

Avatar: The Corruption of Korra Ch. 1

Written by ZaneofBane

Hate. With every breath he took, with every beat of his heart, Shu hated. He hated until his bones ached and his spine tingled. Hate greeted him in the morning and lulled him to sleep at night. It was his everything. It was as if he was the embodiment of hatred itself. He had no room for anything else, not anymore.

Hiding within a thin thicket of trees along a cliff side path, Shu stared out at the passersby, waiting. His every cell ached to move, to seek out the object of his revenge, but through a monumental effort he remained still and silent. Soon. The target of his revenge, his opportunity, it would come to him soon. All he had to do was wait.

Silently, patiently, the man waited, his anger gnawing restlessly at his insides. He stared out of his hiding place, watching many mysterious and monstrous beasts passed by, completely unaware of his presence thanks to the preparation of his benefactors. Happily and harmoniously they trotted by, unaware of the ominous man crouched within the woods, his dark eyes following them as they passed.

Such a strange place, the spirit world. He had seen things resembling men, animals, plants, and everything in-between since entering this foreign plane. Had it not been for his backers, to come here would have meant death, or far worse. Still, before his patrons had ever offered him their aid, he had been preparing for this trip, ready to throw away his life in pursuit of his revenge. It was that very determination, his unrelenting grudge, which drew his co-conspirators to his side, once their own plans had failed.

Suddenly, the man stiffened, his hand drifting down to the dagger at his waist. There, a sound! Like a chime, the sound of laughter drifted through the air, deep and confident, yet unmistakably feminine. The words were lost to the wind, but the familiar voice caused Shu to clench his teeth until they threatened to crack. Her! His enemy was approaching. The one who had taken everything from him: Avatar Korra!

From around a bend on the cliff side path, she came into view. Garbed in the blues of her tribe, she wore an azure sleeveless shirt with a high collar, her arms garbed in midnight sleeves, exposing only her muscled shoulders and fingers. A matching pair of pants, padded in the style of many modern benders, were tucked into a pair of leather boots. A rawhide waist wrap could be seen around her hips, trimmed with white fur.

As Shu's eyes rested on his enemy's boyish face, taking in her caramel complexion and chin-length chestnut hair, he nearly lost control. So close... The avatar was so close... Still, using every ounce of willpower he possessed, he waited. His benefactors had a plan. All he had to do was wait just a few more minutes and revenge would be his.

“And what’s that supposed to mean?” Another voice, light and feminine, drew Shu’s attention away from the avatar. Striding alongside his hated foe, her companion tilted her head, sending her cascading black hair tumbling to the side. Her ruby lips blossomed like a rose amidst pale-pink face, her thin eyebrows rising in shock, though amusement danced within her emerald eyes. The rough travel clothes dyed in crimson and ash failed to conceal the graceful sashay with which she walked, though Shu care little for her.

“Oh come on! It was a compliment.” Chuckling softly, Korra shrugged as she eyed her companion, a teasing smile twisting her lips.

“And how is comparing me to a warty toad spirit supposed to be a compliment?” Asami’s voice rose in mock anger, his eyebrows raised in disbelief.

“Well, they did call her the village beauty...” Korra received a playful slap on her shoulder for her mischief, rubbing the spot with a giggle. Caressing the dagger by his side once more, Shu’s anger surged, seeing his hated enemy so filled with joy. He could feel his hatred taking over, his vision growing red despite his desperate efforts to remain calm. Suddenly, the sound of panicked voices could be heard from up ahead, granting Shu a surge of strength. Just a little longer...

“From up ahead!” At the avatar’s shout, a gaggle of spirits came running down the mountain path, their hurried steps signaling their panic. Four little misshapen things resembling multi-colored sweets came charging past Shu’s hiding place, their frightened calls growing hopeful as they noticed the avatar. With a stomp, the earth beneath Korra rose, catapulting her forward as she rushed to meet the fleeing spirits.

“What is-“ Korra’s question was cut off at the sound of crumbling rocks ahead, followed shortly after by an earth- shaking roar. Suddenly, a shadowy black figure came charging around the corner, vaguely ape shaped with horns sprouting from its head and back. Its four eyes glowed with a sickly orange light, focusing on the fleeing figures before it. With inhuman speed it darted forward, rapidly closing the dozens of feet between itself and the avatar so quickly as to blur in Shu’s sight.

“A dark spirit...” From where he waited, Shu could hear the avatar’s shocked whisper, his knuckles creaking as he clenched his fist. So close! If he wished to, he could have been on her in seconds. This was his chance! All it would take was a single scratch. Shu’s entire body ached for him to launch himself at his enemy, but still he managed to hold himself back.

Everything had gone exactly as the his benefactors had promised so far. The Avatar was in position and the dark spirit was present. If his benefactors were correct, then shortly...

The avatar held her ground as the multicolored spirits fled passed her. Taking a steadying breath, Korra faced the dark spirit before her, relaxing her body. With a practiced ease, she lowered her stance, her muscled legs spreading slightly. Slowly, calmly, she brought her arms before her, beginning to move her hands in the languid circles that characterized water bending.

Immediately, Shu noticed a difference in the dark spirit's charge. As if in a trance the spirit slowed, gradually coming to a stop a dozen feet from the avatar, wobbling uncertainly. From the air, water began to condense, forming a double helix around the shadowy figure as it dazedly stood, transfixed. As a soft, golden light began to creep its way upwards along the water, Shu took his opportunity. Suppressing a cry of triumph, he leapt from the thicket.

"Korra!" Far behind, Asami's cry of warning was too late. Distracted by her bending, Shu was able to close the distance between himself and Korra in just a few seconds. Hand on his waist, Shu drew the pinky sized dagger.

As the weapon left its sheath, the spirit worlds itself shuddered, the entire world growing dark and cold as an unearthly wail seemed to rend the air. A palpable evil descended, malevolent and filled with resentment. Trees began to twist, the sky grew cloudy, and the wind began to pick up as the spiritual reverberations held within the dagger began to transform the very fabric of the world. An seething cloud of pure malice shrouded the blade, angry and black. Shu thrust his dagger.

Caught unawares, Korra quickly abandoned her spirit bending and widened her stance. Sweeping her arms towards Shu, she began to shift her center of gravity with a familiar ease, preparing to redirect her assailant's momentum and divert his attack. Moments later, Shu found himself skating passed the avatar, his stance broken as he was sent tumbling harmlessly into the dirt. Well almost harmlessly. Glancing back at the avatar, Shu noticed a trickle of blood oozing from her shoulder as well as the absence the dark presence that had only moments earlier being twisting the very world.

It was little more than a nick, barely enough to draw blood. It was by all standards one of the most ineffectual attacks to qualify for the label. Yet still, Shu knew it to be enough. Staring at the tiny dagger still clutched within his hand, a tiny bead of blood graced its tip, a drop of crimson on an ebony peak that even now seemed to wither away.

"Asami!" Turning her attention back to the dark spirit before her, Korra let out a sharp bellow, returning to her bending. In that single momentary clash, she had felt Shu's inexperience, immediately judging the dark spirit to be the greater threat.

"I've got it!" From nearby, Shu heard the young woman's voice. However, Shu hardly responded, merely turning on his side to better watch the avatar as his dagger did its work. Asami arrived to the baffling scene of her friend's assailant lying leisurely on his side, making neither a move to resist nor escape, with a satisfied smile on his lips. Unsure what to do, Asami decided to stand nearby, keeping an eye on the prone man.

"What's... Grr... Happening?!?!" Hearing Korra's struggling groan, Asami's focus soon matched Shu's as she turned to find the avatar struggling. The pure light which had only moments ago encircled the dark spirit now crackled with malevolent energy as a sickness seemed to seep along the double helix, polluting its radiance. Her forehead drenched with sweat, Korra was forced to halt her spirit bending, taking a stumbling step backwards.

“Asami! Back away!” Having lost her containment of the spirit, Korra quickly motioned for her friend to retreat. Despite the feverish heat radiating through her body, the avatar took a ready stance, preparing to fend off the corrupted spirit and give her friend a chance to escape.

However, contrary to everyone’s expectations, the spirit didn’t attack. With a quiet sniff, the corrupted being merely stared at the avatar, tilting its head in apparent confusion before letting out a low whine. Then, with a differential nod the beast left, darting back the way it had come. Frozen in disbelief and incomprehension, Korra kept her guard up until the creature left.

“What just happened?” From above Shu,, he heard Asami’s shocked voice, her face twisting in apprehension. However, the man paid it no heed, his attention solely upon the avatar.

“Ugh...” Finally realizing the danger had passed, Korra began to slump like a puppet with its strings cut, stumbling as she struggled to stand.

“Korra!” With a start, Asami took a step towards her friend, almost rushing to her aid before a low laugh reminded her of the man on the ground.

Lying on his side, Shu couldn’t suppress his laughter, his low chuckle rising in pitch as realization struck the man and for the first time in ages he felt something besides hatred: Satisfaction. Finally! After all this time, he had done it! Looking at the dagger in his hand, Shu noted that his limb had blackened from the corrosion, a small price to pay for his revenge. Moving his eyes to the blade, a marred and worn scrap of metal greeted his vision.

“What did you do!” Shrieking in anger, Asami’s foot met Shu’s blackened wrist as she kicked, his hand weakly relinquishing the remains of the dagger as it sailed through the air. Moments later, the woman’s grip wrapped around the outstretched arm, careful to avoid Shu’s corrupted flesh as she grabbed his sleeve and maneuvered the man onto his stomach. Before he knew what was happening, Shu found his arm wretched tightly behind him as Asami took a seat on the small of his back, pinning him in place.

“Justice.” Shu’s mad cackle was cut off as Asami drove a knee in to his ribs, causing the man to choke.

“Cut the crap!” Stumbling toward the duo, Korra’s voice growled with anger. However, her anger only made Shu laugh harder.

“You don’t look too good, avatar...” A smile split the young man’s face, hideous and malevolent. Korra grit her teeth, taking an angry step forward before losing her footing, dropping to a knee. All of a sudden, the avatar’s face grew ghostly pale, a look of shocked realization dawning on her face.

“Korra!?” Alarmed, Asami watch as Korra fell backwards onto her butt, bracing a hand against the ground as she landed.

“Raava...” In the deathly quiet of the cliff side path, Korra’s disbelieving voice echoed in the air, reaching her friend.

“What-” Concerned, Asami raised her voice, only to be cut off.

“I can’t feel Raava!” Korra’s voice rang with a note of hysterical disbelief. The sight of tears pooling in her eyes caused Shu to fall into another fit of laughter. Bringing her hand up to clasp the back of her captive’s head, Asami drove the man’s face into the dirt, silencing him.

“I... I...” Stuttering, Korra looked lost and on the verge of panic.

“Korra!” Raising her voice, Asami shouted, catching her friend’s attention. Snapped from her downward spiral, Korra shook her head, mustering her will. Without a word, she forced herself to stand up, staggering over to stand beside the two as Asami rifled through their assailant’s pockets.

“Look...” After a few seconds of rummaging, Asami withdrew her hand from the inner pocket of Shu’s jacket, her palm outstretched with two small objects resting within. The first was a small patch in the shape of the Equalist symbol, designed to be sewn onto a piece of clothing. The second was a small wooden playing tile: A red lotus.

“You...” With a look of realization, the avatar’s expression twisted, her fear replaced with anger.

“You’d better start talking before I break your arm.” Giving Shu’s arm a savage twist, Asami let out an angry groan, her face just as angry.

“What’s your relationship with the Red Lotus?” Shu felt a splash of warm breath against the back of his neck as the raven haired woman leaned in close, her voice low and menacing.

“They’re just some likeminded individuals who offered to help me meet an old friend.” At Shu’s flippant remark, Asami’s knee dug into his back, eliciting a sigh of pain.

“Don’t play games.” The woman put more weight onto her leg until Shu’s breaths came in ragged gasps before finally easing the pressure.

“What’s wrong? Can’t imagine that the great and perfect avatar isn’t loved by absolutely everyone?” However, Shu was undeterred. Pain meant little to him now.

“It seems those *friends* of your have abandoned you.” With a note of smug satisfaction, Korra attempted to taunt their prisoner, only to receive a mocking laugh in return.

“Of course! I’m a cat’s-paw, a disposable pawn.” Shu cast a mocking grin in the avatar’s direction, paying little heed to the seething brunette baring down on his back.

“You don’t seem upset...” Shocked confusion colored Korra’s voice at the unexpected response.

“And why should I be? I got what I wanted...” At Shu’s response, the girls grew silent, realizing the man in their possession wasn’t completely sane. Shu could sense the discomfort in his audience at

his flippant disregard for his own wellbeing, relishing it. Yes! Wise men feared those with nothing left to lose. Of course, it was already too late...

“What’s with that dagger?” Picking up where her friend left off, Asami asked about the corroded scrap of metal lying in the dirt nearby. Already, the nearby grass was withering at a visible speed as the remnants of its powers leached out into the surrounding soil.

“A curse... I suppose.” Shu shrugged with disinterest.

“What kind of curse?” Asami continued her interrogation, a note of worry in her voice.

“I’m not quite sure.” With a twist, Asami yanked her captive’s arm upwards, eliciting a momentary gasp of pain.

“I didn’t ask for the specifics. All I know is that the more I hate you, the more it hurts you.” However, despite his rough treatment, there was laughter in his voice when he spoke.

“Then I guess lifting the curse just became a whole lot simpler...” Realizing that the man on the ground was one of the components of her curse, the avatar brought her fist into her palm, a dark look on her face. From his position pinned to the ground, he turned his eyes upwards, smiling without a word at his would-be assailant.

“Wait! Something’s not right.” Sensing something amiss, Asami gave Korra a meaningful look before turning her attention back to the man beneath her.

“Talk! How do we lift the curse?” Twisting Shu’s arm threatening, Asami continued her interrogation. However, at the woman’s words, Shu couldn’t hold back his a hysterical cackle.

“I have to... forgive you...” His body heaving with laughter, Shu’s barely forced out the words, erupting in a coughing fit at the end from his exertion.

“What did I ever do to you?” Exasperated, Korra threw her arms wide, leaning forward with an accusatory expression.

“You took everything from me!!!” As if it were a lie, Shu’s laughter evaporated as he shouted the words with venom. Fury and madness danced within his eyes as he glared at the object of his hatred. His hatred resurfaced. Letting out a cry of pain, Korra dropped to her knees.

“Korra!” Asami let out a cry of concern. Seeing his opportunity, Shu brought his head back, striking his captor in the face and sending her reeling. With a twist of his body, he sent the woman sprawling in the dirt, freeing his arm and scrambling to his feet. Running, it took only a few seconds before he found himself at the cliff’s edge.

“Good luck getting forgiveness from a dead man!” With a shout of sadistic glee, Shu threw himself from the cliff, hurtling towards the ground below.

Falling, one again Shu found himself experiencing another long forgotten emotion: Contentment. In the background, his anger still radiated like a blazing sun, but it was a setting sun now that his revenge had been achieved. Who knows, had his revenge not required him to end his own life and deny the avatar her only possible means of salvation, he might have even recovered other emotions given time. Shrugging at the thought, Shu closed his eyes, enjoying the feeling of the wind ripping passed as the trees below surged towards him until a sudden upward force slowed his descent.

Suddenly, the wind buffeting Shu grew stronger, and with an alarmed look on his face the man opened his eyes. He was still falling, only seconds from crashing into the mesh of branches beneath him, but with every passing moment he found himself slowing. Glancing over his shoulder, he soon discovered the reason.

Standing at the top of the cliff, staring down at him in hateful defiance, stood the avatar. Nothing more than a blue and brown blur from this distance, Shu could just barely recognize the familiar stance of a bender as they shaped the elements. It was then that Shu recognized the wind for what it was; the avatar's cursed hand! With a surge of hatred, the figure at the top of the cliff collapsed with a distant cry of pain, but it was too late.

With a smack, Shu turned his attention to the ground below once more, just as the first tree branch buffeted him in the face. Shu brought his hands up to his face by instinct, tucking his body as wood and leaves assaulted his form, followed moments later by spongy flesh.

With a thud, Shu landed amidst a patch of mushrooms, glowing with an otherworldly blue luminescence and sending a cloud of vibrant spores drifting through the air. The mushrooms, each as large as the man's torso, cushioned the blow with their springy tissue, saving Shu from death but driving the air from his lungs. With a shuddering breath, Shu inhaled, bringing with it the floating spores.

A surge of agony infected the man's lungs as he drew a tainted breath, feeling the luminous motes invade his body accompanied by the feeling of suffocation. Once more he cursed the avatar, his hatred surging as she denied him even a clean death. Instead of a swift fall, he found himself doomed to choke to death on these burning spores. Clutching at his throat, Shu turned on his side as the world around him began to twist and sway in his vision.

As oxygen deprivation burned through his body, Shu watched as his feverish mind began to conjure visions, his consciousness losing its tenuous grip on reality his brain was deprived of air. The motes of light, so brilliant in the darkness of the bog, began to grow bigger in his vision as his dying brain focused on their listless travels through the air. His skin began to tingle, his woolen clothes seeming to slide passed his skin, a mild annoyance that seemed to grow rougher and more intrusive with every passing moment. A cool sensation assaulted his feet, and he could have sworn he felt his boots pull free from his body, though that didn't make any sense. Finally, darkness claimed him, almost like a sheet of cloth rising over him and covering his face.

"So this is it, huh? This is death?" Shu's voice seemed odd in his own ears, as if muffled, though he doubted he was actually speaking. He'd heard stories of people experiencing brushes with death

before, where everything seemed far away in their final waking moments. It seemed like that was true. In the distance, Shu heard a splash as something dropped into the bog.

“He landed near here.” Loud yet muffled, Shu could hear his hated enemy’s voice in the distance, seeming both close and far at the same time. However, she seemed a lot less important to him now in his final moments, now that everything was over. He’d already inhaled these glowing spores, whatever they were. His fate was sealed.

“What are these, lights?” Faraway, Asami’s words reached Shu in the dark.

“Spores! Don’t breathe them in. They can’t be anything good...” Korra’s response was cautious, an edge of pain in her voice.

“Where is he?” A note of confused concern colored the avatar’s tone.

“Over there! Are those his... clothes?” Her friend’s response was bewildered, caught off guard.

“But what happened to him? He can’t have gotten far!” A note of urgency filled Korra’s words, but it was too late. Smugly, Shu felt his surroundings growing colder, awaiting the sweet embrace of oblivion.

The sound of splashing water could be heard growing closer, the noise growing louder and louder until Shu felt as if the waves would crash over him at any moment. What was this? Was an elephant crashing through the bog? The wet squelch of the muddy bog clinging to booted feet grew nearer and nearer, until it was all he could hear. Who knew dying could be so loud?

Then, unexpectedly, Shu’s world began to shake. He felt the cloth around him heaving and shifting as it was lifted upwards, his body sliding between its surface and dropping free. Moments later, Shu felt himself falling once more, the cold air ripping at his naked body until he felt himself bounce against a springy surface below.

“Ouch!” You weren’t supposed to feel pain *after* you were dead, were you? Opening his eyes, Shu looked upwards.

Kneeling, yet still towering above him, was the avatar. Like a colossus, she loomed over him, her face filling his vision with its impossible scale. In her hands she held his shirt, massive beyond imagining. Despite the piece of cloth draped across her mouth and nose, Shu could still make out her twisted look of disbelief, her steely blue eyes focusing on the tiny man before her.

With a horrible sinking feeling, Shu realized he wasn’t dying! Once again, Shu was graced with another long forgotten emotion: dread. Scrambling to his feet, the man’s foot slipped against the slick surface of the mycelium beneath him as he desperately move to escape. The permanence of his revenge hinged upon his death. There was no knowing what sick and twisted ways the avatar might use to force him to grant her his forgiveness. However, as a shadow descended upon him, Shu realized escape was no longer an option.

As the avatar's warm hand embraced Shu's shrunken form, he let out a cry of anguish. The sweet and sour smell of his hated enemy's body odor and sweat assailed his senses as he felt himself being lifted up in the air. No! He was supposed to die! Struggling to break free, Shu felt himself being hauled further and further away from his demise.