded like the guests were getting antsy.

eight...

Aang's hands were shaking and no matter what he did they wouldn't stop. He could feel sweat pooling up around his palms and his forehead so he quickly wiped it away with his sleeve.

seven...

He bit his tongue, trying to keep away the intrusive thoughts that were beginning to flood his mind, but all that did was let loose a slight metallic taste into his mouth- blood. He cringed, deciding to try and find a different way to calm himself.

six...

Aang hadn't realized how hungry he was. He hoped they would have food at this event, he wasn't certain he'd make it all the way through if they didn't.

five...

'*Halfway there...*' Aang took a deep breath, trying to center himself the way he'd been taught during his training.

four...

The door he stood in front of suddenly felt much larger. Aang stepped back on instinct, but it didn't help much.

three...

Aang's heart rate sped up, and he felt his face heat up just a bit. He hadn't had a real panic attack in a few years, but now the only thing keeping him from having another one was the air Aang was bending around his finger tips- something he'd always done to help calm his anxiety.

two...

"Here we go..." Aang whispered to himself, taking another deep breath in.

one...

The doors swung open, cascading Aang in a flash of light. It took every ounce of strength Aang had not to shield himself from the blinding light of flashing cameras, but he managed (just barely). He smiled at the crowd, giving a respectful wave as he walked towards the podium, just as he had been instructed to do. There weren't as many people there as Aang had thought there would be, and he was grateful for that, but there were still a lot of people there. He only recognized some of them, though. One of the people he didn't recognize made eye contact with him, which he held for a few moments. She was probably of Southern Water Tribe nationality, and she smiled at him as he stood there. She was pretty- Aang hoped he would be able to talk to her at some point before the night ended.

The crowd clapped as he stepped up to the podium, and the press (or at least who Aang assumed to be the press) continued to take pictures as he prepared his speech, placing the paper on the surface and flattening it out. As the clapping began to die down, Aang began to speak.

"My name is Aang- Avatar Aang," his voice was calm and firm, but not aggressive. Or, at least he hoped it was. He also was hoping the crowd couldn't see how much he was shaking from where they were seated. He'd never called himself that before- he just realized. But, he supposed, now wasn't the time for considerations like that. Now, he had to present himself to the world and fulfill his destiny- or at least part of it.

Chapter End Notes

I didn't feel like writing out the speech lmao my bad

Connections.

Chapter Summary

Katara and Aang have their first real conversation.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Once he'd finished his speech, Aang immediately felt nauseous. Not nauseous enough to throw up, and hopefully not nauseous enough that any of the world leaders in the crowd noticed, but enough to feel a slight bit of discomfort. He wasn't sure exactly what brought it on, whether it be anxiety or something else, but either way, it was quite distracting.

After the crowd finished clapping for him, a group of Earth Benders bent away the chairs, exchanging them for two large tables on either side of the room. Immediately, groups of workers began filing out of doors on either side of the walls Aang hadn't even realized were there, stocking up the tables with as much food as they could. Aang had been so bewildered by this display he hadn't even realized Gyatso had been calling him to get off the stage and come talk to some of the others who were there at the event. Aang felt his face flush once he realized and quickly followed after his mentor.

"Did I..uh..did I do okay...?" Aang asked Gyatso, who was standing with the other Air Nomad representatives from each temple. Aang had met all of them at some point or another, although the only ones he had ever really spent much time with to were, of course, Monk Gyatso, and Sister Lio, who had helped him during his spiritual training at the Eastern Air Temple.

"You did great, Aang," Gyatso said with a smile, pulling his student in for another hug. Aang accepted gladly, burying his face in Gyatso's robes. Even though the other people in the venue were talking among themselves, and music had begun to play at some point, Aang could still feel nearly everyone's eyes on him. He did his best to ignore the feeling, even as he pulled away from his mentors embrace.

"We're so proud of you, Aang," Monk Tsewang said softly. Aang had only met Monk Tsewang a few times, most of those from when he was a little boy, but he remembered that the older man was the head monk of the Northern Air Temple, and that he was blind in his left eye because of some incident that happened when Aang was a baby. He'd always been curious about that, especially about the burn scar Aang had always seen just barely coming out from underneath the older man's eye patch, but he'd never dared to ask.

"Thank you, for everything," Aang smiled at them all. "You being here means the world to me, really," Aang sighed, running a hand over his head and glancing out at the crowd, most

of whom quickly looked away before his eyes could meet theirs. "By the way, how long are we staying here? In the South Pole I mean."

"We're all staying for one week, then you and Gyatso will move on to Ba Sing Se for a more proper meeting with some of the other world leaders you'll meet tonight," answered Sister Yin. She was second in command to Sister Yangsto, who was the official head of the Western Air Temple. Sister Yangsto was sick, from what Aang had heard, and wasn't able to make it to the ceremony, so Sister Yin had come in her place. Sister Yin was the youngest out of all four by far. At about thirty two, she was the youngest member of the head monastic councils out of any of the temples. Aang had spent some time with her as a child, in fact he was pretty sure she had babysat him and some of the other kids before she had even gotten her mastery tattoos yet. "In the mean time, we agreed to let you take a break, have some free time, you know?" Sister Yin grinned at him and Aang grinned back.

"Really?!" Aang's face lit up like a child.

"Of course," Sister Lio said with a smile. "You've been working so hard these past years, you deserve a little break."

"Especially since Pasang isn't here to stop us," Sister Yin giggled.

"Yin, that was uncalled for!" Monk Tsewang berated her, hitting her across the arm as he tried to hide his own laughs.

"Aang," Gyatso said after a moment. "It's been lovely to talk to you, but it looks like there's someone else who would like to speak to you, so we will finish catching up later, you go have fun with your..." Gyatso caught himself just before he said the word *'friends'*. There was an unspoken rule that anyone Aang knew wasn't allowed to be referred to as a *'friend'* of his. After all, as the Avatar, Aang wasn't even allowed to have a romantic partner, let alone any platonic connections besides those made with his mentors and bending sifu's (and even those were on thin ice). Before Gyatso could finish finding the right word, Aang tuned around to find Zuko standing there awkwardly, as he often did, fidgeting with his hairpiece.

"Zuko!" Aang exclaimed, swiftly making his way over to the older boy. Aang opened his arm to hug the Fire Prince, but seeing Zuko wasn't particularly interested, he backed off. "It's so good to see you, I was worried you wouldn't be here." Aang grinned, and Zuko nodded, which Aang had learned over the years was Zuko's way of saying he was happy to see you. Zuko had always been like that- quiet and terrible at communication. For a bit, Aang was worried that Zuko just didn't like him, but after a while he learned that was just how Zuko was.

"It's good to see you too," Zuko replied as the two boys started walking towards one of the food tables. "You did pretty good tonight, I kind of thought you'd end up chickening out but you didn't. Good job," Zuko teased, a slight smirk on his face. Aang pouted playfully, crossing his arms as they walked.

"You're so mean to me," Aang said in mock-hurt. The two boys laughed at each other before Aang changed the subject. "Is your sister here tonight?"

"Yeah, she is," Zuko nodded. "I'm not sure exactly where she is, though. She didn't really want to come. Mai isn't here though, I couldn't convince the Fire Sages to let me bring her with me on the trip since she isn't technically part of the royal family yet," Zuko huffed in frustration.

"I'm sure you'll survive not being attached at the hip to your girlfriend for five minutes, Zuko," Aang snickered. The two reached the food table, but just as they did, Zuko went pale. His golden eyes were wide, fixated on someone behind Aang, who was also seemingly standing near the table. Before Aang could ask what was wrong, Zuko changed the subject.

"I...I have to go, we can talk later," Zuko muttered quickly before hurrying off and melting into the crowd of people. There was a certain tone to his voice, to his stutter that made Aang worry for his friend. Zuko's body language had changed from relaxed to practically ready for a fight within seconds. Aang furrowed his brow but decided to let it go. He sighed quietly, upset that the only other person he knew here had abandoned him, but as he went to reach for something from the table to eat, his hand met someone else's. He instinctively pulled away and looked at the person he'd touched hands with to apologize, but his words were caught in his throat.

It was that girl he'd seen in the crowd from before!

She was even prettier up close, with brilliant blue eyes and smooth, dark skin. Her hair was tied in two braids on either side of her face, and she wore the regalia of a Southern Water Tribe noble. She looked a bit uncomfortable in the clothes, though, as if she wasn't used to them. "S-sorry," Aang finally forced himself to speak, feeling his cheeks grow red.

"It's alright," She replied. Her voice was smooth and gentle, but not submissive. Aang hadn't noticed before, but she had a water pouch wrapped around her hip. She was a bender! "My name is Katara, it's nice to meet you, Avatar Aang," Katara smiled at him, and Aang couldn't help but smile back. Her name felt familiar, but he wasn't sure exactly where from.

"Wait...aren't you Chief Hakoda's daughter?" His eyes widened just a bit. He'd heard about her, namely about her beating the shit out of Master Pakku only a month after Aang had left the North Pole. He remembered being so upset he hadn't been there to see it happen for himself.

"Oh, yeah, that's me," Katara replied awkwardly. Aang hoped he wasn't making her uncomfortable, but he'd been told he did that often with out outgoing he was.

"I've heard about you! You're so cool, I was hoping I would get to see you at some point while I was here!" Aang grinned excitedly, and Katara seemed a bit surprised at how excited he was. A slight smirk of pride planted itself on her face, and Aang watched as her shoulders dropped and she became more at ease talking to him.

"I'm very flattered, Avatar Aang," she replied, still trying to sound professional. "I appreciate your kind words."

"You can just call me Aang if you want," he said, a bit quieter. Katara raised her eyebrows just a bit and nodded.

"Alright, If you say so Ava- Aang," she caught herself at the last minute, and the both of them laughed a bit at her near slip up. "So, how long are you staying in the South Pole?"

"I'm staying here for a week, then I'm moving on to Ba Sing Se," Aang explained, remembering Sister Yin's words from earlier. "Thankfully the elders are letting me take a little break from training while I'm here, so I actually get to enjoy the culture and take some time to learn about the Southern Tribe. It's actually my first time here," he reached over and grabbed an Egg Custard Tart from the table, taking a bite as he looked away from his new-found friend for a moment.

"Well, if you'd like there's an...eh..." she paused for a moment. "there's a '*cultural festival*' going on tomorrow night, if you'd like I can accompany you there...? So that you can learn about Southern customs, of course," for a moment, Aang thought she had gone back to speaking in formalities, but he notices a slight twinge of sarcasm in her tone that he could tell were only for his ears. Suddenly, it hit him that she was trying to be inconspicuous about inviting him to hang out so that no one else in the room would realize. Aang grinned; he liked the way she thought.

"That sounds lovely, Lady Katara," he replied, trying to match her tone and energy without breaking out into laughter. "Will anyone else be at this...cultural festival?"

"Yes, several friends of mine including my older brother Sokka," she pointed across the room at the other table where a man who looked similar to her stood talking to a girl with white hair. "As well as his partner Princess Yue of the Northern Water Tribe," Aang's eyes widened just a bit. He talked to that girl a few times while he was at the North Pole, but it hadn't crossed his mind that she would be here tonight. "and Lady Toph Beifong, who isn't here tonight but is staying in the South while her parents attend the ceremony," Aang's eyes widened further, but he kept his face calm. Before he could properly reply, a reporter made their way up to him, asking if he would be willing to step out for a moment in order to shoot an interview. Aang agreed, but as he began walking away, he slipped Katara a piece of paper with his phone number on it. "I'll be there," he whispered, and a smile spread across her face.

Katara waved to him, watching him go with slight disappointment in her eyes. She was glad to have met him- not just the version of him he presented for television or stuck up nobles, but the real him. She could tell he was being genuine with her, she felt it. Even if she wasn't sure why just yet, she knew he would be special to her.

Chapter End Notes

I named Sister Yin after Guan Yin cause I'm a Mahayana Buddhist and Guan Yin makes me happy :)

Stars.

Chapter Notes

For the record, I know that the Poles have a different sunrise/sunset thing than the rest of the world but i didn't feel like going back and fixing it so

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

After the party had ended, not long past midnight, Aang and the other Air Nomads had gone back to the building that they would be staying in. According to Gyatso, this was the building where all Air Nomads stayed while they were in the South Pole, if they were there on official business. That made sense to Aang, since nearly all the major cities in the world had designated spaces for dignitary members of other nations to stay. It was in accordance with some sort of world policy that had been decided a few years before he was born.

The building was tall, two guards standing on either side of the door, their expressions nearly as cold and frigid as the weather itself. Aang felt a twinge of guilt at the fact that these two would probably be left outside nearly all night, but he supposed it was their job, so they'd probably be used to it. *'I should still bring them something warm to drink,'* he thought with a slight smile. The architecture of the building itself was quite beautiful, with a stone base and an exterior made from ice and wood. Intricate designs covered the outside, the pictures carved to tell a story Aang could not read. There was a particular method of construction done in the South Pole that allowed for buildings to be made of ice without being too cold on the inside, but Aang hadn't finished reading the Wikipedia page. *'Maybe I'll ask Katara about it...'* he thought, before quickly brushing the idea away. He couldn't get too close to her, he knew that. He didn't understand it, but he knew it was a rule set in place, and one not meant to be broken. Granted, he already had broken it in a way, with Toph and Zuko, but Toph was more of a bending Sifu and Zuko was technically just supposed to be his political acquaintance. Aang had tried to convince himself many times that his relationship to the two benders was purely for practical reasons, nothing that could ever interfere with his duties as Avatar, but deep down he knew that was probably a lie.

Monk Tsewang and Gyatso, as well as Sister Lio all retired to their chambers almost immediately after they arrived at the house, while Aang and Sister Yin decided to stay up for a bit longer. The inside of the house was actually quite warm, warm enough for Aang to take off the parka and hat he'd layered himself with. Normally, in colder weather, Aang would just use his Air Bending to warm himself up, but he didn't really have the energy to bend right now, even if it was just a bit. It was late, later than he would normally stay up. His body felt exhausted and weak, but his mind was still racing with thoughts of a...particular shade of blue he'd grown quite fond of that night.

"You wanna stay up for a bit longer?" Sister Yin asked, pulling Aang out of his own head. He'd been spaced out for a while, staring at the hard wooden floors. Each plank was dark and shiny, something about them drew him in. "It's fine if you don't but I'm gonna stay up for a bit, so if you wanna join me..." Yin smiled, and Aang smiled back. She placed a hand on his shoulder, giving it a slight squeeze before making her way over to where the television was.

"I'll put on some tea," Aang replied, before passing the doorway where he'd been standing and walking towards the kitchen. Most of the downstairs area was a living room, with fancy, dark gray furniture and old painting and pictures covering the walls. Against the back wall, a large television was mounted, directed towards the three couches that were arranged around the indoor fire pit, which Yin had already lit. To the right was a stair case, leading up the a balcony on the second floor, with five different bedroom doors lined up. It was a nice house, Aang was a bit sad thinking about the fact that he would have to leave in a week.

"So, did you enjoy the party?" Yin asked from her spot on the couch. Aang glanced over at her and nearly laughed. It was a bit comical, seeing the woman still dressed in her formal robes, draped over the couch and clicking through the television.

"It was pretty great," he replied, looking through the selection of tea in the cupboard. He frowned slightly, noting that they didn't have the ingredients to make butter tea. Jasmine would do, he supposed, even if it wasn't particularly good quality. Granted, from what he had heard, the Water Tribes weren't particularly fond of tea, especially not the South, so decidedly it wasn't his place to complain. "I got along pretty well with this gi-"

"H-hey, that interview you did earlier is on T.V. already! I thought they'd wait until morning to air it!" Aang glanced at the television and, sure enough, there he was, looking awkward and a bit cold, his mind clearly on something else as he answered the questions given to him. His uncomfortable looking appearance on the television program wasn't really his concern though. No, Aang was more confused as to why Yin had cut him off, seemingly deliberately. He couldn't prove it, and had no intention to, but something in her voice, the speed and tone, told him that she hadn't wanted him to finish his sentence.

After about forty-five minutes of scrolling through Netflix with Yin, the both of them decided to go to bed. Aang knew he wouldn't be sleeping, though. In fact, after grabbing a few bags of snacks for the night, Aang spent most of the evening glued to his phone screen. He felt lucky that he'd been given his own room since Gyatso and the other elders wouldn't see him with the device (although he had a sneaking suspicion that at least a few of them already knew). The night sky was beautiful in the South, with the brilliant pale moon peering it's light through his window, and the thousands of stars dancing and twinkling alongside it. Aang hadn't seen this many stars out at night since he'd last been at one of the Air Temples. It was strange, the way that there were so many stars in such a big city. One would expect that light pollution would have pushed them all away; apparently not, though. "Maybe it's the spiritual energy here, or something," Aang mumbled to himself. *'Or maybe,'* he thought. *'The stars just like it here. If I was a star, I think I'd like it here, too.'*

Aang's thoughts began to drift back to Katara. Her eyes, her voice, her smile. Something about her...captivated him. He'd never felt like this about anyone, and honestly it was a bit

scary. The feeling was similar to how he had felt about Khando, the older boy he'd been so close with when they were younger. He hadn't spoken to Khando since they were both quite young, but last Aang heard he had gotten his Mastery tattoos a few weeks after Aang left for the Northern Water Tribe all those years ago. Although it was similar, whatever it was he had felt towards Khando was much more intense in Katara. If only he could pinpoint what it was, put a name to the strange feeling swirling around inside him.

He glanced at the time on his phone; 2:22 *AM* it read. Katara still hadn't texted him. Part of Aang's mind hoped that she was asleep, that she was dreaming of something pleasant and happy, and that she was comfortable at home. The other part of his brain was desperate to hear from her, no matter how late it was. Aang put his phone down with a sigh. After a moment, he realized there *was* someone who would be up that he could talk to.

A: Hey Zuko !! Are you up :D

Z: yeah. what do you want.

Aang frowned slightly at the tone of Zuko's message, but he supposed the older boy was always like that, especially over text. The Fire Bender had never quite gotten the hang of illustrating his tone and emotion through the internet, which was a bit frustrating at times, but for the most part Aang didn't really mind.

A: I just wanted to say hi, jeez :/

Z: it's like two in the morning why are you even up?? don't you have avatar stuff to do in the morning or something

A: Actually the elders are letting me take a break for the week so I can pretty much do whatever I want !!

Z: oh good for you

Z: so uh do you wanna hang out tomorrow since you aren't doing anything important

A: I actually already got invited to hang out with this girl i met at the party !! Her name is Katara, she's super cool, I really like her :)

Zuko opened the message quickly, marking it as *seen*, but didn't reply for a moment. Aang stared at his screen, awaiting the Fire Bender to start typing, which he did, after a while. Zuko stopped and started typing several times before sending the message he'd been working on.

Z: oh

Z: that's cool ig

Z: i think i've met that girl

Z: anyways uh maybe we can hang out the day after then??

Aang waited for a moment, considering Zuko's strange response before continuing.

A: That works for me! Or we can get breakfast tomorrow morning, the thing she invited me to isn't until night time. Idk tho, she hadn't texted me yet. She's probably asleep.

Z: breakfast sounds good. i'll buy.

A: Aww , thanks Zuko !! You're the best :D

Z: you should go to sleep, though. i'll meet you outside your building at ten tomorrow morning, if you're not outside in ten minutes I'm getting food without you.

A: If you say so hotman :)))

Z: quit calling me that it isn't funny

With that, Aang shut off his phone, setting it on his bedside table. He knew Zuko was probably right, that he should try to get some sleep before they went out tomorrow morning, but staring at his screen for so long had made any trace of exhaustion leave his body. Quietly, Aang reached over the side of his bed and pulled out his laptop. He'd been given the computer on his 16th birthday, and he was only supposed to use it for studying and such, but after he convinced Zuko to help him get the child-lock off the browser, the laptop could be used for nearly whatever he wanted. He squinted uncomfortably as the bright light shone in his face, quickly pressing the button to dim the screen. He glanced over at the time again; 3:02 AM. Aang sighed, running a hand over his head. Decidedly, Katara wouldn't be texting him tonight.

In all honesty, he had no idea why he had been so excited to hear from the Water Bender he'd met that night. The way he couldn't keep himself from looking at his phone every few minutes, part of him still wishing an unknown number would pop up, proclaiming them self to be *her*. Aang remembered feeling similarly when he'd first met Toph and Zuko, but not to this extent. He'd felt excited, sure, but there was something different about the sensation of just thinking about Katara. The way his chest felt hollow and light, the tingling feeling that shot up his back, making his shoulders shiver a bit. Whatever it was, he didn't mind too much. It sort of felt nice, thinking about her gave him something to look forward to in the coming days.

Lost in his own thoughts, Aang hadn't noticed his hand navigating through the computer, pulling up a documentary series about the Southern Water Tribe. In spite of the time, Aang wasn't tired enough to sleep just yet. So, plugging in his headphones and setting his phone aside, he hit play, settling into his bed with intentions of staying there for as long as he needed.

When Aang's laptop battery finally died, he hadn't even noticed it was running low. Unfortunately, the battery had died just before the episode on Chief Hakoda and his family. Aang was nearly disappointing at that, but his attention quickly shifted to the steadily rising sun. "Shit..." he cursed under his breath. The other elders would be up soon, which meant Aang probably wouldn't get any sleep tonight. He realized he'd never actually done that-stayed up all night with no sleep, that is. Aang sighed quietly and plugged his laptop in before grabbing his phone. Thankfully, he'd remembered to plug that in before setting it down.

Upon opening it, nearly a dozen notifications were awaiting him, but only one really stood out. An unknown number, with the area code of the Southern Water Tribe's capital city.

?: Hey, Aang! Sorry I didn't text you earlier, I fell asleep almost the second I got home. We still on for tonight?

Chapter End Notes

Small cultural reference; Butter Tea is an actual beverage, and is a staple of the Tibetan traditional diet! Also I'm gonna take this opportunity to say that you should donate towards www.freetibet.org if you can! Tibet needs our help!

Sorry this chapter isn't too exciting, but hopefully platonic zukaang and bi/pan aang made up for it <33

Ily! Have a good day!

also sorry Zuko is so ooc i can't write for him today, idk why lmao

Snowfall.

Chapter Summary

Aang feels something strange towards Katara. He gives it a name.

Chapter Notes

Aah sorry this chapter isn't too exciting!! The next few will be more interesting, I promise! Or at least I'll try to make them interesting lol

Something inside Aang seemed to change when he spoke to Katara, to alter itself and move so much within his body he could barely contain it. Something deep within him, much older than his body itself or the rules that constrained it. It fizzed and bubbled up to the surface when he thought of her, sparking a flame that even after so much training he could not control or bend. Aang didn't particularly like the feeling. It made his hands shake and it disrupted his focus, but he didn't hate it either. If given the chance, he wasn't sure he'd give it away. Perhaps it was there for a reason. Gyatso always told him every thing had a place and a purpose, even if you didn't know what it was yet. What that purpose was, though, Aang wasn't sure. He wasn't even particularly sure about what the feeling was in the first place- let alone why it seemed so fixated on Katara. He couldn't be the only person who had ever felt like this- that would be absurd! Maybe he could try again to contact Roku, and ask him what the feeling was. Aang had never been successful in contacting any of his past lives, but that didn't stop him from trying quite often. He'd only ever read about them, been told stories about their lives and what they were like. He always had a feeling he wasn't being told everything, though, that in order to really understand he'd have to speak to his predecessors himself.

This feeling he had, it was present. Constantly present. Like energy constantly swirling through his body. He couldn't ignore it, and he had a feeling it wouldn't be going anywhere anytime soon. So, as Aang often did with anything that appeared to him more than once, he gave it a name; *Snowfall*. Maybe it was a bit cheesy, sure, but Aang thought it was very fitting. That was sort of what it felt like, in a way. That strange tingling down his spine, settling all the way down to his feet and clouding his brain with something he couldn't quite describe. It felt blue, too. Blue like the rumbling, splashing ocean. Blue like the butterflies he saw floating through the monastery halls as a child. Blue like the sky at high noon. Blue like her eyes. It was so many blues all at once, but however one might want to put it, it was still blue. A pretty blue.

That morning, talking back and forth with Katara about everything and anything that came to mind, it left Aang truly feeling that *Snowfall*, as he'd now decided to call it. Perhaps it was more like a snow storm. Either way, he felt it, even long after Katara and him had ended their conversation to move on with their individual days. She was quite a joy to talk to, Aang had found. Even just over text, her energy seemed to radiate out through the screen and touch him like the first drop of rain during a storm. It was quite a strange emotion, and in all honesty, Aang found it quite frustrating that he was seemingly incapable of figuring out it's proper name. Aang liked to put names on things- labels. To put things in boxes, fitted with a name tag so he knew exactly what they were. He found it a bit ironic, that as an Air Nomad he would be so fixated on keeping things bound tightly to the positions he wanted to give them instead of letting them flow freely. Maybe that was something he should work on.

"Are you even listening to me?" Zuko asked, a frustrated tone to his voice. Aang blinked, jolting back from his spaced-out state. Suddenly, he was back on the floor of Zuko's bedroom, eating the takeout they got for breakfast. *'I've been spacing out a lot recently,'* Aang thought. *'Weird.'* His senses felt heightened as he came back from his thoughts; the hardwood floor below him suddenly feeling much colder, and the chopsticks in his hand feeling awkward and clammy.

"Y-yeah Zuko, sorry," Aang apologized awkwardly, setting down the utensils he'd been holding. "I've just got a lot on my mind, that's all," he reached over for his cup of tea so he had something to do with his hands. Thankfully, the tea was actually quite good since Iroh had made it when they got back from getting their food that morning. It was warm, and the heat against his nearly-numb fingers was a welcome sensation.

"Hm," Zuko raised an eyebrow slightly. "Do you want to talk about it...?" The Fire Bender seemed a bit hesitant at the question, but he asked anyways. In his defense, he was a good listener, he just wasn't particularly good at offering advice after he was done listening. He was perfectly content sitting there and listening to someone vent for as long as they needed, but the second they asked what he would do in their situation it felt like he'd barely been paying attention at all. Aang always found this to be a strange trait of Zuko's, but he didn't mind. That was how their friendship worked; they each had their quirks, and the other would work around them without question, a delicate balance of personalities shared between the two boys. Others found it strange, but for them it was second nature.

"Uh..." Aang considered it for a moment. "No, that's okay. Thanks, though," He smiled, fidgeting with the orange beanie he wore over his head. As Aang and the other Air Nomads had learned quite quickly, being bald in the South Pole wasn't a particularly pleasant experience, but thankfully since this breakfast wasn't a formal event, Aang was allowed to take a hat with him to keep warm. "So, how's Azula?" Aang changed the subject.

"She's doing alright," Zuko replied, taking a bite of his food. "She's probably in her room talking to her friends or something, she hasn't been out much since we got here," he sighed, glancing at the wall behind Aang, as if he could see right through it and into her room to look at his sister. "Her therapy sessions have been going pretty well as of late, though, so she isn't as...difficult as she used to be," Aang could tell Zuko didn't like how he'd phrased that

sentence, but they both knew what he meant. Aang had known Azula just as long as he'd known Zuko, so he was quite familiar with all of her quirks as well, even if he didn't speak to her as much. Aang still liked to consider Azula a friend, although he had a feeling she wouldn't say the same about him. "Being here, in the South Pole, it brings back some...memories for the both of us. Some good. Some not. It's just been a while since we were here in person, she's having a hard time coping with it I guess," Zuko let out a deep sigh, taking a long drink of his tea. Aang thought for a moment, trying to remember what Zuko was talking about. He supposed it was probably memories of coming here with his father and grandfather on diplomatic trips when they were still kids. Aang imagined that much be hard, he knew any memories of their father from before he was imprisoned were difficult for the two siblings.

"I understand," Aang nodded. "If you ever want to talk about it, I'm always here for you," He smiled, and Zuko smiled back, although Aang could tell there was something else he was thinking of. He decided not to ask, though. If Zuko wanted him to know, he would have told him already, he just needed time before he would be ready to open up.

Aang had snuck out at about 10:30 PM that night, thirty minutes before when he and Katara had agreed to meet up. He left the house as quietly as he could, using air bending to muffle the sound of his steps. He left out his window instead of the door, just to make sure the guards at the front porch wouldn't see him. Thankfully, no one seemed to notice he left, and there weren't many people out on the street to recognize him either. Things were going well, so far at least, but Aang was still anxious. There was a jittery feeling running through his body, like when he'd tried coffee for the first time when he was staying in the Fire Nation as a teenager. His hands were shaking again, but he wasn't sure if it was from the actual snowfall or his...well, emotional *snowfall*. He sighed, watching as his breath clouded in the air before disappearing.

As he walked, he glanced at his phone every few minutes, just to make sure he was going the right way. Katara had agreed to meet him near the local Otter Penguin Cafe, which was about three blocks from where Aang was staying. Walking through the snow, though, it felt like six. The worst part was that Aang's parka was downstairs by the door, and he hadn't gone to get it for fear of waking the elders, so here he was, wandering through the snow in two sweatshirts and a coat, along with his orange beanie. He was using his Air Bending to help keep warm too, but that could only do so much, and it was a bit tiring to do it for long periods of time. Aang always found it strange that people had this conception that Air Benders would subconsciously warm themselves in the cold, using no effort at all. Maybe for an older master that might be the case, but Aang hadn't actually had a whole lot of experience using Air Bending in the cold. This was the first time he'd had to use it as much as he was now since he was about 13, and decidedly he should have practiced sustaining it for longer before he got here.

"Hey, Aang!" he jumped at the sudden calling of his name, turning towards the sound to see...*her*. The snow faded her appearance just a bit, but she was just as beautiful as she had been the day he met her. A thick blue parka graced her shoulders, and her hair was in two braids that poked out of the hat she was wearing. Her boots could barely be seen over the snow, but Aang could tell they were keeping her warm. He felt a tiny bit jealous, seeing as his own boots probably weren't as good for insulation as hers since the material was different. Aang couldn't help but smile back at her, though, walking towards where she was standing. She was leaning against the wall of the building, her arms folded. "You look a bit cold," she laughed, bending the snow off Aang's shoulders. "Why didn't you bring a thicker coat, that sweatshirt will barely do anything in this cold," she smirked, just a bit, and Aang felt his heart skip a beat.

"Y-yeah," Aang laughed back, breathing into his hands for warmth. "I left my parka in the living room, and I was too scared to go down and get it so I just..." he trailed off, gesturing to his awkward amalgamation of sweatshirts and jackets.

"Oh, did you sneak out...?" Katara frowned slightly. "I'm sorry, I wouldn't have invited you if I knew you weren't supposed to be out at night. I wouldn't want you getting in trouble, especially not because of me," despite her words, she started walking off, presumably towards wherever this '*cultural festival*' was being held, and Aang followed her without reluctance.

"No, no, it's alright!" Aang replied quickly. "It's not a big deal, I'm sure the elders wouldn't really care too much, but I figured better safe than sorry," he smiled at her, and Katara smiled back, although she seemed like she was thinking of something.

"So, how was your day?" she changed the subject as she turned a corner, Aang quickly following after her.

"Pretty good," he answered, looking around at the street lamps that lit up their path. It was late, but the city seemed to look even more beautiful in the moonlight. "I got breakfast with..." he paused for a moment, considering what to call him, before just settling on his name. "Prince Zuko, and then I did some banding practice in the afternoon," Aang watched as Katara's face faltered when he said the Prince's name, but before he could ask if something was wrong, she spoke back up.

"That's nice," she smiled, a twinge of awkwardness in her tone. Aang connected something, silently, in his head, that Zuko and Katara might not like each other very much. Seemingly, whenever the other was brought up around them, they would both become uncomfortable. He made a mental note to avoid the topic, and maybe do a bit of research later to figure out what connection the two had. "I taught some Water Bending classes this morning, but other than that my day wasn't very interesting," she shrugged.

"Woah, you teach bending classes?!" Aang said excitedly, a grin forming on his face. "That's so cool!" Katara smiled back, matching his excitement.

"Yeah, I started teaching them when I was about sixteen," Katara continued. "I took over most of the classes that my master, Hama, used to teach," she paused for a moment. "Hama started having some...struggles with mental illness not long after I came back from studying

in the North Pole. She's doing better, now, but she ended up retiring and letting me and a few others do most of the work teaching students," Katara fidgeted with her gloves as they walked.

"I see," Aang nodded. "It's really impressive that you've started teaching others at such a young age. When I was learning Water Bending all my teachers were stuffy old men," they both laughed a bit. "I'm assuming you teach Southern Style...?" Aang quirked his brow. He liked talking to Katara, their conversations flowed so smoothly in a way he hadn't experienced in a long time. Like the smooth waves of the ocean on a Summer day. It was nice.

"I teach two different classes, actually," Katara explained. "One for younger kids, mainly ages four to eight, that covers the absolute basics. Those are pretty universal for all forms of Water Bending. Then I teach a second class for older kids that specifically covers Southern Style Water Bending," there was a twinge of pride in her voice as she spoke, and Aang was enamored with it. "Southern Style Water Bending was actually endangered until a few years ago, but it still needs help to remain alive. It's a pretty big honor to be able to keep my culture alive in that way, you know?"

"Yeah, I get that," Aang replied after a moment, snapping himself out of just...staring at her. "It's a pretty little known fact, but each of the temples actually have their own styles of bending. I'm probably best at Southern Temple style since that's my home temple, and I've always thought it would be cool to teach it but until like..." he paused. "A few days ago I was pretty busy with training. Maybe I could start doing that now that I'm done..." he thought for a moment before continuing. "You know, I'm actually not familiar with Southern Style like...at all. Could I maybe...uh...sit in on a lesson...? It's fine if not but I'm pr-"

"It would be an honor," She giggled, and Aang felt his heart rate pick up. *'She's so pretty...'* he thought, before quickly brushing the idea away. Strange.

"So, what exactly is this uh...'cultural festival' we're going to?" Aang asked, changing the subject. It seemed like they were getting closer to Chief Hakoda's house, which Aang found a bit strange.

"Actually it's more of just a get together with some friends, I think I told you who would be there at the party?" Aang thought for a moment before nodding in confirmation.

"I think you did," Aang replied. "I'm excited to get to see them, though! The elders are...weird...about letting me have any...friends," he hesitated for a long while before saying the word, but it felt so right in his mouth. Even though he'd never met these people, at least not yet, they were his friends. Or, at least potential friends. Aang didn't get to call people that often. He called Zuko a friend in his head, maybe once or twice to his face, but that was probably it. He used to call Bumi and Kuzon his friends, but he hadn't spoken to either of them since he was twelve. Friend was a strange word, but he liked it. He hoped Katara would be his friend. After all, the snowfall wanted that to. Aang was starting to like the snowfall.

Katara seemed to realize how much that word meant, and she smiled at him. "Yeah," she said softly. "Friends..." There was a long pause before Katara turned back towards Chief Hakoda's house and waved for Aang to follow, which he did. She kept walking past the front door,

though instead leading Aang to the side of the house. She bent the thick layers of snow aside to reveal a cellar door. Aang's eyes widened slightly, but he didn't hesitate to follow Katara down the stair case beneath it, and into the unknown.

Company.

Chapter Summary

Aang meets Katara's friends, and Katara has a mid-early life crisis.

Chapter Notes

This chapter is kinda messy but school has been making updating hard so here <33

"Katara, you've made some weird decisions before, but inviting the Avatar to our movie night probably takes the cake," Sokka grimaced, looking back and forth between Katara and the awkward looking Air Bender who stood next to her. "Isn't this like...illegal or something?"

"Sokka, it's not that big of a deal," Katara frowned. "Aang's a nice guy, I just thought it would be fun to let him come hang out!" Her brother gave a long, slightly dramatic sigh before mumbling something along the lines of '*whatever*' and settling back into his spot on the couch, his lover tucked around his form.

Aang was listening to the siblings bicker, but not very well. He was more focused on the room they were in, in all of its strange, comfortable glory. It was a lot warmer in here than it was outside, he'd been able to take off his jackets and set them by the entrance to the cellar. The floors down here were carpeted, which caused it to dawn upon Aang that he'd never actually been in a room with carpet until today. The temples were all made of stone and wood, and all the houses he'd stayed in with Gyatso during their travels had all been hardwood. He'd taken off his shoes when he came in, so he could feel the soft, squishy texture under his feet. He wasn't certain he liked it, but he didn't hate the feeling either. The carpets were a clean beige, covering most of the basement apart from the bathroom Aang could see off in the corner, along with another room separated by an archway rather than a door. Aang assumed it was a kitchen, but he didn't really want to go investigate just yet. He already felt oddly exposed in front of these strangers, who so far hadn't actually spoken to him that much.

"No way..." Aang heard an oddly familiar voice say from the other end of the room. His head turned towards the voice, his eyes landing on a short young woman with black hair and several large stone bowls of snacks being bent above her hand. "Twinkletoes?!" Aang smiled, excited to see the Earthbender again. He hadn't actually heard from Toph since he left Gaoling all those years ago, but he'd missed her more than he thought he would.

"Hey Toph," he replied as she walked towards him, watching as she set the bowls haphazardly down on the coffee table near the couch where the others sat. He resisted the urge to give her a hug; Toph had never been too keen on physical affection (or really affection of any kind). "It's good to see you again," Toph stood in front of him for a long moment, and he supposed she was *'looking him over'* through the stone he could feel underneath the carpet. He imagined it wouldn't be as easy to use seismic sense through the fabric, though, he could barely use his when he tried.

"You got taller," she commented, almost begrudgingly. "It's good to see you, though," She said, slightly quieter this time.

"You two know each other...?" Katara asked, tilting her head in confusion.

"I was his Earth Bending teacher!" Toph laughed. "He was such a wimp when I found him, I'm kind of surprised he didn't die while I was teaching him to Earth Bend," she snickered, and Aang flushed slightly.

"She was my unofficial teacher," Aang clarified. "She just kinda...showed up and made fun of me for two years straight," Toph nodded in confirmation. "She was actually really helpful, though, she's pretty much the only reason I can Earth Bend at all," he smiled down at her.

"That's pretty in-character for Toph," Sokka added, although there was still a twinge of annoyance at Aang's presence that could be heard in his voice. Yue, who sat with her arms wrapped around Sokka as they shared a blanket, nodded in agreement. There was a moment of pause, just long enough to be noticed, before Yue continued.

"I remember when you first came to the Northern Water Tribe," She said softly, looking Aang up and down with a slight smile. "You've grown up a lot since then," she sighed softly. Aang thought for a moment, unsure of when or if he'd actually spoken to the princess before now, but then it dawned on him.

"Oh, I do remember talking to you!" He laughed, an excited expression blooming on his face.

"Does everyone know this kid except me?" Sokka asked rhetorically. "You don't know Suki too, do you?" he raised an eyebrow at Aang, who thought for a moment before shaking his head.

"I don't think I know anyone by that name..." he said slowly, still considering the question. Aang had met a lot of people over his travels, after all, and he can't say he remembered each and every one of them.

"Thank La," Sokka mumbled, rolling his eyes. "See, that's why we should have pushed harder to let Suki come here earlier! Now she's going to be late, I won't get to see her until Wednesday, and we're stuck here with...him," he waved his hand in Aang's direction.

"Sokka, don't be rude!" Katara chastised, ignoring that Aang and Toph both found Sokka's apparent distaste for his quite funny. Katara and Sokka argued for a few more minutes before they both agreed to just sit down and watch the movie.

"So, what movie are we watching?" Aang asked as he sat down on the floor, his legs crossed into the lotus position. Katara settled down next to him after a moment, and the two looked over and smiled at each other. Aang pulled a blanket off the couch and spread it over the both of them, not saying anything as he did so, just allowing it to happen. Katara did the same, simply enjoying the act of kindness.

"It was Toph's turn to pick this time, since she doesn't always get to be here-" Katara began to explain, but she was cut off by the Earth Bender herself.

"We're watching '28 Days Later'!!" She exclaimed. Katara groaned in complaint.

"Toph," Katara whined, extending the vowel in the Earthbenders name. "You know I hate scary movies," Toph only laughed in response.

"Oh, I am fully aware," she replied, a mischievous tone to her voice. "And since Snoozles kept complaining about the audio transcript last time, I'll listen to it on my phone," Toph rolled her eyes as she plugged in her headphones before turning back to the older Water Tribe man on the other side of the couch. "Sokka, play the movie!!"

Despite Katara stating that she wasn't a fan of the genre, Yue seemed much more reactive to the horror aspect of the film than Katara was. Aang had been pretty immersed in the movie, though, so he hadn't noticed Katara's more...subtle reactions. He hadn't fully realized when she grabbed his hand from under the blanket they were sharing only a few minutes in, and in all honestly Katara herself hadn't completely realized either. Aang didn't try to stop her though, he was known to be quite physically affectionate with everyone he knew. It just came naturally to him. The Waterbender had managed to keep her cool for the most part until about thirty minutes in, when a jump scare that even seemed to make Sokka jump a bit made Katara yelp out loud and hide her face in Aang's chest. The two sat like that for a moment before Katara awkwardly pulled away. "I..." she started uncomfortably, her face a brilliant rosy blush. Aang suspected his complexion was a similar color.

"Are you- I mean- Uh..." Aang's tongue danced in his mouth, unable to preform it's needed duties. Katara pulled her hand away from Aang's, leaving him feeling a strange emptiness in his chest.

"S-sorry," Katara said, looking away from Aang. Before he could reply, she mumbled something about needing the bathroom before quickly ducking into the room in question, leaving Aang and the others in uncomfortable silence.

Katara shut the door behind her, locking it's handle on instinct. There was a moment of silence before she groaned loudly, letting out the frustration and embarrassment that had been building up inside her for the last minute (although, from her perspective, it felt more like an hour). She slid down the door, sitting down on the cool tiled floor. She pulled her knees up to her chest, resting her face in her legs with a sigh.

Katara hated feeling like this. Normally, she was composed and calm, confident and self assured, yet kind and compassionate. She rarely stuttered or slipped up, her presence commanded the attention of anyone in the room. She was known world-wide as a role model for girls, as someone who changed the world. Katara was an individual, she made sure of that. Katara was not known as her father's daughter or her brothers sister, she was Katara of the Southern Water Tribe, one of the only and youngest Water Bending masters on the face of the Earth. She was an adult, she'd carved herself in ice and stone with only the help of her family and culture. She had grown up into a strong, powerful woman, and perhaps she had wished for romance once but she did not anymore. Perhaps when Jet had swooned her in her girlhood she had thought that love was a true concern, but now it wasn't, at least not yet. Now, her job was to ensure her culture stayed alive and well, that her people were accounted for and well taken care of, that their presence on the world stage was not overshadowed by that of their sister tribes. Katara was young, she had time for romance later. Things were stable in her tribe, at least for now, but she knew her tribe was fragile. They'd only agreed to host the Avatar's Reveal Ceremony because it was tradition for the nation geologically closest to the Avatars home to do so, but they really didn't have the means to do it, financial or otherwise. Things were alright now, but only barely. *That* was what Katara needed to be focusing on right now, not on her mini-crush on the Avatar himself!

"Oh, Tui and La, I actually thought that," She mumbled to herself. Katara had been vaguely aware of her feelings for Aang, but putting a label on it felt...odd. Not completely wrong, but not right either. This feeling she had...the tingling that ran up and down her spine, the butterfly-beetles in her stomach...she'd felt this before. Not in a long time, but she still knew what it was. She wasn't stupid, and she also wasn't stupid enough to think that Aang felt the same way. Decidedly, the only reasonable thing to do was wait until these feelings disappeared; she knew they would in time. Still, something told her that wouldn't be for a while.

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!