The Burning Cold

by baisley

Summary

Between the Dragon Riders' war against the Dragon Hunters, a new evil lurks in the fringe of Midgard and threatens the very life of the realm itself. A prophecy reveals a hidden world. Creatures once in the shadows step into the light. Memories of long past surface and Hiccup Haddock finds himself stuck in a war in two worlds, desperate to keep them from colliding. In the pith of it all, a young spirit, whose glacier eyes pierce his soul, holds the key to ending the battle, once and for all.

An epic tale of adventure, tragedy, romance and- of course- dragons.

Hiatus

Notes
Disclaimer: This story is based on characters created and owned by William Joyce, Cressida Cowell and Dreamworks. I have no claim nor ownership in any of their beautiful characters, this is purely for the enjoyment of myself and (hopefully) others. No money is being made and no copyright or trademark infringement is intended.

A/N: This work is un-beta'd, any mistakes concerning spelling, grammar etc. are completely my fault. The concept of this story has been lurking in my mind for a very long time and it wasn't until watching the gameplay of God of War 4 that I got inspired to write this. I'm also touching up on my knowledge of Norse Mythology, because that has some importance in this story, but I'll also be adding some twists in the lore. I'll try and make it make sense for those unfamiliar with it in the simplest way possible.

I hope you guys enjoy!

~B
In which a young Hiccup goes troll-hunting, raccoons are beasts and eyes of blue makes a memory

Trolls do exist.

Young Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III knew that for sure. But the problem is that his cousin Snotlout did not. His protests to his beefy cousin’s teasing and disregards at his beliefs had led to him to take desperate measures and find a troll in the woods and bring it back for stupid Snotlout to see. His still simmering anger could be heard by the vicious snap of twigs that fell victim under the weight of his foot as he trudged in the woods in search for a troll.

He sniffed as he rubbed the still stinging arm where Snotlout punched him.

Gobber wouldn’t lie to him. He said it was the reason why he couldn’t find his left socks because they steal it. Gobber needed his left sock too, he only has one foot left after all and he needed them warm. Armed with a net to trap them and one of Gobber’s smelly left sock (he gagged) to lure the troll, Hiccup knew that he would catch one, his plan was full-proof. That’ll show Snotlout- and the rest of the village too!

Maybe catching a troll would make him less of a hiccup.

With that motivating thought, Hiccup made his way deeper into the forest with zeal, hefting the net more securely on his shoulder. He crafted his clever instrument for trapping in Gobber’s forge, with some nets from the fishermen that were of no use to them due to the holes that were present. Hiccup fixed that no problem with patches of boar hide, then it would make the net much sturdier in case the troll will try to escape.

“Then I’ll show it to Snotlout, then Gobber,” Hiccup said to himself. “Then he won’t have to lose anymore left socks.” Gobber would definitely be happy about that, much more so when he can show the village that trolls are real.

He pushed away a low hanging branch and crawled underneath the gap of a fallen tree, dusting off the dirt that clung to the knees of his pants before continuing on. The high hanging sun’s’ light litters the forest ground through the gaps of the tall trees’ head of leaves. Everyone would be busy at this time of day, especially his dad, chief of Berk, Stoick the Vast. He’ll be busy doing his chief duties to look for him. It didn’t matter anyway, Hiccup knew he would simply scare the trolls away and then drag him back home. If his dad could rip a dragon’s head clean off with just his bare hands, then it wouldn’t be surprising if he could scare trolls away with the sound of his voice alone.

Hiccup’s face scrunched up at the thought of his dad. His dad was among those who didn’t believe in trolls, no matter how much he nods along to Gobber’s tales about them. He told Hiccup himself when his son asked him to hunt trolls with him. ‘Trolls aren’t real, son. They’re just fairy tales, now focus on yer rod, ye might catch a fish this time.” Hiccup quickly went troll-hunting as soon
as his father’s back was turned.

If trolls weren’t real, then why would parents still give their children horrible names to scare them away? Hiccup scoffed. Adults are so weird.

Snap!

Hiccup froze. His head slowly turned to the right, wide green eyes staring at bush where he heard the snap of a twig. He swallowed, and tried to take a step to take his escape before whatever monster is hiding behind the bushes, but was stopped by the rustling of its leaves. He whimpered and whipped out the small dagger he hid underneath his coat. His hands and knees were shaking as the bush shook more from the movement of whatever it was hiding.

A fuzzy head popped out of the bush and he let out a scream, raising his thin arms to cover his head. He peeked behind his arms after he was sure he isn’t being mauled to death and let his arms fall limp.

“Oh.”

It was just a raccoon. The ring-tailed critter was sniffing along the ground for something to eat, completely ignoring the thin child staring at it with a deadpan face. He put the dagger back in his coat and took the net that he dropped on the forest floor during his act of defense.

He glared at the raccoon. “Definitely not a troll,” he muttered. It continued to ignore him, scratching itself behind its ears with its hind leg. He raised his hands and shook it in a shooing motion. “Go on, get out of here.”

It stayed resting where it was, now licking its...eew!

Hiccup flushed brightly and kicked a small rock at it. “Go away!” It hit on the critter’s rump and it jolted in shock with a shriek. The thing caught sight of Hiccup, seeing him as the only source of the attack, and lunged at him.

The young Viking screamed and began to run with the raccoon at his heels. He felt it nip at the back of his legs and his scream pitched higher as he willed himself to run faster. He didn’t seem to run in a particular destination, as long as it was away from that wild thing. Hiccup sped past low hanging branches that left scratches and the undergrowth. He dared to look over his shoulder and, to his relief found no raccoon chasing-

“Oof!”

He felt the painful impact of the dirty forest floor on his face as he tripped on an upturned root. Hiccup groaned pitifully as he pushed himself up to his feet, hissing at the painful scratches that he acquired in his escape. “Ouuuch…”

His eyes scanned the area where he seemed to run into. It was a small open area in the forest, surrounded by a scattering of bushes and stray, bare saplings, only half the height of the great oak trees that populate Berk’s forest. He could hear the rushing stream from afar, possibly just a few walkways past the fallen log in front of him. Overall, Hiccup thought that this was the perfect place.

Quickly forgetting the adrenaline-fueled chase that happened just moments ago, he worked to set up his trap. Hiccup first swung the rope of the net, the end with a bundle of hollow wood attached as his alert system, over the branch with much difficulty, perhaps by the seventh or eighth time he managed to do it successfully. The net itself, he spread flat on the ground and covered completely
with dead leaves and twigs. He put the smelly sock in the middle of the trap, directly on the trigger system. He sprinkled some pieces of the slightly stale bread he brought with him over it all. Hopefully, the sock won't be the only thing that'll lure the troll.

He looked at his fine work and nodded proudly. He looked around once more and found a suitable looking bush he can hide behind while he waited for the troll to get caught in his trap.

Hiccup stared unwaveringly at his trap, hoping to the gods that he would capture a troll and shove it in front of Snotlout’s face. But Hiccup waited and waited and waited. The sun was already starting to set and he was getting sores from staying in his crouched position behind the bush for too long. Not only that, he already finished the stale bread he brought with him hours ago and he began to grow hungry.

Maybe Snotlout and his dad were right. Maybe there are no such things as tr-

A rustle from the opposite bush startled him and he crouched lower to observe, his heart racing in excitement. But it was short-lived as the creature that strolled out of the bushes was no troll, but a familiar ring-tailed pest that was making its way to the bread crumbs on the trap. Hiccup decided that all his hard work and effort would not be turned to ruin just because of some flea bitten pest.

He scrambled out of the bushes with a cry, his dagger raised and rushed to the raccoon. It startled, tripping back in its hasty retreat. Hiccup panted as he slowed to a stop protectively in front of his troll-trap, watching the critter flee.

“Th-That’s right! And don’t come back you son of a-” Hiccup cut himself off as the raccoon made an abrupt stop. Its hackles began to raise and its tail puffed up to twice its size. Hiccup jumped as it turned back at him with a snarl and his heart was no longer pumping because of the adrenaline, but because of fear. It seemed to remember their last encounter.

“No, no, no, go away! Shoo !” Hiccup stammered, pointing the tip of the dagger to its direction. He moved back as the angry raccoon advanced towards him slowly, teeth bared with a coat of foam already bubbling around its mouth. Just his luck, it’s rabid.

It feinted a lunge, but Hiccup jumped back with a scream and realized his mistake a moment too late as he heard the crunch of dead leaves under his boot. The trigger was set and with an echoing snap, Hiccup felt the net incase him painfully. His legs dangled above the ground from the holes in the net. The young Viking stared helplessly at the dagger he had dropped and felt the tears of frustration flow.

“Arrgh! You stupid, stupid, stupid!” He knocked his head on his fist a few times as he cried. “You stupid hiccup….”

Adding salt to the wound was the sight of the raccoon devouring the crumbs that it sought after below him. The sight of it caused his bubbling anger explode into a cry of rage. The raccoon scurried away with its stolen goods, letting out a chattering sound, not unlike a mocking laugh, as it did.

Hiccup pulled at the net with all his might, thrashing and yelling for help while he exhausted himself trying to escape.

“Somebody help! Dad! Dad ! Gobber !.... Anyone !” Hiccup screamed out to the forest. He only managed to scare away perching birds.

But no matter how loud he screamed, nobody came.
It was starting to get dark, and Hiccup felt the chill of the oncoming night crawl in. He curled himself uncomfortably in the net, tucking his cold hands under his pits to keep warm. His throat was raw from screaming and his eyes were red and hurting from his tears.

This was the gods’ punishment to him, for being such a complete screw-up. Their way of saying that all his plans will end up in disaster, that he should just give up and accept his fate as the useless son of Berk’s greatest chief. His face screwed and his bottom lip wobbled, but his eyes were already spent of weeping.

No one will come and he’ll be hanging in a net for the dragons to feast on.

Hiccup tucked his chin into his chest as another cold breeze flew past. Well, there was also the murderous winter that could freeze him to death. The village would probably rejoice when they realized that the disgrace of the village is gone. Maybe even his dad...Maybe even Gobber.

He let out a soft sob at the thought.

A low growl emitted from close by and his breath hitched. His hand snapped to cover his mouth when he began to hyperventilate as a snort and a chorus of chitters followed. There were more than one out there. The scuffling of paws grew nearer along with the growls.

Hiccup froze as a pack of Terrible Terrors emerged into the clearing. He felt himself shake in fear at the sight of the dragons, one of the many species of dragons that pillage his village.

They scuttled underneath him, sniffing around for anything to scavenge. One of the Terrors came across his fallen dagger. It gave a tentative sniff before flinching back and snarled. Others came to investigate and graced the dagger with the same reaction. One went so far as to attack the offending item with its hissing flame, kicking dirt on it once it was finished.

So captivated he was at the scene that he didn’t notice a stray Terrible Terror climb up a tree and inspect his triggered trap. Hiccup’s tense muscles forced him to be still as it climbed around the net. His brows furrowed in pain at the occasional poke of its sharp talons through the holes. One particular poke drew blood as it pierced his skin and he let out a small gasp.

The Terrible Terror, the leader of the pack by its larger size, paused and lowered its horned head, coming eye to eye with Hiccup. The scrawny Viking felt himself shiver as he stared back, frozen, at the thin slitted eyes of the killer reptile. It glowed like fire from the early moonlight, and Hiccup saw the flames of his fiery demise in those devil-eyes.

It suddenly snapped its head northwards and gave a trilling call, catching the attention of its pack, and flew away with the rest following. Hiccup sagged in relief, breathing deep, and felt faint at being so close to death.

But his relief was short lived as he felt the net sway from the thundering footsteps that shook the ground and the trees. Hiccup clutched the net desperately and felt his heart drum at this new threat, and from the sound of it, it’s far more dangerous than a Terrible Terror.

Hiccup screamed, covering his eyes, as a mighty roar shook the forest and rattled his bones.
“I don’t wanna die!” He cried, shaking his head furiously and pulling at the net. He didn’t want to go to Helheim, Valhalla is a dream for someone as weak as him. It made him cry harder at the thought of his soul rest in the eternal coldness of Hel. Nobody will remember him, nobody will mourn for the hiccup of Berk, he’ll die alone, he’ll-

“Hey, hey, hey. Shhhhh, shhhhh. It’s okay, it’s gone. You’re fine,” a soothing voice was faint behind his loud sobs and the sound of his racing heart. He thought it was a figment of his imagination, he was finally going mad- perhaps he was already dead- but long, cool fingers caressed his cheek and wiped away his tears. “There, there. Don’t worry, I’ll get you out of here.”

The cool fingers left his face and Hiccup felt the net begin to lower. His body was limp and he laid sprawled on the forest floor from shock. His eyes stared at the night sky overhead, twinkling stars littered the sky.

Then he’s being pushed up, so gently that he can’t remember a time when he was handled like that in a village of hard-as-rock Vikings. He feels weak and tired, he couldn’t jump back from the stranger if he tried. But then he caught sight of blue, bluer than the ocean, than the sky- bluer than blue is what his hazy mind came up with.

“You shouldn’t be out here in this time of night, little one,” the stranger says, brushing the young Viking’s hair away from his face. Hiccup shivered violently at the icy touch, giving a groan as he tried to turn his head away even if the action was soothing. “Sorry.... What were you doing out this late anyway?”

Hiccup gave a little groan, eyes screwing shut as he tried to find his voice. But felt the aching rawness of his throat from his last bouts of screaming instead. He felt a thick fabric wrap around him that he snuggled against and the feeling of being lifted up by capable arms.

“Nevermind. Let’s get you home, little one,” the stranger said. Then they were moving.

Hiccup burrowed deeper into the fabric that kept him insulated. His consciousness was slowly being lured into sleep, the gentle rocking from the stranger’s movements didn’t help. But his mouth always had a mind of its own.

“Huntin’….t-trolls...st’pid...S-sn’tlout”

“Trolls? So you weren’t…” The stranger sighed softly, if Hiccup had been slightly more alert, he would have determined that it was a sigh of relief. “Don’t worry anymore, I’ll take you home…”

That was all he heard before he was rocked to slumber.

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Hiccup dreamed of snow blankets that warmed instead of freeze. He dreamt of Terrible Terrors singing Snoggletog jigs while flea-bitten raccoons danced on a frozen lake in tune to the dragons’ songs. Then, cold fingers twirled him around, a flash of blue eyes stared back kindly and the Terrible Terrors are singing, “Hiccup~ Hiccup~Hic-”

“-cup! Hiccup!“

The scrawny Viking jolted up, struggling against the tangle of fur blankets until he fell off his bed.
“Whu-What?” He gazed around blearily, sleep hazy eyes landing on the broad figure of Stoick, barely fitting his bedroom door.

“Finally awake! You’ve got to stop staying up late in the forge so much, Hiccup,” Stoick sighed exasperatedly. “Come on, get up, son. We’re supposed to set sail to the Bog-Burglar tribe today. Get ready, that wee lass, Camicazi, she was quite fond of you on our last visit.” He then turned and lumbered back downstairs, leaving a befuddled Hiccup on his bedroom floor.

His mind finally caught up a few seconds later and he remembered the events of last night but hardly recalling if it was just a figment of his wild imagination. What else could explain how he returned safely in his bed?

Hiccup’s eyes caught sight of the healing puncture wound on his arm, then the many scratches that were on the rest of his limbs. He stared wide-eyed at the evidence of his close to death encounter last night. From the raccoon to the dragons, to the...the...

A glint of metal caught his eye at the end of his bed, and he scrambled towards it. Hiccup picked up the strange pendant from the strung twine. It was a bent piece of iron that crossed with an elegant swirl at each end. He traced the small carved runes on the curves. Even if he held it to his eyes he couldn’t understand the engravings on the pendant.

Hiccup carefully put the pendant on as if it was fragile, easily broken, staring at the evidence of what he survived that night and the...the, blue-eyed stranger. His savior.

He sucked a breath and began to prepare for the day’s events.

As the years will go by and the young Viking won’t be so young anymore, he’ll come to forget that fearful night, the pendant no longer a reminder but a source of grounding when his responsibilities begin to suffocate him. Even the memory of his savior with hands like ice will begin to fade. But the unearthly blue of those eyes will always remain in his mind.
“Hiccup, we need to talk.”

Words that were never followed by anything good, Hiccup knew that to be true. The auburn-haired dragon rider turned around from his seat to face his second-in-command, Astrid Hofferson. A blonde-haired, blue-eyed spitfire of a shieldmaiden that donned a familiar narrow-eyed look. Familiar in the way that it’s usually trained at his cousin, Snotlout.

His beloved companion was curled by the dying yet still warm hearth, unbothered by the world of trouble that would befall Hiccup. The traitor.

“H-Hey, Astrid, what brings you here?” he smiled nervously. She slammed his door shut behind her for privacy, but it just made Hiccup’s stomach drop to his feet knowing he can’t escape the talk he tried hard to avoid all day.

“What was that back there with Krogan?” Straight to the point. Sometimes he envied Astrid’s ability to cut to the chase. To face her problems head-on with an axe held high and a warrior cry at the ready. Astrid doesn’t hesitate and Hiccup often found himself torn between whether that was something to be feared or admire.

They were on their way to infiltrate a dragon hunter base, get some information of the dragon eye and free the dragons that they had managed to capture. A simple mission that they’ve done hundreds of times. Only, it wasn’t as simple as he thought. He didn’t expect Krogan and his army of dragon flyers to ambush them from above. A leak of false information that his gullible mind held on to from the trade market led to their failed mission.

They had no choice but to take on the leader of the dragon flyers. And oh what a horrible choice it was. Outnumbered in the unfamiliar ground with the threat of vulnerable, imprisoned dragons
being hit by a stray shot of an arrow or fireball made it hard for them to fight back without hurting any of them. Each one of them had at least ten dragon flyers on their tail. Chaos was everywhere and even the twins couldn’t bask in it, too occupied in keeping themselves alive. But the gods were in their favor in that battle. By the grace of Thor, a storm brewed in the sky and a lightning shot grazed Krogan and his Singetail. But that was all it took to take them down, twitching and paralyzed from the lighting on the ground.

It could have ended there. Nothing could stop him from ending this war with the enemy there by his feet. All the anger for the destruction, the lives endangered and taken by this man laying at his feet boiled his blood. Rage so hot that a curtain of white blinded him and he had begun to raise Inferno above his head.

It was Toothless’ uncharacteristic whimper that broke him out of his blinding rage and made him stop and realize what he was about to do. Krogan’s convulsing form was just...pitiful. Hiccup’s nose scrunched at the horrid scent of burnt skin from the lightning strike, his clothes were scorched, and his eyes were rolling to the back of his head. He reminded Hiccup of the very dragons that they forced into cages and abused, leaving a broken dragon stripped of its might. His eyes glanced at the scarlet red titan wing Singetail, in the same state as Krogan, and he backed away, hand reaching behind him to find comfort in the warm scales of his friend.

He could have put a stop to everything then. No more game of cat and mouse, no more dragons in cages, no more fear of the Edge or Berk being attacked. No more of….this. The greed that makes monsters of men.

Hiccup flew then, leaving Krogan in his pitiful state, and forced his riders to flee. He couldn’t forget the thoughts that crept into his mind back then that felt so...right. Now, it made him feel sickened with himself. Furthermore, the fact that he would have brought his blade down had it not been for Toothless just made him ill. To take another living being’s life goes against everything he believed in. Dragon or human, a life is a life, and life...is precious.

Upon returning to the Edge Hiccup confined himself in his hut, to compose his thoughts and to avoid the bombarding questions that his riders would sure drop on him. But that didn’t seem to stop Astrid. Then again, as he said, nothing got in Astrid’s way.

Although, he didn’t expect the question she shot at him. He expected she demands answers to their sudden retreat, or an ‘are you okay?’ Hiccup thought nobody saw his confrontation with the fallen leader of the dragon fliers. He felt terror and something dark squeeze his gut. What would Astrid think of him now when she witnessed how he almost killed a man without thought? How he must have looked raising his sword above his head to plunge it deep into Krogan’s chest.

“Look I can explain...”

“You had him at your mercy, Hiccup,” Astrid said. “He was lying there!”

“W-What?” He couldn’t believe it. Did she actually... Him?

She started to pace, brows furrowed in frustration. “You were about to do it, but then you just... You just didn’t! I don’t understand, this war could have been over. No more dragon hunters, no more dragon fliers if you had just brought the sword down! So why didn’t you?” She faced him with a frustrated look, similar to somebody who just can’t fit the final piece of a puzzle no matter how many times they turn it.

He felt a sense of déjà vu at her query. She had asked that question before, only now it held a different weight. Before, she questioned his inability to kill a dragon, urging him to understand
what sort of Viking he is— not a cowardly fishbone, but somebody who found courage in mercy. Now, she questioned his inability to kill a person. It made his stomach churn.

“Why didn’t I? Astrid, Krogan may be our enemy, but he doesn’t deserve to die!” he told her, standing. “I wouldn’t… I would never kill any living being. That’s who I am, Astrid.” He raised his arms, willing her to understand. “We can defeat Krogan, stop the dragon hunters, without bloodshed— not if I can help it.”

Astrid stared at him for a moment before letting out a heavy sigh, shoulders sagging. She looked older than she really is right then— weary of seeing battles that lead to same conclusions. The young shieldmaiden was starting to tire of losing, it wasn’t in her to keep her mouth open to taste the bitterness of defeat in every confrontations.

Hiccup knew of her inner conflicts, it was clear on her face. It was a past time of his— observing people, back when the village wouldn’t acknowledge him and stroll past his inferior build. He developed that skill for years; Hiccup saw the little furrows and twitch of a lip that spoke of an inner turmoil within the young shieldmaiden. She’s a Viking of Berk, where her family is, her childhood, her memories— all there on Berk. He knew she felt that her duty as a warrior is to stay and protect Berk; she felt her responsibility to the Edge cannot compare to that of her responsibility to the village. Hiccup saw that by the way she glared at the lenses that were piled on his desk.

He knew that she’ll snap. One day she’ll finally come face with the final straw.

Their efforts to keep their relationship professional during missions seem to only widen the distance between them. In these times, they hardly get the time to let loose and not have to worry about looking over their shoulders all the time. That was just the kind of person she was. She doesn’t take well to failures and so the only solution to that is to always keep her guard up— even when her eyes are shut to sleep.

The first realization had hurt, a lot. But he slowly grew to accept that. The pain lessened as the time flew by and although he has yet to accept it, he’s coming close to that point. He wondered sometimes if that made him a horrible person to anticipate the end of what they both worked hard on, what he sought after since he was young.

“Just… don’t let it happen again, please,” Astrid implored, brows furrowed.

“I’ll make sure we’ll win this Astrid.” That was as close as he could say to her expected answer.

She looked like she wanted to close the distance between them for an embrace, or a kiss. Her hand lifted ever so slightly but refrained. He watched her hand drop and her expression harden— her warrior mask shielding her from the sentiments that urged her to touch him.

“I’ll be at my hut if you need anything.”

He watched her sadly as she turned and left his hut. A nudge to his side had him sigh and look down at his black-scaled companion. Hiccup ran a hand on the smooth scales on his head as Toothless crooned to comfort him.

“It’s nothing, bud. I’ll just…” Hiccup let out a heavy breath and laid his head against Toothless’, “it’s nothing.”

His companion let him stay like that for a few minutes, to let him gather his composure before he butted his head against the Viking’s and bounded to the hut’s door with excited grunts. Hiccup groaned pitifully at the pain in his middle, knees wobbling as he stood.
“Ow, ow. Toothless, alright, jeez! You didn’t have to do that so we can go flying,” Hiccup complained, walking towards him. The Night Fury gave a gurgle that sounded suspiciously like a laugh. He flicked the dragon’s appendage on its jaw for retribution, laughing as Toothless shook his head with a whine in response. “Come on then, you big baby.”

He took them outside and mounted the back of his dragon, securing himself to the saddle. His prosthetic gave a sound click as it attached itself to the mechanism that controlled Toothless’ prosthetic tail.

Hiccup didn’t need to give the command as Toothless unfurled his wings and took to the sky without prompt. The familiar race of his heart drummed loudly against his chest, in sync with Toothless’ own heartbeat that he could feel against his leg.

All the burdens that clung on his shoulders were blown away by the icy winds that they cut through and Hiccup felt free. Weightless and unburdened.

They flew across the endless sea that served as the Dragon Edge’s view. The briny tang of the endless waters below hit his nose as occasional waves rose from the blue. Being surrounded by the sea all his life made him immune to the smell of the sea’s salt and its deep dwellers. A pod of Thunderdrums swam in and out the sea as they passed. Hiccup caught another pod of tidal class dragons, Scauldrons, having a feeding frenzy with a school of tuna. Toothless managed to snag a stray snapper with a quick swipe of his front paws, splashing his rider with a copious amount of seawater, making him sputter.

“Oh, so you get a snack while I get soaking wet? Is that how it is?” he grumbled, swatting away some sea water on his arm guard.

For some time Hiccup let Toothless take the lead, trusting him to keep them out of harm's way and let himself be a passenger enjoying the view. They flew high, away from the waters, and above the clouds. Hiccup relaxed against the strong back of his Night Fury’s they flew by a flock of Nadders, who gazed curiously at their passing before coming back to concentrating on their journey. One gave a flirty nip at Toothless’ foreleg and Hiccup laughed as his companion gave a screech of surprise before speeding away from the flock.

Hiccup could hardly feel the sharp cold of the wind as they flew leisurely in the endless sky. Every bank and careful swoop a gentle rock that threatened Hiccup to sleep’s embrace. But he’s learned his lesson before to never sleep on the back of a flying dragon, lest you’d fancy an awful crick on your neck or back that’ll sure to stay for days. The young Viking rubbed his own neck with a grimace as if feeling that awful pain again.

The memory of his argument with Astrid threatened to take over his mind, urging him to pick at every little detail that would just sprout more somber thoughts. The reason why he’s flying with Toothless to gods knows where was to keep him from thinking about it in the first place. He didn’t know why his burdens are nagging at him, still reaching for him all the way in the middle of nowhere.

Hiccup sighed and straightened up on his saddle. “C’mon bud, let’s find somewhere to land,” he said.

They began their search for land in the abundant sea and it took a while before they spotted an island past two rock towers with a lone mountain that touched the clouds in the sky at the southside and a lush forest at its feet. He took a mental note to record this new area on the map and steered Toothless to a small clearing near the cliffside but still well guarded by the island’s thick-trunked trees.
He hopped off the saddle just a second before Toothless’ paws touched the ground, stumbling, and rushed to the bushes. Toothless grumbled as Hiccup let out a sigh as he relieved himself. The dark as night scaled dragon laid his belly on the ground with a huff, eyeing the tree towering forest with his suspicion and guard raised.

The air smelled different in the place than all the other new lands he and his companion journeyed in despite the normality of a simple forest place, and it nagged at the dragon’s senses. But Toothless remained vigilant in his wait for Hiccup. Besides, he'd rather be watching for any danger than hearing his companion marking his territory in the new woodlands.

Hiccup emerged from the bushes to return to the still-statue form of Toothless keeping a watchful eye on the woods. “Hey bud, thanks for keeping watch,” Hiccup rubbed the top of the dragon’s head with a laugh. “Really appreciate it.”

Toothless grumbled back and sat up to watch curiously as Hiccup pulled out his cowhide covered notebook and began to record the directions and a sketch of the island. His fingertips were covered in charcoal by the time he was done. He pulled the notebook back to inspect his work with a grin.

“Kind of looks like a foot, don’t you think?” He showed the picture to his curious companion, and it did look like a foot indeed. Toothless gurgled. “Yeah, maybe we should take another look above before we put it on the map.” He stood and Toothless rose with him, stretching languidly.

“Psst.”

Hiccup started, dropping his notebook, but was quick to recover and turned with Toothless to the sound with Inferno unsheathed and flaming. Toothless growled low with his sharp teeth bared towards the rustling bush.

“Who’s there?” The bush stilled once again, and Hiccup was ready if it were to pounce for an attack or flee. He raised Inferno a little higher until he could feel the warmth of its fire on his face. The pair waited in tense silence until Hiccup could feel his muscles getting sore, but just as when he had made the decision to approach, a mop of flame-red hair slowly emerged from the top of the bush. It stuck in every direction as if a Terrible Terror had made a nest of it. It rose to reveal a long, heavily freckled face that sported a sharp nose that turned up to the sky. It was a boy, and his brown eyes crinkled to make room for his large, snaggle-tooth grin.

Hiccup returned the boy’s stare, only without the grin and deadpan look on his face. “Who are you?”

The fiery-haired boy didn’t answer, he only continued to grin and it began to unnerve Hiccup. Toothless has yet to lower his guard or stopped growling, in fact, his purple fire seemed to only get brighter in the pits of his maw. Hiccup followed his lead, refusing to show weakness in the face of the stranger. He looked younger than Hiccup, despite being thin, but he’s seen younger children do the unthinkable in desperate times. If the boy lived in these woods then he must be hungry… hungry for what, Hiccup can only begin to guess.
He suddenly ducked down, back into the bushes and Toothless roared. Hiccup pressed his back to his companion’s side, who half curled around him as his defense, but was enough to make an attack. The young Viking’s grip on his blade tightened until his knuckles turned white.

“Psst!”

Their heads snapped to the side to find the mess of red hair popping from another bush that was a long way away from his previous hiding spot. Hiccup gaped head turning back and forth from the bush in front of him to the bush he was hiding in now. But his incredulous look turned into a simmering anger as the boy held up a familiar cow skin notebook in his hand, his grin still wide and impossible as he shook the notebook teasingly at him.

“Hey, give that back! That’s mine!” Hiccup dashed to catch the thief, Inferno tucked back in its sheath, and with Toothless in tow.

The thief was impossibly quick, his steps a quick pat-pat on the forest ground; Hiccup could have easily lost him had it not been for his head occasionally popping out of a farther bush to grin and hold up his stolen notebook before returning to avoid him. Hiccup could feel his lungs burning and his stump of a leg ached from the friction against the prosthetic. Gotta fix that, he thought to himself through the sound of the blood pumping in his veins.

Seeing his two-legged companion begin to slow, Toothless dove his head between Hiccup’s legs and threw his head back, to deposit Hiccup to the saddle. The one-legged Viking have a surprised yell but held tight to his dragon’s strong neck as they speed through the forest, working to catch the thief who was still keeping out of reach as he popped from bush to bush.

That notebook held valuable notes concerning inventions, battle plans, maps and whatever Hiccup’s mind managed to think up off. If it got into the wrong hands they could make use that to their advantage against Dragon’s Edge. He couldn’t possibly let that happen. So he sat on the saddle and attached his prosthetic to the pedal and opened Toothless’ own prosthetic tail. He pressed himself as close as possible to Toothless’ body as they glided above the forest floor.

“Get back here!” Hiccup shouted as they sped past the thick trees.

He was replied by a burst of laughter from afar, his breath unchanged by the speeds the thief is taking to avoid them. He laughed like he was having the time of his flea-bitten life.

“Faster, Toothless!”

The Night Fury screeched and worked against the wind, gliding until the trees were a blur and the shock of red hair had stayed still in on the furthest bush in front of them. Toothless tucked his wings against him and smoothly transitioned from air to ground without losing his speed and Hiccup leaped from the back of his dragon to tackle the red-haired thief. His hand wrenched the cow-hide covered notebook from thin fingers and his body collided with another’s, head painfully clashing the other’s before his eyes saw the whole world roll.

The young Haddock felt the twigs scratch his skin and the fallen leaves slap his face as he rolled down a small downhill slope. He stopped rolling, his back on the chilling floor and his eyes staring dazed at the spinning grey sky. Hiccup heard Toothless’ roar of distress before he felt a cold nose press against his cheek. He let out a pathetic groan to voice out his head feeling like melted yak butter and his guts threatening to say goodbye to his breakfast.

“Ugh...Toothless...Gods,” Hiccup groaned, shutting his eyes and resting a hand on his head to find relief. Toothless nudged his side and managed to push him upright. By then, the spinning had
lessened and Hiccup withheld the urge to shake his head. “I’m fine, bud. I’m fine.”

He peeled his eyes open, falling to the notebook that was clutched in his hand in a vice grip that was sure to crinkle the parchment inside. But where was the thief? His head snapped up and he stood so quickly he felt vertigo crawl back to him. “The kid! Where is he?”

The area where he stumbled upon was clear of that shock of red hair, not even a rustle of bushes disrupted the silence in this place in the forest. In fact, Hiccup noticed it was too quiet. He looked at Toothless and found his oddly silent as well, staring in front of him where the trees parted for a dirt trail. His eyes followed the trail shortly before finding the signs of a village at the end of the road.

Hiccup’s curiosity perked up but his years of paranoia snapped at him to stay vigilant and prepared for any danger. His hand itched to be curled around the handle of Inferno for comfort but it wouldn’t do well to show up in an unknown village as an image of hostility. Instead, the young Viking followed the trail, ordering Toothless to follow him in the shadows, unseen, with a silent hand signal: two fingers held out and pressed together, making a circle before jerking it forward. He didn’t need to look back to see it Toothless obeyed the command, only feeling the shift of wind behind him to know Toothless had hidden and followed him without being seen. Hiccup didn’t know the people in this village would react to a dragon so close.

He followed the trail to the village until the forest line was behind him and the empty...village...appeared. The streets were bare and nothing was out of place in the deserted village. No wagons were upturned, no stalls were out of place, home doors were kept closed and no sign of pillaging occurred in the area. But what unsettled Hiccup all the more was the absence of any signs of life in the place. He couldn’t even here a muted mutter as he pressed an ear against the door of a nearby home. Hiccup narrowed his eyes as he walked down the streets, surveying everything in his peripheral. He vaguely noted that the sun was starting its descent to dawn.

The village, despite its empty state, looked no different than any villages in the archipelago. Homes were built with stone or wood. Layers of mud and hay covered wooden roofs to act as insulators against the harsh winters of the archipelago. Runes of protection and prayers were carved carefully along the door sill, along with dizzying knotworks that stretched as far as the length of the home’s wood. Hiccup traced the carvings with a hand thoughtfully. The wooden homes were dark with age, and the stones were weathered and littered with lichen. A sign that the homes were not new. No singe marks were present, nor vicious claw marks that hinted dragon activity. It’s as if the village has never even been touched by a dragon before.

Hiccup ventured further into the village, keeping his guard erect and his back constantly watched. The area was a far cry from the layout of Berk, where homes were built to hug the cliff sides and stone clearings. There was no elevation in the village’s area, so he was stuck in a maze of homes without a view of what’s ahead. It made him feel claustrophobic. Being in the air with Toothless most of his days made him uncomfortable in small spaces. As if he was always looking for enough space to lift off whenever Toothless and he makes their escape.

He started to grow tired seeing the same view of abandoned houses each careful turn. Maybe there was never any people in the place, to begin with, maybe the village itself had been abandoned long ago. His stump started to grow sore again with his constant rub against the wood of his prosthetic. He leaned down to rub his leg with a hiss. Crash! It came from the house ahead of him to the right, the signature runes and knots carved on wood and a trio of ceramics stood by the closed door.

Clang! Clack!

Hiccup dashed to the house, his blade unsheathed, and carefully opened the door. The inside had
little furniture, but it was instead filled with all sorts of animal carvings big and small. An uncomfortable looking wooden stool sat in front of the dead fireplace, a quilt was draped over the stool- horribly wooly and would undoubtedly leave you itching for days. Wood shavings littered the floor, a sign that whoever lived here created the variety of wood carvings in the home. Hiccup stepped further into the niche, sword held up in front of him.

He peered into the fireplace. There was still firewood inside, untouched by fire, but frost started to make a home on its skin- probably from the chill air that seeped in from the chimney.

Scrriitch! Clang!

The ruckus came from the back room of the home, just inside the doorway to the right. Hiccup stalked to the doorway, pressing his back on the wall near the entrance. He evened his breath as he listened to the scuttling inside the room and a few more sounds of ceramics breaking and metal meeting the wooden floors.

With one last breath Hiccup separated himself from his hiding spot and jumped in front of the entrance. It was a small storage room. What once could have been neatly shelved and jarred food and pots were left a mess upon the floor. Soft vegetables littered the floor in a splattering mess along with moldy curdled cheese. Hiccup blanched at the smell. The whole room was ransacked and upturned; if the noise was anything to go by, then the one responsible for it was still in the room. Hiccup raised his blade a little higher and followed the trail of discarded food on the floor.

His eyes narrowed and lips pursed at the sight of muddy footprints amongst the mess. Hiccup followed it carefully. The tracks showed the intruder going from one place to another, scouring every inch of the room- looting or stuffing their gob most likely. But the footprints stopped abruptly in front of a shelf full of smoked meat. The realization came to him and he looked up, only to meet wide, brown orbs on the very top of the shelf. The nest of red hair made Hiccup realize what he was looking at. He was too late to raise his blade in defense as the thief lunged at him from the top of the shelf. Hiccup gave a startled cry as he was knocked back to the floor, head smacking painfully on the wooden boards. He groaned as the wild-haired thief planted a dirty foot in his gut in his haste to escape.

“Stop!” Hiccup grunted, heaving himself up and chased after the thief once again, who had left the wooden home and was running down the pathway. This time he had no bushes to hid behind and Hiccup saw the bulges of food he tried to keep from falling was stuffed inside his brown, dirty tunic.

“Hey! Hey! Stop!” Hiccup shouted as he dodged another raw vegetable thrown at him by the thief. The first was a tomato that was now staining his tunic.

He gave a growl and decided to end the chase once and for all. He cupped a hand to his mouth and let out a guttural call that echoed. A similar roar replied nearby and a black scaled bulk dropped from the roof of a home and in the way of the red-haired thief. The stranger gave a startled yelp and stumbled to a stop a few feet away from his dragon, letting loose the stolen foods under his tunic. Toothless growled, wings unfurled to appear bigger as well as blocking his way. The red-haired boy turned his head to Hiccup’s direction, brown eyes wide and in a panic.

“No more escaping...You’re trapped,” Hiccup panted. “Now, tell me-oh, gods.”

The young Viking groaned as the fiery-haired miscreant leaped over the low crouching back of Toothless, who yowled his surprise at the spontaneous action. Toothless turned to pursue him without prompt.
“Get him, Toothless!” he called, jogging to cover the growing distance between himself and the pair.

He wondered why the miscreant was the only living soul in the deserted village. Maybe he had something to do with their disappearances, it was unlikely that one scrappy boy would be capable of doing so but he was the only suspect to point fingers at. He could guess that he had been living in the wilderness if his ragged and dirty appearance said otherwise, taking the opportunity to scavenge the pantries of the missing villagers.

Hiccup sprinted when he lost sight of Toothless who followed the boy rounding a corner. He found himself stopping in front of a forked street as he rounded a corner. “Toothless!” he called. A distant roar echoed but Hiccup heard it carry stronger in the left path and sprinted towards it.

Hiccup started following the main path that turned corners, calling Toothless, whose roars seemed to be growing closer at times and fainter when he turned another corner. He began to feel the frustration tagging along with exhaustion.

“Toothless! Toothless! Toothless!” He was beginning to feel breathless and his aching legs began to shake every time it landed on the ground. More so his stump. It was sure to be swelling and probably acquired nasty blisters.

“Argh! Son of a…” Hiccup cursed loudly as he felt more than heard the twang of his springs forceful dislodge from his prosthetic. He hit the ground hard. It was sure to leave bruises. He sat up to check over his prosthetic, only to scowl. The spring was popping out, already broken away from its connection to the second joint. His left leg wound sink and he would be waddling instead of walking. “This is just great,” he grumbled. Uncomfortable it may be, but at least he won't be hopping around.

He pulled his left leg to himself and turned to look at his surroundings, only to scream and crawl back at the sight he came face to face with. A head was mounted on a standing pike, bleeding from the mouth and the cut on its head. Blood trailed down the pike’s length and made a small pool on the ground. The head’s eyes were rolled back to point its unseeing eyes to the sky.

Hiccup turned his head to wretch this morning’s yak chops. He pulled back once he was done, wiping the tears that came with the vomit and the thin trail of saliva. He dared to look again at the mounted head and felt his stomach churn once more.

He made to stand, wobbling a bit but was successful. Hiccup flinched a bit, seeing the head at a higher angle. The churning in his gut wouldn’t stop and he felt even more dread as he saw more blood trailing down the street and turn a corner as if a body was being dragged. Hiccup swallowed thickly, cringing at his sore throat and the sour taste his sick had left behind.

Taking a last look at the butchered head, he followed the trail. He turned the corner and took one look before retching, leaning on the wall of a wooden house as he felt his legs weaken. He found himself staring at the village square...with a mountain of piled bodies in the middle of it all. Men, women, and children in a bloodied heap, some bodies were littered around the area. Many, Hiccup blanched, were headless and one sweep of the area found a small pile of heads next to a stack of crudely sharpened wooden pikes. No doubt to suffer the same fate as the mounted head from before.

Hiccup gagged and felt a shiver run down his spine as the stench of blood and rot hit his nose. The smell makes his eyes tear up. He spat a wad of saliva to the side as he started to taste the revolting smell. Who would do something like this? A whole village...massacred.
Stomach rolling, Hiccup shakily sat on the dirt floor, back leaning against the home’s wall. His head pounded like the thundering beating of drums. He didn’t think he could hold himself up much longer. Growing up in a village who used to fight Dragons daily, Hiccup isn’t a stranger to violence, blood, wounds, and bruises. Dragon hunters were also a usual scene for the badly wounded from dragon attacks. But this...this is too much.

The young viking’s eyes snapped up. Toothless. He had to get Toothless away from here. Whoever was responsible for this is probably still in the island... the only living thing other than them.

Hiccup cursed and scrambled to his feet, cursing once more when he stumbled, barely catching himself, and remembering his busted prosthetic. “Dammit, dammit, dammit,” he continued cursing as he ran close to the walls, his prosthetic clanking with every step he ran/ hopped away from the sickening scene. He mimicked a Night Fury’s roar to call Toothless, feeling great relief when a responding roar came. He rested against a torch pole to wait for his companion, feeling his head pound- rhythmic, thunderous beats that pulled something in his memories. As if the fear curling in his chest was familiar yet different from fears that he felt during mission misshapes.

A giggle made him jump and spin around. Crouching on top of a home’s wooden overhang, muffling his still loud giggles with a hand over his mouth, was the red-haired thief. Hiccup glared at him from his spot. “Do you know what happened there?” he demanded, pointing to the direction of the massacre.

The red-haired rat only continued with his giggling- it was an annoying *hiii-hiii-hiii* sound- firing Hiccup’s anger. He pushed himself off of the pole, glaring up at the boy.

“This isn’t funny,” he hissed. “Why are you here? Did you do this? To those people?!”

He didn’t stop his tittering to answer Hiccup, instead, it grew louder. He started to snort, slapping his thigh as if Hiccup’s questioning was the hilarious thing in the world.

“Stop it. Stop laughing,” Hiccup snarled. In a fit of anger, he undid his broken metal leg and threw it at the boy. He dodged easily, leaning his body away and letting the metal contraption sail past him. The boy stopped giggling, staring at Hiccup, grin faltering before he blew a raspberry. He threw a tomato at Hiccup that he had hidden underneath his shirt, the young Viking barely dodging the attack, and made his final escape, leaping over the roof.

Hiccup leaned back on the torch pole, feeling lighter and unbalanced with his missing metal leg. He let out another call for his dragon, feeling like a great weight was lifted off of his shoulders when the black dragon dropped down in front of him. Toothless shuffled forward with a pitiful coo, his intelligent eyes displaying an apologetic look having failed to capture the wild-haired boy.

Hiccup hobbled forward, patting Toothless’ head. “It’s alright, bud. Let’s just get out of here.” He hurried to take his spare leg from the satchel attached to Toothless’ saddle and put it on. His eyes caught the light reflecting off something amongst the splatter of tomato juices.

Cautiously, he swiped away the tomato splatterings and picked up the gold coin. The carvings made Hiccup’s knowledgeable mind unable to point to its origins. He held it close to his face. Carved on the face of the coin was two ravens trapped in the coils of an open-mouthed serpent. He ran a thumb on the engravings, feeling the details of the serpent’s scales and the Ravens’ feathers. On the other side was a single rune carved, the letter Ingwaz. A rune to represent the god Ing, of fertility and creativity.

Toothless gave a concerned croon and Hiccup tucked the unfamiliar gold coin in his trouser pocket. He mounted Toothless’ saddle, giving the dragon a reassuring pat on the neck, and took to
the sky.

“Back to the Edge, Toothless,” Hiccup said as the island grew farther from behind him.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the wait, but I've made it a personal goal of mine to make it so each chapter has a minimum of 6K words to force myself to write as I believe that there is no such thing as writers block. Anyway, 200+ hits and 30 kudos y'all! I'm so happy people took the time to take a look and give this fic a chance, so thank you guys. I hope to not disappoint! Also, I've set up a tumblr to post art for this fic for inspiration to write, updates and maybe some sneak peeks for the next chapters. It's this link. You can find the cover I made for the fic as well!
Chapter II

In which the tavern sings, the speechless speak of divination and Hiccup is warned

The tavern was called *The Fat Gosling*, and it was the prime spot for the labourers, vagabonds, and riff-raffs to drink barrels upon barrels of mead until they kiss the tavern's grimy floors. They sing loud and drunkenly the tunes that tell stories of the sea life and their loves. Many ogled at the bosoms of the barmaids of the tavern that serve them their mead and meal, they steal kisses and try to feel the softness of their skin- some have a grinning lady or two sitting on their laps. It was a place of pleasure, whether it be drunken or sinful.

"I SING TO MY SEA, OH BLUE SEA! SHE IS QUICK TO TEMPER, QUICK TO ROAR. BUT STILL, I RETURN TO HER EMBRACE..."

Ubba Golperg was called Ubba the Pig by many, not because of his porky appearance or his gluttonous habits. But because of one incident where the folks found him in the pig pen, sleeping with the pigs after a drunken night. He even kissed one while trying to wake, people said he thought it was his wife. Ubba the Pig was the village laughing stock. He did not walk by every day without the mocking pig snorts following him from the villagers.

That is why he sits with no one in the rowdy tavern, with a spare bit of wood on top of a barrel as his table in the corner. His greasy fingers tapped against his tankard of mead, eyes darting around nervously.

"SHE MOVES SERENE A TIMES, SHE SINGS SWEET WITH RHYMES. I SAIL TO LOVE HER. BUT BEWARE, OH MY BROTHERS! SHE LOVES OH SO FIERCE!...."

While the others in the tavern act their merriment and drink themselves silly, Ubba sits alone with his nerves in a bundle. The fat that hides his neck jiggle as he mutters something that can't be heard.
over the noise. But one cannot mistake his continuous mutterings as a prayer to the gods. For as infamous as he is to the villagers as the village clown, they also know he is a man who serves the gods unyieldingly, faithfully.

"...Odin, far-wanderer, Father of all mortal children, grant me wisdom, courage, and victory. Friend Thor, grant me yer strength. And both be with me. Send forth the blessings of my Lady Frigg, of mother's touch and knowing eyes. My destiny be in the carriage of yer hands-"

"Spare me your useless mutterings, Ubba."

A heavily cloaked figure took his seat across from the muttering Norseman, who started, banging his knee underneath the table with a hiss. He clutched his mug of mead close, beady eyes wide and staring at the stranger in shock.

"Wha-whu-who are ye? How d'ye know my name?" Ubba stuttered, his sagging chin wobbling with his lips.

"It's me, you bumbling fool." He threw back his hood and levelled the quivering man with a one-eyed glare. His face bore grotesque claw marks that began just past his hairline, running down over his right eye, scarring it permanently closed, and fading to a finish over the corner of his mouth, pulling it down to a frown. Half of his dark hair was tied in a top knot and the rest of his scraggly hair hung down above his shoulders.

"Iric...how d'ye know I was 'ere?"

Iric rolled his eyes and leaned back in his seat, arms crossing. "Just like how I know what every labouring man wants to do after a hard days work. To drink themselves in a stupor and end with a woman to warm their beds."

Ubba's eyes flicked down to the mead he had both his hands wrapped around, then to Iric's face, stuck in a permanent frown. His grey eye stared back at him and Ubba quickly looked down.

A face like Iric's was a common sight in the tavern, nothing to gawk at, save for a passing glance at that nasty scar. But his sneer was a feature that many was sure to avoid anyway. The village men in the tavern weren't without their own scars, of course. Bear maulings, fights and dragon attacks are common causes of their gruesome blemishes.

"TOORA-LOORA-LEI-LAI! THAT IS WHAT SHE SINGS TO ME!"

The most outlandish scar story he had ever heard was from Kabbi the sheep farmer. He always claimed that he got the bite mark on his arse (another reason for him to show off his scar) from a Nadder while he kept away its pack from his flock. Then chomp! - right in his left cheek, before he stabbed it in the eye. A brave man he was, the village said. A great table tale that fell apart after he drunk one too many drinks one night and told them that he got that bite mark because his dog had bitten him.

After that, his flock seemed to dwindle in numbers while the other villagers somehow appear the next day with an extra sheep or two in their own flock.

"...BUT BE WARES! FOR SHE IS NOT SO SWEET, SHE IS THE SALT THAT PAINS MY WOUNDS, OH MY SEA! LOORA-LEI-LAI- LOO!"

"Ye shouldn't interrupt a praying man, ye know. Ye might find yerself faced with their ire," said Ubba.
"Peh. The gods don't need a reason to wrong their mortal slaves," he sneered, snatching the tankard of mead a barmaid had barely placed on the table and took a swing. She gave a little huff and Ubba watched the sway of her hips as she walked away. "I mean look at you, the gods didn't stop you from being the village idiot- Hel, they're probably laughing along with the others too."

Ubba flushed brightly and glared down at his tankard.

"No longer a man of faith then?"

Iric scoffed and set his tankard down. "Why did you call for me?"

"Can't a man just want some company?"

The scarred man stared blankly at him that clearly said ‘you're as dumb as the animal on your moniker.’

Ubba knew damn well why he asked him to meet with him in this crowded tavern, and Iric knew that the fat bastard knew. What irked him was that the pig-kisser acted like he knew something that Iric didn't, which was never the case.

But he didn't let that irritation show. Instead, he took a slow drink and watched the singing men across the tavern, completely ignoring the man across from him.

"WHEN I LEAVE FOR LAND, SHE SENDS HER RAGE TO ME! MERCY, MERCY, OH MY LADY!"

"Sorry, I know how much ye hate that." The fat fool had the nerve to chuckle. "Now, anythin' interestin' happen to ye? News?"

Iric gritted his teeth and turned back to give him a one-eyed glare. "Three days ago, Romans invaded the Parni port, burned the village and sold the villagers as slaves. I was there when it happened and made a quick escape. Five days of travelling and avoiding dragons later I get word of you looking for me. So your request to see me wasn't exactly welcome."

The fat man across from him smiled sheepishly. "Things are quite different this time, though I appreciate ye coming quickly."

"As you should."

"Something's happened you see…" he leaned forward, voice dropping low but loud enough to be heard by Iric over the noise. Gone was the bumbling village clown and was replaced by a man with intent. It made Iric's attention snap to Ubba immediately and lean forward also.

"I caught 'er."

Iric rose a brow. "Did you now?"

"She was down in the moors three nights ago- the moors of all places!" he insisted. "It was a full moon, Iric. In the winter of Mörsugur! When Odin himself travels in mortal lands…"

"Yes, I know of the winter solstice, Ubba," he drawled. "You live far too deep into your delusions-"

"She had a knife with 'er and cut 'er own palm!" Ubba cut him off and he mimicked the description with a finger slashing across a palm. "And then she started chanting- she cursed this
village, I tell ye! Didn't ye see a sickness has started ta spread? The children have been coughing like Hela herself has wrapped her dead hands around their throats."

Iric's scarred face blanked, Ubba's fantasy story beginning to disinterest him. "It's winter's third month, and snow falls harshly in this village. It's not rare to find children not making it to their next summer month."

There's always a child or two to grieve on when the winters begin and hungers for the weak. Weeping mothers were a common sight, carrying their children to the pyre to burn, hoping that the smoke and flame take their spirits high and away from Helheim's gates, for their deaths were caused by illness. Not a glorifying end to a young life in the eyes of Odin in Valhalla or even to Freya in Fólkvangr. Even after death, the gods still turn away from their mortal creations, who exalted them all their lives.

"I DARE NOT DROWN IN HER EMBRACE, FOR THOUGH HER LOVE IS FIERCE, I'VE A MISTRESS I MUST FACE!"

The men in the tavern roared in laughter as a barmaid sitting on one's lap pulled the man towards her and gave him a passionate kiss. His tankard of mead held away from him as some mead spilt at their actions. Iric scowled at the sight.

"No, that's not it! Don't ye see? She's got ta be stopped!" Iric began to shake his head and pull away but Ubba lunged and grabbed a firm hold of his arms to pull him back. "I'm not insane- I make no false claims. I know what I saw."

Iric showed no sign of being moved. Ubba's eyes showed his desperation, his grip on Iric's arms near painful. "Brother. Please. I beg ye, help me."

It was then that Ubba shed that serious facade and Iric saw the disgusting and desperate man his brother has become. He tied himself down to a village that had made a mockery out of him and the fool had thrown away the keys to his shackles. It just came to show that Iric made the right decision by leaving this forsaken village. They used to be close when they were young boys, Ubba and him. But the shift between boyhood and manhood was what made them drift apart. Still, he remembered the way his elder brother stood up for him, taught him everything he knew and guided him through difficult times before he left the village- left Ubba.

An elderly woman's voice drifted in his thoughts, reminding him, ‘Family, boy, it is like string. You have many strings, maybe few, but they come together and make very, very strong twine. All it takes is for someone to twist string in place.’

Iric's lip twisted, accenting the grotesque lines on his face. Of all the times for his thoughts getting the better of him- with the sound of that thrice-damned woman's voice no less.

"Fine. I'll keep watch of her," the scarred man growled at last. "Now get your grubby hands off me."

Ubba's hands dropped from the other's arms and clasped together. "Thank ye, brother. Thank ye. Yer welcome ta stay in my home."

"No. I'll stay here," said Iric, downing his drink and standing. He tossed two silver coins on the table and sneered down at his brother. "Meet me back here in five days. I'll tell you what you want by then." With that, he pulled his hood back over his face and disappeared into the crowd. The end of his cloak was the last Ubba saw of him.
Had Ubba Golperg's eyes stayed on his brother's retreating form just a second longer he would have seen another broad-shouldered, cloaked figure stand from his own lone corner in the tavern and follow in the direction of Iric. But as it was so, Ubba had stared down thoughtfully at the mead inside nearly empty tankard.

"Oi! Piggy, piggy! Innit time fer ya to get back to yer pig pen?" One drunkenly called.

The tavern filled with a round of uproaring laughter and Ubba Golperg bowed his flaming red face. He called for another drink in hopes that he'll be drunk as a skunk before the men went on for a second round of singing.

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Hiccup jolted from the precarious edge of sleep at the sound of Tuffnut's squawk of indignation as his twin gave him a vicious punch in the arm. Toothless gave a concerned coo and Hiccup sighed, patting the Night Fury's neck, before turning back to give the Zippleback riders a glare.

"Would you two please stop that?" said Hiccup. "We don't want to attract any unwanted attention."

The dragonriders received a Terror-mail from Berk at dawn, just an hour shy of when Hiccup and Toothless came back to the Edge after their little escapade. Hiccup was already half asleep when he took off Toothless' saddle and had dropped in his bed, shoes and all, intending to sleep the rest of the day after his shocking discoveries and hope it was all a dream when he woke up.

But the shrill cry of a Terrible Terror outside in the barely rising sun ruined all that. His body ached to stay and sleep but he forced himself to go outside and glare at the shill singing Terror on the perch, a rolled piece of parchment tied to its leg. The rest had come out of their own huts, looking sleepy but at a much better state than Hiccup was.

The Terrible Terror carried a message from his father. The runes spelt Stoick's instruction for Hiccup to come to Berk per the village Elder's request. Hiccup had intended to go alone but the rest had chimed in their want to visit Berk, catch up with family and possibly pester Gobber for some upgrades on their weapons.

They had packed promptly and left the Edge to the protection of the Night Terrors. Hiccup had looked forward to a quiet flight to Berk, maybe even rest his eyes and let Toothless do the flying, but really should have known better when the twins were involved.

"It was her! Gah!" Tuffnut yelled, failing to dodge a kick to the shin. "She- ow! - hit- ow! - me first! Arck! Stop it!" He flailed his hands to stop Ruffnut's attacks, only urging her to do the same and leading to a fury of hand slaps as the twins simultaneously leaned away from each other.

"Yeah, well, someone un-start it," Hiccup sighed turning to look forward.

"Remind us why, again, did Stoick call you to Berk?" asked Fishlegs, trying to change subjects.

"Gothi told him to call for me, curious enough, and he didn't really say why." Hiccup answered. "Maybe she wants another batch of herbs for her stock."

The group cringed in unison. But only Snotlout voiced out his displeasure. "Oh gods, not again! Why did you even force me to go with you guys? Remember the last time she asked us to get her 'some herbs'? We nearly died and smelled like yak dung and barf for TWO weeks!"

"Nobody forced you to go anywhere, Snotlout. I even asked you if you wanted to keep watch over Dragon's Edge," said Hiccup over his shoulder. "And 'nearly died' is a bit of an over exaggeration,
don't you think?"

Although he couldn't deny the last bit. Gothi had them gather some Viking Breath blooms in Outcast Island, as much as they could carry she said because a lot of the villagers were complaining about painful stomach aches. It was good for the bowel movement, but, like it's namesake, it smelled horrid. Before AND after it was prepared.

Unfortunately for them, there was a whole field of them in full bloom, spreading their disgusting scent in the air. Alvin happily left them to it, happy that his village will finally be free of the stench. Hiccup thought for sure that a Viking's breath on a bad day would have smelled nicer than the plant.

"Well I for one thought that its pungent odour was a great bug repellent," Ruffnut declared, pausing her fight with Tuffnut.

"Please, tell me you didn't," Astrid groaned.

"Oh ho, yes we did!" said Tuffnut. "We smuggled in some of that Viking Breath blooms and now our hut is all kinds of bug-free, baby!"

"No wonder your hut smelled like somebody's dead foot," growled Snotlout, teeth gritting. "I could smell it from outside, you muttonheads!"

"I think you meant it smelled like Viking's breath. It's in the name, you know."

"Yeah, I think you need to re-think which one of us is the muttonhead here," Ruffnut shot Snotlout a smug grin, making the meaty Viking flush with anger. "And anyway, we hid it all over our hut, so you'll never find it if you go looking. We'd like to sleep without waking up with bug bites thank you very much!"

"Besides, our great-aunt Inga said it wards off evil spirits, negative energy and all that," said Tuffnut.

"Like it isn't all that already," Astrid muttered, though clearly intending for them to hear.

The twins made a sound of indignation a Hiccup decided to intervene before an argument broke. "Just make sure you guys don't leave any lying around or -gods forbid-misplace it in our huts."

Hiccup immediately wished he hadn't said that when he spotted the twins exchange evil grins.

It was late in the afternoon when they spotted the stone statues that guarded Berk's sea. The torches weren't lit yet and there were a few trading ships docked in Berk's port that Hiccup spotted as they flew overhead.

Even at that time of day, the village was still bustling with loud Vikings calling out to another at a distance. Children played in the snow, pelting snowballs and running wildly. They gasped and waved when they spotted the group overhead. Fishlegs gave an enthusiastic wave back.

Hiccup spotted his father's broad-shouldered, barrel-chested figure with Gobber, making their way to the steps of the Meade Hall. Stoick the Vast was a hard Viking to miss if the shock of red hair wasn't enough to make people look twice, well… he isn't called 'Vast' for nothing. Chief of Berk was a title that was tailored perfectly for Hiccup's father.

The dragon riders landed smoothly in the village square just as Stoick and Gobber took the first step on the stairs. Stoick's face beamed at the sight of his son and he opened his thick, muscled arms wide as he descended upon him with a call of "Hiccup!"
"Ack!" Hiccup heard a few bones pop as he was engulfed in his father's embrace. "N-nice to-see you too, dad." He patted a muscled-thick arm, either as a sign of greeting or a sign to let him go before he starts to see the gates of Valhalla.

"Yer killin' the poor lad with yer love Stoick!" laughed Gobbed, patting his friend's shoulder.

Hiccup breathed deep, coughing a bit when Stoick let go of him. He waved away his father's apologies and offered a half-hearted grin. Toothless bounded over, circling Gobber and Stoick with excitement, making them chuckle.

"Good to see you, son," said Stoick, clapping a large hand on his son's shoulder, making him stumble. "You got my message I take it?"

"Yeah, I got it," Hiccup replied.

"At gods knows what in the morning," mumbled Snotlout.

Everyone swiftly ignored Snotlout's comment with practised ease and Gobber ushered them to follow with his prosthetic hand, saying cheerfully, "Come on then, ya lot. Dinner's about ta start soon. Takes a day from the Edge to Berk, doesn't it? All ye must be hungry. Heard yer uncle Borsnut's cookin' tonight." He looked at the twins.

"Uncle Borsnut?! The-best-yak-chop-stew Uncle Borsnut?! " Tuffnut yelled in disbelief.

"I'm getting the first plate!" Ruffnut shoved past her twin and raced towards the mead hall entrance. It was enough for Tuffnut to snap out of it and run after his sister with a cry of, "hey!" Barf and Belch bounded after them. The smell of food must have caught Hookfang's attention as he too darted towards the doors with a roar.

"Hookfang!" Snotlout growled and chased after his dragon, tripping on the last set of stairs before tripping again from the feet that were held out from behind the Meade Hall doors. Snotlout's outraged cry and the twin's mad cackling echoed from inside.

Gobber shook his head and limped after them, grumbling under his breath about "impatient boneheads." But it seemed that he was just as eager to get first serve to tonight's dinner.

The Meade Hall was warm from the roaring flames of the firepit in the middle of the great room and it bathed the Meade Hall in an orange glow. There were only two dozen villagers present for the meal and that wasn't even close to a quarter- or even a third!- of the village. But there were a few dragons warming by the fire pit, adding to the fire whenever it began to lower.

It was common for the place to be almost empty as it is, the only times the village ate in there was if there was either a celebration or a feast. Most villagers would rather have a meal with their family but there were the few who would like a hearty meal with friends in the Meade Hall. Then again, most of them were bachelors or those who can't cook for the life of them.

The twins and Snotlout were already scarfing down on their own bowl of soup on a table near the fire pit. The remaining riders made their way over to them, but Hiccup was halted by a large hand on his shoulder. His eyes caught Stoick's, who gave his son a meaningful look.

"Over here, son. I need to speak to you," said Stoick, leading him away from the group.

He caught Astrid's eye when she noticed he wasn't following and nodded at her to go on without him. She hesitated for half a second before giving him a firm nod and continued on.
Hiccup was lead to the end of the Meade Hall where a smooth stone platform was elevated with a few steps to behold the Chief Throne in all its glory, tucked against an alcove on the wall. It was oaken made, dark with age but still sustaining the shine from its varnish. Norse knots made up its back, stretching high and was also seen curling in the throne's arms and legs. It's perhaps the oldest and well-preserved thing on Berk, the only piece of furniture that hasn't been touched by the dragon attacks back when they used to hunt dragons.

It was said to have been hand-made by the first chieftain and founder of Berk himself. Orri Haddock, his many great-grandfather, a simple woodcarver who sailed to sell his wares but ended up shipwrecked on an unknown island and made the foundations of Berk. Well, that was the short version of the tale anyway, if Hiccup told the whole story it would probably take all night as his father saw it when he was young.

The Chief Throne was usually used during the formal event of the anointing of a new village chief or some sort of celebration or meeting between tribes. Hiccup always thought that the seat looked too uncomfortable for his liking.

Stoick gazed at the impressive throne for a moment before he turned his eyes, intense greens that were solemn and old. "Did I ever tell you that I used to sneak in here just to sit on this throne?"

Stoick said.

No, Hiccup thought, but he didn't think his father was expecting an answer because he continued.

"I would sit and pretend I was chief before my father found me and scolded me for sitting on the throne," he reminisced. "He told me that to sit on that throne, one must understand the responsibilities that come with it. To be a chief who shows his people that he can carry the load that comes with the title. To show them that although the throne is for him to sit on he still chooses to stand with his people."

Hiccup felt something twist in this gut at the direction the conversation was leading to. He heard Snotlout's roaring laughter from afar and wished he just went to them before his dad whisked him away.

"But of course I was just a wee lad back then. Didn't understand or care about what he said and just started wondering when he'll finish his little speech so I could go off with my friends," Stoick laughed, missing Hiccup's wince.

"Y-yeah," Hiccup chuckled nervously before quickly changing the topic. "So, do you have any idea why Gothi asked for me?"

"Haven't a clue, son" Stoick shrugged. "She came to me, dragging Gobber with her. Started writing out what she wanted on the dirt so quick Gobber barely had time to translate. He said it was hard to make out but he got the idea and told me that she needed to tell you something. Something important. Wouldn't say much more until you came."

"Sound urgent."

His stomach growled loudly. Hiccup turned bright red to the tip of his ears.

"Enough to skip a meal?" Stoick boomed with laughter. "Come on then, that stew smells delicious."

Hiccup didn't need to be told twice.
The flock of Terrors simultaneously turned their eyes to the approaching group, eyes that glowed in the winter night followed their every move as they reached the village healer's hut at the highest point of Berk. When they reached her patio Hiccup found a large stone, nearly half his height, sitting standing upright and its flat face turned towards the direction of the moon. Three wooden bowls circled the propped up stone; one held a small pile of hack silver, the other carried some dried herbs that smelled of something sweet, and lastly, a large cube of thick raw meat in the final bowl.

Despite the crowd of Terrible Terrors that perched nearly every inch of Gothi’s home they steered clear from the stone and bowls. They didn't seem interested in the chunk of meat either. Curious. Gobber knocked on the healer's door.

"Gothi? Ya there?" asked Gobber. "Hiccup's 'ere like ya requested."

Only Gobber and his father came with him, the rest had gone to their homes for the night. Although Astrid was intent on following him his father stopped her, saying, "It's alright, Astrid. You can go home. I'll take it from here." She clearly didn't like that arrangement but she couldn't just disobey the chief so she acquiesced, bidding them goodnight and sent a look at Hiccup that said 'tell me all about it tomorrow.'

A Terrible Terror, the colour of turquoise and blue, squawked from its perch on the roof and the door swung open not a second later. Gothi gazed up at them with her squinted eyes and face full of wrinkles that reflected her old age.

She gave a small grunt and waved a hand to usher them inside, stepping back from the door. Gobber and his father had to dip their heads to squeeze past Gothi's small door. Hiccup saw her eye him intensely when he walked in and he offered her a small, albeit uncomfortable, smile.

The inside of her hut was still the same as it has been since he last came here. And the year before that, and the year before that, and the year before that… Gothi wasn't really the type to go on redecorating. One wall was still dedicated to shelves that stacked her herbal remedies, healing tonics and paste. Her work table was pushed to one side and jars were lined on another shelve above it. A variety of plants and herbs hung from lines of twine above them to dry and its combination made a strange, spicy scent filter around the healer's hut.

"Achoo! Thor's left buttock, Gothi! Let in some fresh air would ya," grumbled Gobber.

Gothi swung her staff so viciously against Gobber's head that both father and son winced. Gobber yelped in pain. There wasn't anyone in Berk who hadn't felt the pain of the old healer's staff, it left a throbbing pain days after too so it was hard to forget.

"Crazy old woman," hissed Gobber under his breath, rubbing his pounding head. Gothi waved her staff threateningly and Gobber limped behind Stoick to use as a shield.

"So, Gothi, you asked for me?" Hiccup stepped up.

The village elder paused to rub her chin and hobbled to a corner where dirt was spread on a mat. Gothi began to draw the images that made up her wordless language. They closed in and hovered over her to try and distinguish what she was saying, but alas, that was ever only a job for Gobber.

The number of people in Berk who could ever recall Gothi being able to speak could be counted on one hand, minus the four fingers out of five that make up that hand. Her name's Signy, the village völva who lives reclusively in her shack in the Olde Forest. She's older than Gothi and her age will prove to forever be a mystery lest you want to get kicked out and take the long hike back to the
village. Signy's well versed in the practices of seiðr magick and said to pull her magic from the earth, which was why she lived deep in the woods. But that was not mostly why the villagers take the 3-hour hike deep in the trails of the Olde Forest. It was for her abilities as a seer. To prophesy the future by speaking with the gods and goddesses in Asgard. She had once revealed that she wasn't always called Signy and that it was the name the gods had told her to be known as ever since she became a völva.

The village said that the two had both been close and trained together to become a völva, but only one had been successful, and the other practised the art of healing. The two women drifted apart after that and have never seen each other since Signy became a völva. But Gothi had still trained to gain the skills of becoming a village shaman, and although she lacked the power to wield seiðr magicks and given the Sight she still had the ability to deliver the messages of the gods and goddesses of the Aesir and Vanir.

She was vague in telling her tale, but it was as good as he could get because she never mentioned it again. Hiccup never really took interest in the village völva, never visited her, or request for a peek into his future. He heard she had a nasty temper anyway, and her shack smelled something horrid.

"I have been... gulpin'-given! Given a message from the gods, to ya Hiccup," translated Gobber, his thick brows shooting upwards in surprise. His mouth slightly agape as he stared at Hiccup, along with his father.

"What did they say?" Stoick's eyes were intense as he stared at the elder, who began another round of scribbling.

"'They told me... ta give you their riddle and...ru-ray- ree-re- remember!- remember their words well. It'll be of help in the future. The lady mother, Figg, and... Tyr the one-armed of the Aesir said...’" Gobber paused as Gothi looked at Hiccup, who quickly got the message and took out his cowhide notebook and stick of charcoal. He nodded to show he was ready, the charcoal hovering readily over the blank parchment. It wasn't every day that the gods sent you a message, much less the venerated Frigg and Tyr. Gobber waited for Gothi to finish her speedy scribbles before speaking.

"'To he who hath need of smoke and fire

Open thine maw, fire eaters.

Take heed, Young Dragonheart, for times grow dire,

Eyes keep watch, the lurking of the shadow creatures.

To he who thirst for water

Welcome the guest-

Who bringeth the cup. However,

Take heed his quest

The touch of winter's breath.
Keep not bladed hearts,

Tis unwise to bring thine swords

Against the ice that outsmarts.

Beware! The man of night who picks the chords."

"Well tha' was interestin'," said Gobber after a long pause, earning Gothi's glare.

Hiccup wrote the final rune, a face intense with concentration as he stared at the riddle he just transcribed. A riddle indeed! It was already making his head hurt just trying to make sense of it. But Gothi wasn't done just yet. She moved away from the dirt surface and rummaged through the contents of her shelf. The sound of glass bottles and ceramics clinked together as she searched for what she was looking for.

The young Viking looked questioningly at Gobber, who answered him with a shrug. Gothi finally managed to find what she was looking for and returned to the dirt patch. She reached out a foot to settle the dirt and brush away her previous writings before scribbling once more, much quicker. She finished and noticed the absence of her translator's voice. Gobber was picking at his yellowed teeth with his hook while he waited, obviously not seeing Gothi's reddening face.

"Gah! Gothi, ya mad woman!" yelled Gobber, rubbing the tender red mark forming on the flesh of his left arm.

"Pay attention, will you, Gobber," Stoick sighed as Gothi waved her hands aggressively, fussing wordlessly.

"Alrigh', alrigh'..." muttered Gobber. He returned to his task of deciphering Gothi's scrawls. "The gods said ta return this gift you had lost. So, I believe this belongs ta you."

Gothi had walked towards him while Gobber read. She held out in front of her the item she had been rummaging through her shelves for and offered it to Hiccup to take. Whatever it was was wrapped in a small piece of brown cloth, and it looked heavy as it dangled it from of him, eager to meet the wooden floor. Hiccup held out his hand underneath it and Gothi let it drop. He felt Stoick and Gobber lean in to take a look at the object he was handed as he pulled away the covers of the cloth.

Hiccup felt his breath stop.

It was as if it was untouched by time; the curved iron wasn't stained by rust or recurved by the forces of nature from where he lost it long ago. The pendant was half the size of his palm, yet it was cool and familiar in his hand. His thumb traced the runes that were carved on the pendant, smaller now that he's grown and still untranslatable.

He had lost it a long time ago when he was young. Back when Dagur, the cruel and bratty boy who's so different from the Dagur in the present, had been his main torturer. He used to keep the pendant around his neck every day, never taking it off. It had lost itself from his person when Dagur tried to drown him in the river. He had cried and tried to go back and look for it but gave up on the third day, thinking it had already been carried by the current. The ache of losing that precious trinket of his childhood had dulled over time, but the sight of it once more stirred his memories.

A flash of impossible blue ran across his mind and the coolness of the pendant dug deep into his flesh.
"'I was surprised to... find this in the mouth of... one of my Terrors,'" read Gobber from behind Gothi's hunched form over the dirt space. "'That amulet yer holdin'... it's a rare thing. Haven't seen one of those in decades.'"

"What is it?" asked Hiccup, eyes still transfixed by the amulet in his palm.

"'It's called a...too-tra-tro- troll cross. They ward off malevolent magick and evil trolls. My mother used ta wear one and took it ta her grave.' Aye, smart woman," said Gobber. "Sure wish I had me one of those. Ah, right, sorry..."

Gothi tapped her foot impatiently, the next batch of scrawls already written on dirt for him to translate.

"'I feel the ancient magicks in tha' amulet, even with my weak connection ta the gods.'"

"And the runes? What do they mean? I've never seen these runes before," said Stoick.

Gothi hurried to write out her response. "'I recognize them, but I cannot...translate them. That is beyond me.'"

Hiccup felt a pulse come from the amulet and he started, eyes shooting down at the innocent trinket laying on his palm. "Do you know anyone who can, Gothi?"

She thought for a moment and had begun to turn back to her dirt sheet when a commotion sounded from outside. Terrible Terrors squawked and hissed in alarm, wings flapping aggressively. Gothi hurried outside with a panicked look on her face, fearing for the wellbeing of her flock. Hiccup, Gobber and Stoick rushed in tow.

"Oh great Odin, who coulda' done this…" gaped Gobber.

Her hut was cleared of the flock that once crowded there, a few brave ones stayed on top of the roof, back arched high threateningly and pupils slit as thin as a strand of hair. They stared at the motionless form of their kin in front of the large stone. Gothi rushed towards the scarlet scaled Terrible Terror and cradled it in her arm, eyes wide.

Hiccup stepped closer to inspect the small dragon. Its eyes were wide open, staring at nothing, mouth slightly agape with its tongue lolling out, but… "It's still alive." He breathed a sigh of relief. "Just stunned."

Gothi too showed her relief and cradled it closer. She reached out to point at his hand that held the amulet and then patted the head of the dragon in her arms. It didn't take long for him to understand what she was saying. The Terrible Terror in her arms was responsible for finding the amulet. He wanted to drop the thing and keep far away from it, but his hand only clutched tighter around the amulet.

Hiccup's eyes wandered to the set up in front of Gothi's porch. One of the three bowls was empty of its contents and the only evidence of anything being anything there in the first place was the small pool of blood that came from the chunks of meat that once rested in the bowl. Gothi noticed it too as her eyes narrowed once she caught sight of the empty bowl.

She struggled to her feet, smacking away Gobber's offered hand with her staff, and started to scrawl down on the smooth dirt she leaves outside her hut. Once she finished she stepped back and started to attend the Terrible Terror, who had let out a wheezing whimper, finally conscious.

Gobber stepped up to read her scrawls, "She says tha' she knows who might be able ta read those
"runes."

"Who?" asked Hiccup.

The door to Gothi’s hut slammed shut as she retreated inside her home, and Gobber winced at the violent sound. "The village völva, Signy… her sister" he said.

Chapter End Notes

Yaaaaaayy an update as promised! Hope you enjoyed!
P.S. Posted new art in my tumblr blog!
Hiccup was freezing.

It had snowed heavily while Berk slept last night. The villagers woke to a foot deep of snow, ready and waiting to be shovelled away and clear the path before anything else. It was anyone’s least favourite thing to do so early in the morning. The only ones who ever enjoyed the snow were the children, who threw snowballs at each other and passing villagers to ‘wake them up a bit.’

“Gahck! Mother of-”

A chortling sound came from Hookfang, drowning out his curse. Snotlout must’ve stepped on another patch of weak snow. Hiccup let out a sigh, the cold air making him see his breath. He clutched his thick fur cloak tighter against him as another shiver made its way to his skin.

He had told the rest of the riders of what happened in Gothi’s hut just a few hours ago and his plans on visiting the village völva. There were quite a mixture of reaction is at that announcement. Fishlegs and Snotlout, like him, had never visited the völva but have been intimidated (frightened really) by the horror stories that the villagers told of her. Astrid, too, had never seen the woman herself, but she held more of a dislike for the old lady living in the woods for some reason. The ‘worthy-of-an-Astrid-scowl’ sort of dislike. The only ones who seemed to be eager to see her were the twins. Unsurprising, really.

“Are you sure that Gothi told you to go to Signy? Not some other völva living in the woods?” asked Fishlegs for the umpteenth time.

“Yeah, Fishlegs, I’m sure,” sighed Hiccup. “The village only has one völva living in the woods, so that’s proof enough that we’re going to the right village völva.”
Just a few feet ahead of them, Toothless and Stormfly were chasing each other, weaving through the trees and playfully swiping at each other. They had absolutely no clue where their riders were going to, but wherever it was didn’t need for them to be cautious it seemed. If they were playing around it was a sign to Hiccup that they didn’t feel threatened, so it eased his worries a bit.

“I’m telling you guys, it’s going to be great!” said Tuffnut. “Last time we gave her a visit she said-get this- she said she’ll skin us and use it as a blanket!”

Both twins howled in laughter while the rest gave them incredulous looks.

“Oh, she’s just great!” said Ruffnut, wiping a tear.

“Great?! Are you muttonheads crazy? Don’t answer that,” said Snotlout, seeing them about to open their mouths and retort. “Hiccup, this is clearly a stupid idea. Let’s just go back and forget about trying to figure out the damn amulet. It’s not like it’s that imp-”

“It is important. And if you don’t want to see her then fine, wait out here in the cold or go back to the village,” Hiccup cut in sharply, words out of his mouth quicker than he realized what he was saying.

A sick green haze hovered at the edges of his vision. The rest of the riders were watching him with wide eyes, surprised at his uncharacteristic outburst. The dragons paused too, feeling the tension in the air.

“Hiccup, are you alright?” Astrid stepped closer, eyes narrowed cautiously.

Toothless gave a soft coo, his ear-like appendages dropped as he stared at his rider. Hiccup felt the amulet press its icy touch against the skin of his chest from underneath his tunic. It made Hiccup blink and shake his head to clear the...whatever it was.

“Yes...Yeah, I’m fine. Sorry, Snotlout, I don’t know what came over me. Let’s just keep going,” He started the pace once more, feeling Astrid’s suspicious gaze burning at the back of his head. The weariness and tensions died down the further they walked. Toothless forewent playing with the rest to walk on Hiccup’s side, nudging his large head to his side.

Small comforts. He’ll take what he can get.

“So how do we know exactly if we’re going the right way?” Fishlegs asked. “The Olde Forest is kind of, you know, big.”

Big isn’t the right word that fits the place. It’s located adjacent to the village and crowded with thick, dense trees that grew high and mighty from age. The village used the place to collect wood, but they never strayed too deep into the area, so nobody actually knew where it ended. It was easy to get lost in the woods unless you took the path reserved only to take you to Signy.

Hiccup felt his brow furrow as a memory tugged at him. But Tuffnut’s voice kept him from dwelling on it.

“We just follow the animal skulls. Gods, Fishlegs, didn’t your crazy Aunt ever teach you anything?”

“I’m pretty sure you two are the only ones here with a crazy aunt to tell you where to find the village völva.” Fishlegs rolled his eyes. “And I get the feeling that ‘crazy aunt’ is the same one who told you Viking’s Breath Blooms are great repellants or something.”
“Correctamundo! And you can stand corrected because there’s one skull spotted to lead the way!” Tuffnut announced smugly, pointing to a tree ahead.

Ancient and thick-trunked like the rest of forest trees, it would take around five grown Vikings to encircle it. Upon closer inspection, the trunk hosted the ivory skull of a bull, the evidence of its longevity found in how it’s almost a part of the tree itself. Flame coloured feathers contrasted against the white of snow and the dull bark as it dangled from the skull’s horns. The rune Jera was carved on its forehead and filled with kohl to stand out against the ivory. Dead foliage from the previous season and snow collected at the top of its head. It made an eerie sight amongst the thick white snow and bare trunks of the cluster of trees.

“Oh… Well, that’s an…eerie sight.” Fishlegs gulped, shifting closer to Meatlug, who cooed in comfort.

“Okay, well, I’m outta here! Hookfang, let’s go,” Snotlout declared, turning to walk back to the way to the village. But he was stopped by a pair of arms wrapping around his shoulders.

“I think not, my friend!” said Tuffnut solemnly before his face switched into a mischievous grin. “We still have to find the rest of the skulls!”

“Let’s go!” his twin said.

Snotlout couldn’t break away from being sandwiched in the arms of the twins as they trudged along. “By the gods! Your armpits stink! Get away from me!”

Hiccup eyed the resting skull, hollow and empty sockets staring back at him, and his hand itched to trace the carved rune. Not a particularly ominous rune compared to the display it sat on. From what little he knew of the divination (being the chief’s son meant a variety of subjects and resources for his more privileged education, and he rather enjoyed the company of the old books when he was a little boy) the rune ‘Jera’ meant Harvest or a reward for positive action. Although he wasn’t that invested in the practices of divination, he concluded that it must be a good sign.

The Dragon Riders encountered more of the strange animal skulls that were nearly being swallowed by the trees as they trudged deeper into the forest, all adorning bright feathers and carved runes on their foreheads. Most of the skulls were from animals with horns and antlers, all of which were intimidating in size and dangerous had they been alive.

With each passing skull display, Hiccup observed Astrid grow more and more agitated. As Snotlout and the twins were once again delving deep into an argument with Fishlegs trying to be the mediator, Hiccup slowed to the back of the group and walked alongside Astrid.

“You’re afraid,” Hiccup stated it as a fact, “of the village völva.”

Astrid’s face twisted into a scowl and she scoffed. “I’m not.”

“Then what is it?”

She was silent for a moment, only the sound of the crunching snow and the ruckus ahead filled the silence between them. She took a breath and finally spoke. “Do you remember my uncle? Finn?”

“Fearless Finn Hofferson...rest his soul,” said Hiccup, remembering the first time they encountered the Flightmare.

He was rewarded with Astrid’s own quick quirk of her lips, a sad smile that hardened as she spoke. “Yeah. Well, my mother told me years ago that he visited Signy before he faced the Flightmare,
before he was called ‘Fearless Finn’, to ask for a vision into his future. Instead, she shared a premonition. She told him that fear will be his greatest enemy, his downfall, and it will ruin his legacy.” She paused, eyes far away as if she was stuck in a memory.

“After that, he started taking on the more dangerous dragons, tougher errands out of the village and dragon hunts just to prove her wrong. That’s how they started calling him ‘Fearless Finn Hofferson’ because he never cowered at anything. Then came the Flightmare...he faced it just to prove the völva wrong and, well, the rest is history.”

“You blame Signy for driving Finn to face the Flightmare.” Hiccup said, realization dawning to him.

“It’s not just me, my whole family has some sort of feud with her. No Hofferson has ever visited her after Uncle Finn.” Astrid pointed a glare in front of her. “I shouldn’t be here… but I understand how important this is for you, Hiccup.”

He felt her warm hand curl around his and squeeze. He smiled and squeezed back.

“Hey, lovebirds! Quit making yuck eyes at each other, we found Signy’s hut,” called out Snotlout from a small hill of snow...

Astrid levelled a vicious glare at him, letting go of Hiccup’s hand, and took a threatening step towards him. It was enough to make Snotlout yelp and scurry down and out of their sight.

Toothless had waited for Hiccup to catch up, making the Dragon Rider smile and pat his friend’s large head. They trudged up the small uprise of snow and until he finally caught sight of the small hut. Stone and wood was the base of the short and stout hut. Atop it, was a thatch roof that was shaped like a mushroom head. It was nothing much to look at unless you counted the fact that the whole thing was leaning impossibly to the right as if strong winds had attacked it to its current state.

A crude chimney (looking near collapsing with the hut itself) sat on top of the roof. The steady smoke rising from it let Hiccup knew that the völva was inside. A low stone fence encircled the area around the home and littered on top of it were more animal heads staring eerily at them.

“What fine decor!” Tuffnut said with a flourish, eyeing the ram skull that was missing its jaw. “The white of the skull clearly compliments the white of the snow.”

Snotlout groaned and rolled his eyes to the sky. “Let’s just go in already and get this over with.”

They all passed the eerie fence, the twins taking their time to admire one boar skull with massive tusks. Hiccup felt like the display of skulls were staring holes into him from behind as they neared the hut. An unexplained sense of dread settled in his stomach. His hand travelled to clutch his tunic, where the amulet dangled underneath.

A hiss stopped them before they reached the door.

The dragons had yet to pass the skull decorated fence. Meatlug, Barf, Belch and Hookfang had backed away wearily from the stone barrier while Stormfly and Toothless had their teeth bared and wings erect as they hissed and growled at the empty space. They were unwilling to cross the stone and skull barriers even to follow the calls of their riders.

When Fishlegs tried to coach his dragon to cross, Meatlug scuttled back before she got too close to
The entrance. “Hiccup, we can’t just leave them out here.”

The door of the angled hut slammed open, making the riders jump, Fishlegs letting out a girlish scream.

“Cease your yapping and get inside, you fools!” an old, husky voice barked from the door.

The old völda, for who else could it be, stood by the door. Small and stout, much like her sister, and if that did not prove their relation then they shared the same hooked nose and blue eyes, her left sporting a vertical scar. Eyes that were staring straight at Hiccup, scrutinizing him and perhaps his soul.

She wore a large brown pelt, large enough to cover her frame and drag on the ground. Her right hand held a dark, crooked staff that stood taller than her. Bands of gold and silver wrapped around its length until it reached the top of the staff, where two ivory skulls rested. One of another horned creature and the other of a bird with a golden beak. Runestones were tied around with twine along with a small bush of herbs and dried flora.

“Are the lot of you deaf? Get in, I said!”

“But our dragons!” Her vicious gaze landed on Snotlout, who cowered at her look.

“You’d leave an old woman to freeze in the winter’s cold? Leave the beasts. They can brave the cold far better than you,” Signy scoffed and walked back inside, leaving the door open.

The dragon-riders immediately set their eyes on Hiccup, waiting on his call. But the young Viking was conflicted. While he wanted nothing more than having the peace of mind that the dragons were safe, he knew he needed to find answers from the völda.

He didn’t need to make any call after all as Astrid spoke in his stead. “I’ll stay and keep an eye on them.”

“Are you sure, Astrid?” Fishlegs asked, nervously looking from her to the eerie snow-laden forest. They all know of the rumours that spoke of missing villagers that left the road to the völda.

Hiccup knew that rumours spread from truths and even he felt uneasy just standing out there for too long. If it hadn’t been for their company he knew he would have doubted coming to the Olde Forest and turned his tail back to the village.

“I’ll be fine. Besides, we’ll just be outside,” Astrid reassured them. She caught Hiccup’s eye and nodded. He understood immediately.

She won’t be the one from the Hofferson family to break the feud and enter Signy’s hut. She was very close to her uncle and still blames the völda over his death.

“Just outside the fence. Nowhere else,” Hiccup repeated firmly.

“Nowhere else.”

Astrid walked away from the hut and to the dragons. Stormfly squawked eagerly seeing her join them outside the eerie fence. The others then followed Hiccup inside the hut. Toothless’ scaled face showed his reluctance to separate with his rider, but he laid himself on the snow obediently.

They were immediately warmed upon gathering in. The fireplace to the left was large to fit in the black cauldron sitting above the crackling fire. Near it was a few frames of stretched hides to tan
against the fire. A few finished hides sat on the floor near the fire to act as a mat. The wooden pillars and beams were carved intricately of still life and runes to tell stories. Hiccup recognized the tale of Odin’s hanging on the branch of the world tree in his quest for divine and infinite wisdom.

More skulls and animal bones hung from the walls and beams. A menagerie of dried herbs hanging from a low hanging net sat above from where they stood, leaving an odour that was not unlike one from Gothi’s hut. He couldn’t stop the sneeze at the spicy smell.

“Ah, the lovely Signy!” Tuffnut had enough crazy to coo at the old völva. “Looking the same as always!”

“Did you miss us, huh? Because we sure missed you,” his twin added in her own bit.

Signy glowered at them. The light of the fire deepened the lines on her face. “The Thorston spawns, I’m surprised your stupidity has yet to kill you two.”

“Yeah, you and me both,” Snotlout muttered. Hiccup jabbed him on the ribs with his elbow.

“Aw, come on now-”

A swift swing of her staff to point at Tuffnut’s face cut him off as he pointed wide eyes at the bird’s skull threatening him with its pointed beak.

“Silence, you miscreants. My time was not foretold to be spared by your idiocy.” Her staff slowly moved to point at Hiccup. “But by you, young Haddock. ‘Twas foretold that you shall come to me, and come to me you have, to seek the answers to the questions and mysteries that plague you.”

“That’s the sum of it, I guess,” said Hiccup.

“Not so,” hummed the völva, returning the staff to stand by her side. “Sit yourself by the fire and show me what you have brought.”

His surprise must have shown on his face as she merely rose a brow at him and sat on the fur pelts by the fire, putting her staff down to her right. She gestured a wrinkled and tattooed hand to the space in front of her.

He shared a look with Fishlegs and moved to sit, taking off his fur cloak to rest beside him. The rest of the riders remained standing, Signy not inviting them to sit with them and a moment of silence saw to it she wasn’t planning to do so.

She stared at Hiccup with her old, blue eyes. She seemed to be searching for something in him. Perhaps it was the amulet that she was searching for, the one still icy cold against his skin despite the warmth of the fire. ‘Twas foretold’ she had said. Told by who else but the gods, he presumed.

“You, young Haddock… Dragonheart, they call you. The Lady Frigg and the lawful Tyr. Their eyes have set themselves upon you, but my sister has already told you, I see.” She said it with a slight twist of her lips. Hiccup stayed silent.

“You, pig-nosed one!” Her staff whipped to point at Snotlout. “Bring some mead from the barrel, I grow thirsty. Take the rest of your lollygaggers and help yourselves to the barrel. Then leave us to our discussions.”

The four didn’t hesitate to dash to the other room for a mug of their own. Tuffnut poked out from around the corner to give him a thumbs up and mouth ‘good luck’.
“Now, for you to show me the burden you have brought,” Signy said solemnly.

Hiccup pulled the amulet from under his tunic. “Gothi found something I had lost a long time ago. She called it a troll cross. It has runes on it but she couldn’t understand it, she said you could read it.” He held the amulet by the string, letting it dangle in front of her.

“A trollkors, yes, a rare thing to have…. it reeks of the Olde Magick, strong and alive.” Signy reached a hand to the amulet. Hiccup couldn’t stop himself from pulling the amulet back, an involuntary action that took him by surprise.

Signy merely hummed as if she found something intriguing. “And he reveals his attachment to it.” She holds her hand out for it this time. Hiccup hands the amulet to her, red burning his cheeks.

Her hands covered the amulet, her eyes falling closed. “I feel its connection to you also. This was given to you, yes?”

“I-no- I don’t….don’t remember,” Hiccup stumbled over his words, feeling his hand itching to take it back. “It’s been with me for so long, I feel like I’ve had it with me my whole life.”

Her hand hovered over her open palm, circling above the amulet. “That is not so. No dim-witted fool in this island has a touch of the Olde Magick within them. Someone has blessed this pendant and given it to you.” She opened her eyes. “Someone of great power has blessed you a gift, and yet your foolish self cannot remember who.”

Hiccup winced. “Sorry.”

Signy didn’t roll her eyes, but her small huff might as well screamed otherwise. She held the amulet to her eye, squinting and tracing the runes with a long-nailed finger. “Of great power, indeed,” she said mysteriously.

“What does it-”

“Silence. Your tongue wags as much as a dog’s tail,” Signy snapped and Hiccup shut his mouth with a clack of his teeth.

The old völva hummed, squinting harder and turning the amulet here and there. Perhaps her eyes have started to dull with her old age. Her hands had a slight tremor to them, he noticed. His eyes wandered to the window. The dragons had begun a new round of play outside the fence. All but Toothless, who had stayed in the exact spot, staring at the door of the hut. Astrid stood beside him, petting his head. Hiccup smiled.

“The Hofferson maiden, eh?” Signy’s voice snapped him out of his daze, head swinging to look at her. She stared at Astrid with something he couldn’t name. But whatever it was caused him to feel a heavy weight press against his chest. A green haze invaded the corner of his eyes, rolling in-

“Ah, so she has opened her mouth to weave the tale of her foolish uncle, I see…”

-closer-

“…of the feud between her kin and I…”

-and closer-

“…all because of the actions of one for the sake of their vanity…”
“Gah! Ow, ow!” Hiccup hissed, a hand flying to his stinging cheek. He looked at the woman responsible with wide-eyes.

In the völva’s right hand she held a branch of nearly dry leaves that were bunched together by a string of twine. She held it up, poised for another strike.

“What are you-why did you- Argh!” His disbelief kept him from blocking the next swing to his other cheek.

“It is rowan. It guards the mind and spirit. You looked like you needed it,” the old woman put the branch down and stared at him as if she hadn’t just slapped him twice with a branch full of leaves.

“Ow, ow,” Hiccup hissed, touching his warm cheeks. No doubt an angry red against his pale complexion.

“It seems you have yet to mention another trinket you carry with you. I feel it holds magick of a different breed.” Her gaze narrowed to him.

“I don’t have anything else,” Hiccup snapped, still feeling crossed about her attack.

“Don’t play me for a fool, Haddock.” Signy spat his name like venom. She pointed a clawed finger at him. “I can feel it on you and my eyes witnessed its magick poisoning your mind.”

“What? I told you I don’t have-” He paused as his hand landed on a pouch attached to his belt. A pouch that should have been empty...

Hiccup opened the pouch and took out the item, brows furrowed. In his hand was the coin that he had found in that no-named island from days ago. He had left it on his work table back in the Edge.

How...

“Hand it over, child. That coin is not meant to be kept by mortal hands,” Signy ordered, voice low and deadly serious. She had her hand held open, the other still holding his amulet.

He was slow to hand it over as if his body was reluctant to let it go even if he knew he had to give it to her. His hand shook over her open palm as his body and will fought over the urge to keep or to let go.

The coin dropped to her hand in slow motion. His eyes tracked the shine and twinkle of gold because of the firelight, seducing him with the intricate grooves of the carving. It landed with the face the carvings of the two ravens and the snake on her palm.

Her hands snapped closed around it and Hiccup snapped out of his daze. She took her staff and shakily stood, giving him back his amulet. Upon having the troll cross on his hands once more, he felt a cold wash over him, the kind of cold you feel when a winter wind kisses your cheeks, snapping him back to normalcy. Calm and a feeling of lightness enveloped him. He put it around his neck, where it belonged.

“What-what are you doing?”
Signy stood by the fire and opened the lid of the cauldron. Steam rose like a cloud from the black cauldron and Signy inspected it before, to his surprise, she tossed the coin in the cauldron. It dropped with a plop!

“Where did you get such coin?” Signy stared at the inside of the cauldron.

“I found it on an island. Why? What is it? I haven’t seen a coin like it—” Hiccup couldn’t stop his rambling now after still being a bit shaken by what he had felt. The cool iron of the amulet against the skin of his chest was comforting in his place near the fire.

She looked like she was about to ask more about the island he mentioned, but she suddenly stopped. She scrutinized the inside of the pot, then her finger clicked towards him.

“Get me that jar beside you, boy.”

Hiccup found the jar to his right and picked it up. He took a peek, inside held some ashes and a couple of dried flowers, then promptly held it away from him as his nose got assaulted by the foulest of smells.

“Great gods! What is in this?” He couldn’t have given it to the old woman fast enough.

The völva gave him an unimpressed looked, unfazed by the horrible smell. She dug her hand in the jar and grabbed a handful of the mixture, throwing it inside the cauldron.

She turned silent, just watching the ashes and dried flowers dissolve into the contents of the cauldron. Hiccup would have mistaken it for yak broth had he not just seen her throw in a handful of foul-smelling flowers and ashes.

“Hlíf in hafa, til heiðreinn, vald
Hverfa af, in armr, aldri endre koma næst.”

Signy’s voice turned low and harsh as she spoke a language that made no sense to him. But somehow, it tugged something from his mind, the flow of the foreign language was familiar to him… as if they have been lying dormant in his mind.

“‘Shield thine wearer, of pure one’s power
Begon, the vile, ne’re again come near.’

That is what the amulet says.” She looked at him as if trying to figure him out. “Written in runes so ancient that it is all forgotten but for myself. Great lengths have this stranger taken to secure your safety. The only thought on my mind is the question ‘why?’”

Hiccup swallowed thickly. “Protect me from… from what? Trolls?” He meant it as a joke to get rid of the tension, but she merely gave him a long look. Hiccup’s mouth dried. “Y-you’re not serious, are you?”

There was a crash and Tuffnut came stumbling in, red-faced with two mugs of mead in his hand. Some spilt as he made his way to them clumsily, a drunken grin on his face.

“Hey, hey, hey, Signy! We tootally forgot to give ya this,” Tuffnut slurred, bringing the mug forward with an unsteady hand. Hiccup stopped him before he spilt any on both of them. The tales of a völva’s wrath was always a fair warning from the Vikings that he kept in mind.
The rest came in too. Snotlout, also red-faced, was being held by Fishlegs, who, thankfully, didn’t look like he drank too much to be as drunk as the other two. Ruffnut was simply leaning on the wall, a grin on her face at the spectacle before her.

“I’m soooorry,” Snotlout hiccupped, letting all of his weight go in Fishlegs’ arms.

“I’m sorry, Hiccup, I tried to stop them from drinking too much,” Fishlegs said. “But they drank almost the whole barrel!”

Hiccup groaned in exasperation. Tuffnut and Snotlout were always a pain when they got drunk. Signy looked ready to gut them and use their organs as Snoggletog decorations… if the village gossip would be believed.

Tuffnut had begun to fiddle with the horrible smelling jar, opening and closing the lid while giggling drunkenly. His hands were struck by the end of a staff and he uttered a yelp.

“Don’t touch that, you half-brained hog, lest you’d like to live your days as a skinless cripple then be my guest!” Signy shouted, anger in her eyes as she shoved Tuffnut with her staff.

Tuffnut laughed despite being struck, draping himself over Hiccup, who grunted his displeasure.

“Oh, you’re aaaalways the life of the party!” Tuffnut hiccuped. “You’re so fun to be around!”

“Uh, Tuff? I don’t think she’s kidding,” the auburn-haired Viking hissed. “And I think it’s time for us to leave before you two go through any more trouble.”

He heaved the blond up with a groan. “Next time, you guys can stay outside.”

“Nooo, wait, wait wait! I wanna hear my future!” The Zippleback rider whined, looking at Signy with half-lidded eyes.

“I see a future of unending suffering,” Signy said, deadpan.

“Yaaaay,” Tuffnut cheered, then promptly fell asleep.

“Ruff, a little help, please?” Hiccup said, struggle to hold his weight.

Ruffnut walked over and looped her brother’s free arm around her shoulder. “C’mon bro. Can’t wait to tell mom that you got drunk in the völva’s place.”

Signy watched them like a hawk as they all filed out of her home. The soft *plop* from the cauldron caught her attention and she picked up the peculiar item that floated to the surface with a huff.

She walked to the door of her hut, watching the young Viking’s lug their drunken comrades on the backs of their dragons. Her eyes narrowed at the sight of the entwined hands of Hiccup and Astrid.

“Haddock’s spawn!” she called out.

Hiccup turned to look at the völva, feeling Astrid tense. He squeezed her hand in reassurance before walking to the old völva. She scrutinized him upon standing before her.

“You will return to seek the knowledge I have that many do not.” She said it as a fact. “And so, for now, I give you these parting words…” She took his hand and laid something on his palm. “It is the eyes the lie more than the tongue. Be vigilant, boy, for there are many a thing that the eyes hide the soul from.”

In his hand laid a small pine cone.
“Wha-”

“The coin you carried was no coin at all,” Signy said, some amusement in her tone. “Merely a pine cone. You have been fooled by one’s trickery, it seems.”

The image of that grinning red-haired thief came to his mind and Signy looked as if she knew something he didn’t. She took pleasure at the sight of his confused face.

“You know something about this.” He held the pine cone up, tone accusing.

“Be vigilant, Hiccup Haddock,” she said cryptically and shut the door on his face before he could open his mouth again.

“Loki’d!” Tuffnut shouted, now awake, and laughed drunkenly.

Hiccup sighed and turned to journey back to the village.

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The full face of the silver moon loomed over the Olde Forest, its light unable to penetrate the thick barrier of trees to let the moonlight upon the forest floor. Deep in the ancient forest, the völva’s hut was dimly lit by the fires dancing upon her hearth.

“Hail, mother of All, humbly I pray. The sisters upon the great roots, humbly I pray. Grant sight to I, a mortal servant to thou. Hail, mother of All, humbly I pray. The sisters upon the great roots, humbly I pray....” The old völva’s low chants filled her home.

She kneeled upon the fire, hands raised. Her left held a crystal quartz on her open palm and her right shook her staff, a rhythmic rattling joining her chant.

In front of her laid Hiccup Haddock’s fur coat in a bundle in the middle of a circle of runestones.

Her voice lowered and her chanting came faster as the fires flickered. The crystal in her palm circled above the cloak, following the shape of the runestones clockwise. Her eyes rolled to the back of her as her chantingbeckoned the seiðr magicks from the realm. Her words garbled and her chants transitioned to sing the vardlokkur, the völva’s song.


She let her tongue loose to chant her song, reaching out to the gods as she entered her trance.

The firelight dimmed as if the energy in the room held down the fire. As the pitch black threatened to overcome her home, the runestones began to glow.

“...Saa-Rii-Rah-Nai-Jahh-Rah!”

The runestones rattled. Outside, the wind whistled to join her chant. Now her palm carrying the crystal moved with purpose. Her eyes rolled back to watch her palm hover from rune to rune as if it had a mind of its own, her chant never wavering.

Ansuz...Raidho...Kenaz... Hagalaz.

Her chant slowed to a stop along with her moving palm as she finished her trance. The fire rose slowly and its light showered the room as she pondered over the outcome of her seance. Her brows furrowed and a frown tugged at her lips. That cannot be true… can’t it?
If she went for another seance just to voice her doubts the gods will not be pleased. So then it must be…

“A path of misfortune, indeed.”

Something shuffled outside her window and she turned quickly, gaze narrowing at the dark outside her window. A moment of tense silence filled the air as Signy stared at where she heard the sound. Slowly, she turned back to the fire, eyes lingering suspiciously by the window.

The old völva ended her seance with a prayer, head bowed and hands pressed together to hold the crystal.

As she prayed, a dark figure peered from outside the window, then another, and another. They all pressed against the window. Eyes of moonlight silver glowed as their gazes settled at the kneeling figure of the völva.

Chapter End Notes

Hahaha finally an update huh?

Tbh the reason this took a long time for me to finish writing is that this chapter was boring to me. I mean I really hope you guys enjoy it, but I've learned how to control myself from revealing the whole plot in one chapter and let things build up and hell it's torture. Jack isn't here yet, and I want him to come barging in already lol. But I have plans!

Huge thanks to the kudos and comments guys! Your comments give me the drive to write!

Don't forget to check out my tumblr: www.baisley.tumblr.com for news, updates and art! Will be putting up a new drawing there in a few days.
Chapter IV

In which justice is marked and a dragon worries

“Come and keep me warm until morning, lovie.”

Hands caress his arm as the soft figure of a woman pressed against him. The smell of her cheap scented oils assaulted his nose, but he made no outward sign of his distaste. She made sure to press her generous bosom against his arm, a sultry act that would turn any other weak men into a sex-starved dog.

“I have no business with you.” He shrugged off her grabbing hands and continued to his way.

The woman’s brow rose but she didn’t relent, cooling her arms around his neck as she stood before him, making him stop. “In a place like this, a handsome man like you, a woman like me-” She thrust her hips against his suggestively, a smirk on her plump lips. “- should have a bit of fun together.”

He pushed her away, not reacting to her screech as she stumbled back. “How dare you!” she seethed, gathering her skirts and looking ready to tear out his throat.

The passersby didn’t much react other than a glance at the commotion before going on their way. An altercation between a whore and a man was a common occurrence in these parts anyway. It was no use getting involved, they know how it ends. It would be by her head if the woman did anything drastic to escalate the problem.

Her shout alerted the rest of the prostitutes as they came like a moth to a flame.

“Come now, dearie, let’s not be like that,” one said, pressing up against one side.

“Why all the fuss, handsome? If you’d rather someone else I’m always here,” another purred,
tracing circles on his chest with a finger.

The prostitutes gathered around, trying to appease him, while at the corner of his eye the first prostitute who came to him was being tugged away by another. She didn’t look mollified the slightest, catching his eyes with a glare.

“If you’d like a little something more, dearie, then there’s plenty—”

“Show me to your matron. My business is with her.”

The women fell silent at that, retracting their invasive hands as if he was the fire that burned their skin.

“And what business would that be?” The whore who pressed against his side boldly said, hands planting on her hips and levelled him with a suspicious gaze.

The women followed her example, there were only a few who were smart enough to hike their skirts and retreat inside. But he was not so easily intimidated. More so by an army of cheap harlots.

He pointed a cold look at the bold woman. “My business is with her.”

The life of a whore may have been easy money, but by no means was it an easy life. A cruel world brought forth cruel men at their doors and so they learned how to deal with their anger swiftly. The men always learn their lesson when they realize that a whore’s spread legs could mean they’d be left waddling with their hands cradling their crotch after a kick. He was nothing special in their eyes. Just another man who gets what he wants just because he has something to brandish from between his legs.

She stood her ground. “Yes, but what business.” He didn’t know whether to admire her bravery or laugh at her foolishness. Instead, he pulled a coin pouch from his person, large enough that its weight sagged from the gaps between his fingers, and tossed it to the woman in front of him. It chinked and clinked a promise of wealth as the woman caught it.

The other women gathered and their eyes widened at the peek of gold in the hefty pouch. It was enough gold to take themselves out of the whorehouse and spend their lives in luxury. Greedy hands made to swipe the pouch of gold and before the fight could escalate he procured another pouch. It sagged heavily, teasing their greedy hearts of the weight of riches inside it.

“Take me to the matron.”

The group of prostitutes parted like waves for him as they eagerly showed him to their brothel home. Inside, the place smelled like cheap perfumes and sex. The sounds of pleasure reaching past closed doors and the creaking of beds. The comotion attracted the women inside, their half naked figures perking up in curiosity from where they stood.

The bold woman who spoke up to him earlier led him up two flights of stone stairs, shooing most of the crowd that trailed behind them away upon reaching the second floor of the brothel. They gave the dark-haired woman a dirty look before retreating back, whispering amongst themselves until he heard them no more.

The second floor had a few rooms than below and the scent of perfume was more prominent. It must be the floor for their sleeping quarters. She led him down the hall and his eyes caught sight of an open door. Inside beheld the picture of a crowd of little girls trying, in vain, to comfort a weeping other on a bed. One paused and caught his eyes. Her gasp was loud and alerted the others.
The woman leading him was quick to move and shut the door. She stares at him, gaze defensive for a silent moment. “It’s better for them to be here, than out there.”

There’s another moment of unnecessary silence while she stared at him with hard eyes. Perhaps she was waiting to see if he understood or not. He doesn’t care but he nods anyway.

She looked pleased and leads him to the last door at the end of the hall. “Mother Bera is in there.” The woman stops him as he makes to enter and he gives her a warning look. She looks expectant and he hands her the pouch full of gold silently. He watches her shove the pouch between her breasts and sends him a saucy smirk before knocking on the door.

“Mother Bera, there’s a man who says he has business with you.”

“Come in.” The voice behind the door was a sensually husky voice.

The woman opened the door and the smell of burning hemp seed and incense invaded his nose. A thin veil of smoke took over the room full of lavish drapes, furs and trinkets. In the middle of the room, a woman laid languidly and bare on a pile of cushions and furs. The source of the smoke came from the long pipe she had dangling from her fingers. The cotton corset and thin skirt she wore didn’t leave much to the imagination as her dark skin dared to tempt a man’s desire.

The woman, Mother Bera, as she was addressed, seemed to have been interrupted in the middle of counting her earnings as bags of coins littered around her. Mother Bera let loose a plume of smoke as her dark eyes gazed upon her visitor.

The man noted that she looked older than the woman who led him to her, but not old enough to be undesirable. No sign of wrinkles or crows feet marr her skin. Her maturity and exotic features is what many men would fall prey for, this he had no doubt.

“What does the man want, Katla?” Her accent betrayed her foreign origins.

Katla remained outside the door. “He wouldn’t say, Mother.”

Mother Bera hummed and sat up with a seductive arch of her back. Her bosom threatened to slip out of her corset. “Close the door and leave us, child.” He heard the door close and Katla’s retreating footsteps. “What is your name, my sweet?” Her foreign lilt pulling his attention back to her. She wore a seductive smile that promised him a night of pleasure.

He stared at her before chuckling to himself. “Mother Bera… Is that the name you go by now?”

The man walked leisurely around the room, eyeing the baubles decorating the shelves and walls.

“What do you mean?” Her tone shifted to suspicion, alert now. Her figure, sensual before, now coiled with tension like a threatened serpent as she watched his movements. She shook her head and opened her arms. “You are tired from journey. Come, let me soothe you.”

He paused in front of a wine vessel on a table. It was molded into some kind of long necked bird. He picked it up and took a swig.

“Ah...This tastes like shit,” he said, and took another swig.

The matron looked at him incredulously, arms dropping. His disrespect poked the fires of her temper as she shot him a glare. “Who are you? Tell me now, before I kick you out.” Her exotic face twisted into a scowl as he continued to drink from the vessel, which was gifted to her long ago by a Roman traveller who spent a night in her sheets.
“Time has not changed your face, my old friend, and neither has that attitude of yours.” He crouched in front of her, wine still in his hand. “It hurts me so, to hear you have forgotten this face, old and wrinkled as it may be. After all, not everyone can be as timeless as you are, min kjære.”

Her eyes widened in shock at the familiar term, but her memory could not quite grasp the face of the ragged stranger. Then, before her eyes, the man’s face began to shift. His dark hair and beard turned lighter to an auburn sheen, the wrinkles on his face disappearing until his visage was a youthful reflection of what it was before.

“You!” she shrieked, scrambling back and gathering the cushions to herself. She knocked a bag of coins over in her scurry.

“A shame you couldn’t remember my older face. What was it you said? ‘Such a handsome face can’t be so easily forgotten.’ Tsk. Guess you prefer a more youthful face.” His hand reached up to rub his chin. “Oh, but I quite like the beard.”

“Nane kose! Why have you not left me alone!” She shouted. “I have paid all debt. I am free woman!”

The man shook his head, looking at her condescendingly. “Ah, but there is where the problem is, min kjære, there’s is still one thing left in our little… agreement that you have yet to fulfil.” He rose his brows at her but she shook her head.

“No, no, I do everything you said. Everything! Debt is done. You said-”

“Stop.” He held up a hand and she closes her mouth with a clack. The other set the vessel of wine down on the floor. “You don’t seem to understand me. Maybe a rich life has made you deaf, min kjære, but I know what I said. Maybe you need a little reminder.”

Before she could utter a scream, he lunged forward and pinned her to the ground. His knees dug painfully on the flesh of her thighs until they were flush to the floor. One arm pushed back her delicate collar and his remaining limb was pressing a hand to her mouth. His face hovered close enough for her to feel his breath on her face.

His dark eyes pinned her soul just as his body has to hers. Her screams were effectively muffled by his hand and her screaming only made him press harder.

“Shh, shh. No, no. none of that,” he soothed as she began to hit him. Something cool pressed against the flesh of her throat. “None of that.”

Her swinging hands stopped and she stared wide eyed at the man above her. His grin would have been called handsome on his face but to her it makes him look more vicious. Like a bear baring its teeth at you.

“You were such a young thing when I first saw you. Among the dirty, flea-bitten older low-lives, you stood there. Maybe that’s what drew me to you. A pretty creature just as dirty and flea-bitten… but oh-so young.” He leaned closer, lips close to the shell of her ear. “Young…and a slave.”

Her throat dared to swallow under his blade and cost her a small cut, pearls of blood seeping through.

Her captor inhaled deeply to catch the scent of lavenders in her hair.

“You were made to work, day and night, and you worked hard. But you hated it. Then, I came
along, didn’t I? I saved you from that life, you asked for a rich life and I gave it to you.” He glanced at the bags of gold with a grin. “I gave it well. And all I asked in return, were three little things. Three things that you completed, yes.”

Her eyes held a shine of hope in between her tears. Such an ugly thing to have in eyes so pretty.

“But then… Then you wanted eternity. An eternity of this.” The flat side of the blade caressed her cheek. She could see her terrified reflection on the blade. It trails back to hover her throat. “This youthful face that betray your old age. I did this. Do you know why I did it, min kjære?”

She breathes heavily under his palm and gives a short shake of her head when he looks at her.

“Because I, too, was young. Young and a fool to give his weak little heart to a pretty little slave like you. I gave you everything, Behnaz,” he whispered vehemently. His face began to shift and sag. A beard grew and lines of wrinkles returned to his face until he was the older man that first stepped into her door. “My youth for your eternity, and all I asked...all I asked was that I could spend that eternity with you.”

He gave a bark of laughter that jolted her pinned form.

“Frigga’s tits! I could have been a poet with that kind of shite I spat out! All it takes for a woman to follow a man is the size of his coin pocket these days.” He gave her a grin to now sported yellowed teeth. “You know what happened next don’t you?”

He forced her head to nod and she tried her hardest to resist, glaring at him. “Oh, yes I did,”” he mocked. “I took all your money and ran a house of whores across the sea where you’ll never find me.’ But here I am, you bitch!” His mocking voice twisted to spit those words. Some of it clung to his beard like a bead. His eyes showed the rage that roared inside him.

He took a breath to calm himself and she felt the blade pull back. Her heart dared to be relieved. The danger has yet to cease.

“It’s a good thing we were apart for a while because it gave me time to think of what to do with you once I found you. Other than my first plan of coming here and cutting you open, of course.” She let out a helpless whimper that he delighted in. “Took everything in me not to kill you when I saw you, but still you stirred my desire when you laid bare like that.” He rubbed a grizzled cheek against hers and she flinched back, the back of her head hitting the wooden floor with a thud.

“It really is a pity that you betrayed me. Pity for you, at least. So here is how it’s going to be, I’m going to take my hand away from your pretty mouth…” He let go as said and she screamed. Behnaz screamed for all the whores in the house to hear, to come and help her. A hand grabbed her throat and she choked.

“If you’d let me finish I’d tell you that nobody will hear you scream if you do, so there is no use. I hate being interrupted.” He loosened his grip and she spat at his face. Her pretty features twisted with rage.

“Ridam behet! What did you do?” she screamed.

“I can’t have you knowing all my secrets, my dear.” He wiped the spit that landed on his right cheek and chuckled as he patted her own cheek with the hand that held her spit. She growled viciously at the action, snapping her teeth at his hand but he was quick to swipe it back.

“As I was saying, your little stunt won’t go unpunished and eternity is quite a thing to have, especially for a mortal. Once given it is not so easily taken back. My gift was quite a difficult thing
to find and I just had to waste it on you…”

He looked like he was about to throw another fit as his expression darkened. Behnaz didn’t want to be faced under his blade again and so she thought quick and her cunning mind thought to stall her old lover. He did so love to talk.

“Then you have no choice but keep me. Keep me, keep eternity. Forever yours.” Her practiced grin was put on to seduce and persuade any weaker men. But he no longer held any love for her and her wiles.

He paused and stared at her. He looked like he was actually considering it. She might have to sacrifice her home for a time but a few years with him would be no time for her, and when he starts to get comfortable around her she could just slit his throat. Do the deed that she should have done years ago and she could life her life as she wanted without having to look over her shoulder for any ex lovers that want her dead. A wonderful plan. Patience, she learned, brings great rewards.

Just when she finished the thought of her brilliant plan he laughed loudly that ended with a wheeze. “All that time I’ve given you and you’ve not grown any smarter, have you, min Behnaz?” Her face grew dark with red rage.

His face then twisted to a hideous scowl. “You see, I, too, made a deal. A gift of Eternity in exchange for a proof of our love. Such a simple thing, so easily given for such a rare gift. But you...you ruined it! You never loved me, like I did you. Now, they want back what you stole, and my debt is to deliver.”

“You speak nonsense! The words of crazy mind. Just kill me and no more debt!”

His hand covered her mouth once more and she struggled to be free of him. Shaking her head and twisting her body, but he firmly held her down.

“No, no, Behnaz. There will always be the debtors and the indebted, strong and weak, hunters and prey… masters and slaves.” The gleam of his blade rose from behind him and she gasped behind his palm as the blade was held above their heads by a tail. The impossible limb took to a lion’s tail, only with the colour of flesh and ended with a tuft of hair of the same shade as the one on top of his head.

Before she could delve into the horror of this new discovery, the tail lowered the blade to hover at the skin between her eyes.

“You cannot escape me this time. Death is too good- quick and merciful. That is not what I want for you.”

The tip of the blade was painfully cool against her skin, breaking out with beads of sweat.

“I want you to suffer, Behnaz. And that all starts now.”

The blade drags across her skin and she screams.

Beyond the agony, she hears him mutter something incomprehensible. The foreign speak sounds different from the branch of language that he used as an endearment to her. Another scream rips from her mouth, muffled again by his as painfully firm hand, as his blade tears the skin of her forehead. She could feel the warm trails of blood run down her face to meet her tears.

Then she saw his eyes. No longer dark and swimming with anger; it glowed a pale blue and watched her suffer with a emptiness that wretched another sob from her.
She cursed, pleaded and begged for him to stop as each stroke of the blade sent pains of an unimaginable degree across her body. Like sick clawed hands raking across her body. Her back arched as another wave of pain hit her.

Suddenly it stopped. Her exhausted body fell limp and her eyes blearily circled the ceiling above her. Her body twitched, still reminded of the torture inflicted. Deep within her, she felt her crumbling soul be bound by grips of piercing ice.

“Your life began as a slave, and so it will be that you will end as such. A slave to me for eternity,” he said and left her limp and bleeding body on the floor.

The man disappeared into the night and when the lamps dimmed in the streets the whores gathered in their home to count their earnings. They suddenly shrieked in outrage as the man’s gold littered across their table shifted suddenly into pinecones and rocks. The women pointed at each other to blame and accuse of thievery.

While in the floor above them, Behnaz sat on her floor of cushions, hunched over a mirror in her hands. Her eyes glared hatefully at the unfamiliar rune that he had carved on her forehead. Her rage caused her eyes to shine with unshed tears and she threw the mirror across the room, shattering it, with a wrathful scream.

Miles away, the man grinned, the very same rune glowing on the skin of his forehead, as he slit the throat of a bandit that had thought it wise to cross him.

“Justice,” he said with reverence.

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The annoying buzz of the fly abruptly cut off as a dagger flew through the air and embedded itself in a rotting log by his feet. It had been hours past sunset since Iric had been waiting in this pest infested moors with nothing but that maddening fly as company.

For days he stalked the moors, taking shelter in a miserable ditch, in the cold, watching and waiting for Ubba’s crazy woman. Night after night and still no sign of her. No palm-slicing, chanting, cursing lady in the moors from his pig-brother’s imagination.

Gods, he should have just taken this night for a drink. But Ubba insisted, every night, she’ll be there. ’I feel it in my gut,’ he’d say. Every time, he feels like he’s being taken for a fool.

He reaches over to take his dagger, a smirk pulling his lips at the sight of the the pest’s guts.

This village was his home village, loathe he is to say it. A village that he had left a long time ago and vowed to never return. Yet here he is, back in this flea-bitten and gods forsaken village with its filthy people and rotten ale. All because fucking Ubba can’t keep a better hold of his woman.

He kicks away a curious rat and watch it scurry to the end of the ditch.

The thought of leaving had passed by frequently. Just leave this filthy village and resume his life on the road. But every time he comes close, that blasted woman’s voice tells him some dragon shit about family, and, against his judgement, he stays.

He stays and stare at the empty moors with the flies and rats night after night.

A bleeding heart he has.
Iric tenses at the sound, amplified by the dead silence of the night. Footsteps follow and he carefully peeks from his hiding spot. There, just emerging from the tree line and making their way to a small stone outcrop, a cloaked figure. Upon reaching the outcrop, standing on a larger stone, they dropped their cloak to reveal Ubba’s woman, a simple white linen dress with her feet bare.

A plain looking thing, a wispy woman with hair the colour of straw. But anyone would agree that she could do much better than the village idiot. Then again, he can’t say much, what with the hideous scar and permanent scowl on his face.

She begins saying something- a prayer, he realizes. It’s hard to make out in this distance. Her arms opened wide as she finishes her prayer. A moment of silence and then, to his bewilderment, she begins to dance.

Swaying like a flower in a breeze, her arms the gentle leaves, her body the stem that sways to an unheard song to all but her.

Iric, to his consternation, was entranced.

So entranced was he that he almost missed the sudden drop of temperature. Those none the wiser would have surely dismissed it as the ever cold mood of winter, but he had spent many years on the road, getting acquainted with the seasons and their fickle tempers. This was highly unusual.

But still, she danced.

She danced until frost layered the heathers in the moors and crept up his cloak. The straw-haired woman no longer danced the gentle rhythm of a flower, but that of a reed in a storm: wild and erratic.

Something strong and suffocating permeated the air. This heavy and powerful feeling was so familiar. He felt it settle in his chest until he found it hard to breathe. Familiar power from long ago. Frozen. Frightened. Something other. Wrong, wrong wrong!

A glint caught his eye and that was enough a distraction for him to snap out of it.

Ubba’s woman had her head held to the sky, a wicked blade poised to strike above her. His eyes grew wide and his body lurched, mouth opened to yell. A sacrifice! The crazy- His thoughts cut off as a body slammed against him and wrestled him to the ground. Heavy and thick arms stopped his flailing hands and a wide body firmly held his own struggling one.

A calloused hand clamped over his mouth to stop the yell but it was already too late. The scuffle had alerted the woman. She whirled around in surprise at the two before quickly gathering her belongings and fleeing to the forest.

In his rage of his losing his first lead, Iric managed to free a hand holding his dagger and blindly bought it down. The blade met soft resistance and the pained grunt verified that the blade made an impact on flesh. His victory was short lived as his attacker wrapped thick arms around his head and squeezed.

Iric felt his breathing being cut off as his attacker had him on a chokehold. Consciousness slowly leaving him and his struggles weakening as his foe didn’t relinquish his hold.

“That hurt! But that’s a nice dagger though. I think I’ll keep it.”
The last thing he heard before succumbing to unconsciousness was deranged laughter echoing in the moors.

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Hiccup wakes again and this time his hands fly to capture his heaving gasp. His eyes roam wild around his his resting area, eyes adjusting to the dark while he makes to calm his racing heart. Toothless sleeps peacefully on his slab of soapstone, unaware of his rider’s distress.

The same dream again. For the past five nights, he’s been plagued with the same dream ever since they rode back to the Edge. Each time it leaves him rattled.

The young Viking shuffled to the edge of his bed and put on his prosthetic, careful of the slumbering dragon near him. He needed air.

He kept his steps silent- well, as silent as he could with a metal prosthetic- as he made his way out of his hut. The night chill was quick to attack whatever warmth Hiccup held, but it also helped clear the distress that burned his mind.

Hiccup sat at the edge of the wooden platform, letting his legs dangle from the height. The half-faced moon shone a dim light upon the edge. He rubs a hand to his face with a groan.

From consciousness to dreaming, almost instantly it starts. He would notice first the snow, not because it’s cold. But because he hears it crunch under his weight. Hiccup would be standing in a clearing in a dark forest. The snow is a pale blue in the moonlight. But not the right blue.

What is the right blue? He would always think.

Then he would hear it. The distant voices, singing, chanting. He would follow despite knowing what he would find. Every body of dark trees sport the ivory shape of horned animal skulls. He feels their stare follow him, but he is not unsettled. He wants to reach the voices that sing and chant.

He expects the rush of icy winds that colour his cheeks but still, he shivers.

A glow of blue light pulsed from between the trees and he follows. He breaks away from the trees to a frozen lake. The singing and chanting stop abruptly upon his appearance.

The eyeless stares of ivory skulls remain upon his standing figure.

His eyes catch the source of the glow in the middle of the frozen lake. He walks towards it. His feet doesn’t slip on the frozen surface. His eyes are glued to that glowing blue.

Right blue. Perfect blue. That’s it, that’s it, his mind chants louder as he nears.

It’s glowing from underneath the ice and Hiccup stares, captivated.

The chanting and singing starts once more. He hears it all around him. Drums pounding so loud that it bounces in his head.

Then there’s a thundering roar that tears his eyes away from the frozen surface. His heart races with his breath.

Footsteps like booming thunder. The trees shake as the ground quakes.

It runs. To him.
He’s unmoving, filled with fear. Stuck. Frozen.

*I don’t want to die!*

Something sprints out from the tree line and to the edge of the lake. Cloaked and a hooked staff above their head.

Hiccup sees the ivory skull of a crow staring at him before the end of the staff slams on the frozen lake, just as another roar cuts through the night. Cracks spread like sinister webs and Hiccup feels the ice give out.

Darkness. He falls.

Falling. Endless.

Then he wakes from the endless drop to the abyss.

He tells no one about this nightly disturbance. But he knows that they know something is wrong. They see the purple smudges under his eyes, the way he would close his eyes when they fly above the clouds for just a few moments of sleep. He caught Astrid sending him looks, narrowed eyes. *Tell me*, it says. But he doesn’t, so they don’t disturb him, they don’t bring it up… yet. Their curiosity and concern will get the better of them soon.

A head nudges him from behind. Toothless warbles as he settles beside his rider.

No one knows, but Toothless. His most trusted.

Hiccup rubs his great head. Large eyes pin him with obvious concern, feeling his unrest. He gives a small coo and shuffles closer to share his warmth. A moment of silence starts before Hiccup speaks.

“I don’t get it, bud. It’s the same dream, over and over again! It never changes. I’m not getting any sleep and it’s showing with every dragon hunter base we destroy. I almost got hit by a rock from a slingshot. A *slingshot!*”

Hiccup rubs his forehead with a sigh. “Krogan and Johann are still out there, there are still hundreds of dragon hunter bases that need to be destroyed, dragons to free and- oh gods, Toothless! Now, there’s this-this whole thing with Signy, the gods’ message and...and... argh!” He throws his hands up and collapses on Toothless’ heated body.

His companion whines and nudges his thigh.

Hiccup reaches for the string around his neck and holds the amulet to his eyes. The curved iron that made the troll cross shines from the moonlight. He hasn’t taken it off since its return to his person. The thought of separating from is always banished swiftly.

But why?

Why was he so attached to some simple trinket? Was it the magick that Signy says is imbued in it? Perhaps... but Hiccup felt it was much more than that. He felt vulnerable without it. It’s like he never lost it in the first place with how attached he was to it.

Before they left Berk, the revelations and mysteries that Signy brought upon him had Hiccup scouring the village’s archives. Not many visited the place. In fact, he knew only two people who willingly entered that part of the village for the sake of knowledge and those two were himself and
Fishlegs. No surprises there really.

The archives contained old tomes, poems, maps—generations of history that had enraptured Hiccup when he was young. It was once the most protected place in the village when dragon raids used to be their morning, noon and night, for it held the wisdom of past generations intended for the future Vikings that would keep Berk strong.

Hiccup had flipped through the old tomes with such fervour that he would have spent the entire day there had it not been for his father and Toothless reminding him to eat or that they were scheduled to leave to the Edge come morning. Any information about the amulet or practices of seiðr magicks he searched desperately for—answers that could quell this need to know.

He read through written accounts of villager’s reporting the tale of their neighbour attempting to curse them with magick because they were said to be jealous of their superior flock of sheep. One said he witnessed his wife turn into a dragon and lay waste to his cabbage fields (Hiccup’s eyes rolled, knowing just who had made the claim). Hiccup stopped his search upon reading yet another poem declaring their love to ‘Torhild, Oh, Torhild! My love to the most buxom lass my eyes did behold!’

Any sign of magick gave him a hope of a lead but it dulled down once he saw any mentions of magick were usually met with the same conclusions: ‘Seek the counsel of the village völva.’ He had admitted defeat. For now.

“But who is it from?” he asked himself, thumb caressing the runes.

Just another question from the pile to add to this whole mystery. That question always brought his mind back to the glowing blue from his dreams. The same mesmerizing hue that flashed in his mind when he was reunited with the amulet.

‘...The touch of winter's breath.’

The line from the riddle that he had come to keep in mind flitted about his thoughts and he paused, the line repeating itself.

‘...The touch of winter's breath.’

Something dawned on him. It was just a little detail that he didn’t really think much off. Until now.

He squeezed the amulet just to make sure and he began to connect the pieces. In his hand, the amulet is still cool, even after some time in his palm its temperature remains unchanged. The amulet is always cool to the touch, ever since Gothi returned it to him.

‘...winter's breath.’

Hiccup’s heart leapt to his throat and he sat up. Winter’s breath. It was a long shot but maybe, just maybe, the riddle relayed by Gothi from the gods and this amulet were connected. Was the answer just right in front of him?

What could fit the description of this ‘winter’s breath’? Surely no man, but a creature of winter. Where the snow never falters, a place in the north. A dragon with a winter’s breath. A theory up for debate, but it’s all that he has going right now. But he could find some answers if he found it…

A Snow Wraith.

A tongue licks his hand, disturbing his train of thought and leaving a wet trail of dragon saliva. He
drops the amulet as he cries in disgust, sitting up and shaking his hand.

“ Toothless!” A chuffing sound was the reply to his indignant cry.

He shoved the laughing dragon, whose thousand pounds remained unmoved. Toothless, still chuffing, rolled over his rider to stop his playful assault. His rider’s wheeze turned to laughter and the Night Fury smiled a toothless smile at a job well done.

Chapter End Notes

First of, absolutely adore all you readers! Over 1000 hits and 84 kudos?! You guys! And not to mentions your comments are all lovely and are my fuel, seriously. I squeal every time I get an email saying I get a comment.

Secondly, she finally updates! Always late to the party, I am! Sorry for the no update last month but I'm getting my Uni sorted out, gotta make sure everything is in order and ready. But anyway! Different point of views ohhhhh~ I hope it won't confuse you guys too much but it'll all come together, I promise!

Also, don't forget! Want to get in on the news, teasers and art? I have a tumblr all for that! www. baisley. tumblr . com //finger guns

P.S. I watched HTTYD 3 last month and guys.... it's so good! Made me happy - sad and all that. I'll keep my mouth zipped now before I spoil anything. Art soon of my fav character in the movie in my tumblr if you're interested!

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