**“Stoick’s Boy” / 1366**

“Are you just going to sulk all morning? You have dragon training, Astrid.” My father said gently. His words were rough, but he was trying to help. He’s right, it’s not worth moping. It doesn’t bring Hiccup back.

It was his own fault too, not a tragic accident or a peaceful passing. He rode a dragon (the ones with sharp claws and thick scales and big teeth) thinking it wouldn’t turn on him and was proven wrong. Even after he’d taken me with him, I could tell you how awful of an idea that is. Hiccup was delusional, stubborn, arrogant, and thoughtless. And the sweetest person I ever met. It took his death to realize I wanted a life with him.

Dragon training went well the morning I left. It always did. I showcased my expert battle skills, showed some dragons the fury of Berk, and didn’t break a sweat. If I had any respect towards the dragons at all, I would be thankful towards them for supplying such an effective distraction. In the ring, nothing mattered except survival. The moment I stepped to the twisting streets, no one would shut up about Hiccup. I understand why it’s so important. For Chief Stoick the Vast to have his own son killed trying to *befriend* a dragon is tragically, absurdly ironic. Everyone whispered because of it.

“It’s just natural selection.”

“He wasn’t much fuel for the dragon who ate him.”

“He had it coming, he was always dead weight.”

There were different whispers, too. Conspiracies. Less credible ones like that he was a dragon in disguise gathering intel on Berk. More credible ones like that he’d flown away on the dragon, or that he’d hidden in the woods to protect the dragon. To be fair, the only signs that he had died were his brown vest at the forest’s treeline and his absence after a week. Given the multiple dragon attacks in that time, it’s assumed he is gone. I can’t take that as an answer. If he isn’t in the woods, I will set sail to find him in the ocean.

My ax is sharpened and my hair is braided before dinner in preparation for my search. My mother makes a delicious mutton stew and tells me my hair is getting so long. My father says he’s only heard praises of my work in the area. We eat, no one speaks a word of Hiccup, and I pretend to sleep until I’m sure the wooden door creaking open won’t wake my loving parents. I know exactly where to go to enter the unforgiving woods.

Just standing in the trees makes me feel alive again. The air has the coolness of the waterfront chilled by a bright full moon. The dragons are quiet tonight, recouping from the previous night’s attack, sharpening their claws and teeth.

I know where I’m going–the canyon Hiccup found Toothless in. If they’re hiding out, they’ll be there. It’s hard to find, if you don’t know what you’re looking for. I barely found it by directly following the wonderboy dragon rider.

I find the canyon walls after an hour of walking. The moonlight flickers off the pond’s inky surface. The rest of the area is shrouded in shade. I couldn’t even tell if a dragon hid in the darkness, much less a boy.

The walls are easy enough to descend. My ax is held at the ready as I half-slide down the loose rocky surface. My eyes adjust to the blackness and I can see what’s directly in front of me. I would scour every inch of this place if I needed to.

There is no need. As I shuffle along the walls I find the only thing I’m not looking for.

At least the grave of Hiccup Haddock won’t lay empty anymore.

For the first time in years, I cry. I weep for the loss of everything he could have been. For the endless potential held in the hands of Stoick’s boy. He would still be here if not for the indifference of the world. Dragons don’t care about the father of the boy they take. I’m going to kill all of them.

I wander the forest, afraid of what I’ll feel when I leave. Before Hiccup, my feelings were simple and manageable. I’d feel a rush of fear, a panging disappointment, an abrupt joy. I could counter each one easily, but I have no idea what to do to solve what I feel for Hiccup. What cure is there for the deep, guttural loss intertwined to a blood-boiling anger? He was some kid. His eyes only ever glimmered with the weakness of hope and he dreamed too big for his own good. But he was everything I wanted to be; all the humanity Berk left behind a long time ago.

It was time to leave. I had all that I came here for. As I left the treeline, I turned to the island’s port as if I were a dog alerted to a familiar scent. I let my eyes drift to the Viking graveyard faintly illuminated by the town.

My feet dragged me to the neat rows of rocks, each symbolizing someone’s child. Some had names carved into them, others lay blank. Hiccup’s would be easy to find since he was an heir to the Viking throne. I found it quickly next to his grandparents, great-grandparents and great-great-grandparents.

“You’re incredibly stupid.” I whispered to the cold, hard ground. “Why did you do it?” It was pointless to ask questions to a gravestone. I didn’t care. The words start flowing, everything I was hoping to say to his face. “Your dad’s upset, of course. I’ve never seen him this angry. Not towards you,” I added quickly, “but towards the dragons. He’s launching search parties for their nest constantly. I can’t even imagine…” I hadn’t even thought about the chief too much. That man had now lost both his wife and his son to the dragons. “He has three lives to live now, I’d be surprised if he doesn’t wipe out the dragons.” I breathed in. “Well, only if I don’t first.” And out. “I wonder if we might’ve been friends. You have the same drive I do, even if it’s entirely opposite.” My throat tightened and I dropped my voice to a whisper. “I guess we’ll never know.”

I was thrown out of my pitying by the shifting grass behind me. I started to swing my ax out of instinct, but it was caught by a strong hand.

“Chief.” I had no energy to be embarrassed.

“Astrid, what are you doing here?” His voice was quiet and gruff.

“I was…visiting a grave. I’m sorry, I’ll go.” I stood up to leave, bowing my head to be respectful.

“Whose?” He said in his steady tone.

I froze.

“Whose grave?” He repeats.

“...Hiccup’s.”

I looked up at him. He didn’t show an ounce of expression on his face. His eyes stared into the void that filled me. I felt like I was both melted and solidified in his gaze. Then his eyes closed as they filled with tears.

“I found his body.” I said so quietly my voice barely reached his ears. He looked past me at his son’s gravestone and slowly knelt beside it.

“Thank you.” He speaks so sincerely it shoots into my soul and extinguishes any fire left in my chest.

I sank beside the chief. “I’m sorry.” I don’t have enough words to encompass what needs to be said to the father of the stolen boy. “Hiccup was…special.” Anyone else saying it might have meant it as a gentle stab at the ridiculous idea of death by dragon taming, but I whole-heartedly mean it referring to the most inspiringly special person I would ever meet.

Stoick and I would form an unspoken bond that night. Someday, we would board a boat together to perform the deadly voyage to the dragon’s nest. We wouldn’t cry together again until the day we slayed the dragon queen.