Unplanned

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by sq1cat

Summary

After Hiccup saved the people of Berk, things seemed to be going so well, but not everything goes as planned. Will Hiccup and Astrid find happiness together? Explicit for copious lemons and other adult themes. Starts after the first movie. Please review!
The ice cold wind cuts across Hiccup's face as he and his sleek, black dragon race through the cold winter skies. He likes these chilled outings with Toothless, they help to clear his confused mind. So much has happened in so short a time.

He had shot down a dragon after years of trying, only to find he couldn't finish the job. Then, he befriended the stricken creature, learning all that his people believed they knew about dragons was wrong. He managed to use that knowledge to earn the respect of his tribe in Dragon Training, only to lose it at the end because they didn't want to accept what he tried to show them. Afterwards, he saved his people from a monster that was actually fitting to their mistaken beliefs of the creatures' devilish nature, and along the way through all of this, he had managed to capture the attention of the girl of his dreams.

He still doesn't believe it's all real.

Yet, it all is so clearly real...except for the part about the girl. She had kissed him twice, once by the lake after their first flight together, then again after he woke up from his recovery. Although Astrid's kisses had left him ecstatic, the emptiness of what followed, or rather, what didn't follow, has left him wanting, empty, and confused.

A couple of days after Hiccup awoke, Astrid and her father went on a hunting trip that lasted over a week. After she came back, she was distant, aloof. For the last couple of weeks since then, she avoided him. The few times they ended up running into each other and he tried talking, the conversation had been awkward, jilted. Each time she quickly excused herself, begging off with some excuse of chores, duties to her parents, or gave no reason at all.

Toothless wheels in the clouds as Hiccup's mind whirls with confusion as he thinks about it. After she kissed him, the boy had thought things were finally going his way, that he had gotten the girl. Now it seemed to be a complete disaster.

To add to the confusion, Hiccup had many times caught Astrid watching him from afar. Whether it was while he worked at the forge, training others to fly dragons, or as went his way about town, Hiccup would often catch her staring, only for her to look hurriedly away, usually leaving after being discovered.

Hiccup scowls as he turns Toothless back toward Berk. He wants to stay out longer, hoping the cold would numb the hurt he was feeling, but his fingers are too numb to push it any further. The sun is on its way down, and he didn't want to be in the air at night, during the dead of winter. That was a good way to lose his fingers, or maybe his other foot.

Flying over the quiet town, Hiccup guides Toothless towards home. All the boy wants now is a mug of hot tea and an end to another frustrating day of being the hero who didn't get the girl.

As such, he's stunned to see Astrid sitting in front of his house when he and Toothless make their final descent. She hops up and waves at him with a big smile as the boy and his dragon pass over his house, flying around towards the back.

The dragon flaps a few times as they land, sending gusts of wind whirling about. Hiccup glances over in confusion as Astrid comes around the house from the front. His heart races with excitement while his gut churns nervously.
"Did you have a good flight?" the girl asks him eagerly with a smile as he unhooks himself from the saddle. Toothless shows his excitement to see her, bouncing over while still carrying Hiccup. The boy yelps and quickly grips the saddle with both hands to keep from falling off, causing Astrid to giggle. Hiccup dismounts, sliding off his friend's back and watching Astrid with a perplexed expression as she starts to scratch the dragon under his neck.

He tries to answer casually, but ends up stuttering in his nervousness. "I-it was a little cold, but, uh, nothing I can't handle."

*Why is she here?*, he wonders, watching with a small, reluctant grin as Toothless rubs up against her while she happily scratches him. The lizard snorts and quickly collapses into a heap with a contented purr once she finds that same spot that Hiccup had, back during Dragon Training.

"Oh, is that why your cheeks are so red?" she asks with a grin, turning her attention back to him and stepping closer to the anxious boy.

Hiccup clears his throat, shifting nervously as she smiles at him. "Red? Am I red? Really?" he asked self consciously, reaching up to rub the back of his neck as he feels his cheek burning at her attention.

"A little, yeah," she answers with a giggle, watching him with amusement. Why is she giggling? Astrid doesn't giggle.

"So, uh, what brings you over?" He asks, anxious to change the topic. He then realizes how that sounds and blurts out, "not that you need a reason to come see me, I mean I'm perfectly happy to see you whenever for no reason...

As Hiccup starts to sputter again and worries about how lame he sounds, Astrid saves him from digging himself any deeper.

"I broke a couple of straps on my saddle for Stormfly, I was hoping you could fix it for me tomorrow?" she answers his awkward question.

"Oh," Hiccup replied, trying hard to hide his disappointment. "Yeah, sure," he answers, then furrows his brow in confusion. "So why didn't you just bring it by the forge?" he asks.

"Well, I was kinda hoping you'd do it right away," she answers somewhat hesitantly, looking away from his gaze, before adding sheepishly, "I didn't want to ask you for a favor in front of everybody, I know you've got a lot of work to do with all the saddles still being made and adjusted."

Hiccup frowns slightly. He had been happy that she's talking to him, but with how much she's avoided him for the past few of weeks since he awoke, her reason makes it feel like she's only using him.

"Yeah, sure," he replies sullenly with a shrug, "bring it by first thing tomorrow, I'll take a look at it." Half turning to go, he pauses before looking back to ask, "So why the rush?"

Smiling shyly, Astrid looks down. "Well," she says, "I was kinda thinking you and I could go flying tomorrow, after it's done." She glances back up at him shyly through her bangs, "I was hoping we could get an early start, maybe spend the day out together."

Hiccup's jaw falls open as his heart races with excitement at her answer. His mind goes completely blank as he stares at her. Astrid shifts uncomfortably under his gaze, starting to blush. Looking away from him, she adds hastily, "that is, if you want to go, I mean, I can understand if you don't, it's okay..."
"No no no, I'll go!" Hiccup eagerly blurts out before he can think about it, cutting her off as he turns to face her again. Astrid stops talking, looking back at him with a slow smile blooming upon her lips. The boy immediately flushes red again, clarifying, "I mean, I'd really like to go flying with you tomorrow."

As if suddenly realizing how vulnerable she is, Astrid straightens up and nods curtly. "Good," she says in her more typical, stern voice. She hesitates, as if not sure what more to say, then adds firmly, "So, I'll see you tomorrow morning at the forge."

Hiccup nods, smiling happily at her. "First thing," he tells her.

Astrid nods again, then moves to go, her way taking her near Hiccup again. She pauses as she starts to walk by him, her shoulder nearly touching his. The boy watches her with a confused gaze as she clenches her jaw. He then gasps in surprise when she quickly leans in and kisses him chastly on the lips.

The world spins as he feels her press against him, his eyes closing with a wimper.

Astrid pulls back just as fast, looking into his eyes with an anxious stare and a shy smile. Opening his eyes again, Hiccup marvels at the sight of her blushing. Astrid never blushes.

"See you tomorrow," she mutters hurriedly as she tucks her hair behind her ear, then looks away, sprinting off back around Hiccup's house. The boy glances back at Toothless with an excited expression. The resting dragon only tilts his head and makes a confused sound.

Smiling with a goofy grin, Hiccup dashes around the house as quickly as he can, hobbling on his artificial leg. As he clears the building, he could see Astrid as she jogs down the hill. He then notices his father coming up the other way. The boy furrows his brow as he sees the mountain of a man stop her in her tracks by virtue of being in the way, calling out a greeting with a loud voice.

Hiccup can't quite make out what they say, but the blonde answers the chief's salutation. The large man smiles as he answers her, then Astrid runs off while saying a few last words in reply, the two waving at each other as Hiccup's father starts up the hill again.

"Hello, son!" the bulky warrior greets his son upon coming within shouting distance, which isn't very far from where he started walking again.

"Hey, Dad," the boy calls back, waving weakly. "So, what were you and Astrid talking about?" He asks, unable to resist his curiosity.

"Oh, I was jes asking what brought her here," he answers with a wide grin as the two waving at each other as Hiccup's father starts up the hill again.

"So, what'd she say?" Hiccup asks anxiously, immediately feeling silly.

"What, ya don' know already? She was jes' here," the big man answers with a chuckle, clapping the boy on his back. "So yer goin flying with the lass tomorrah, eh?" he asks in a conspiratorial whisper with a knowing grin as the two of them walk back inside.

"Yeah," Hiccup answers nervously. Talking with his Dad always made him uncomfortable, and now that the subject was girls - especially THIS girl - he was douby so. "She needs me to fix her saddle first, then she wants to go flying together."

"Well there ya go, lad!" Stoic booms excitedly as he takes off his helmet, hanging it on a well worn hook by the door. The two had talked about Astrid's apparent lack of interest since her hunting trip after the boy had woken up. "See?! I tol' ya she'd come around!"
"Yeah, I guess," his son answers hesitantly, sitting down on a bench.

Stoic sighs heavily. His son certainly knew how worry about even the best bit of good fortune. "What's wrong, son?" The large Viking asks with a weary voice, his exasperation readily showing.

"Well, why did she wait this long?" Hiccup asks with a frustrated whine. "It's been weeks since she kissed me! Why has she been so distant?"

The large man chuckles at his son. "Ah, m'boy," he tells him. "Women're mysterious, fickle creatures! Ya'll be much more happy if ya don' try make sense of their motives..."


"Well what d'ya want, son?" His father chuckles. "She's come around, it'll be fine tomorrow, ye'll see!"

The boy doesn't share in his father's optimism, but he realizes he'd gain nothing by arguing the point. "Sure, Dad, I bet you're right," he answers in his typically sardonic manner.

"That's the spirit, son!" Stoic answers enthusiastically, missing the biting sarcasm, as usual.

Hiccup rolls his eyes and then slips into a yawn and a stretch. "Well, I guess I'll just go get some shut eye," he says. "Big day tomorrow, ya know..."

Stoic nods eagerly as Hiccup makes his way across the room, "Right, right, you get yer rest, and have fun with Astrid tomorrow!" A pause, then he adds while his boy starts hobbling up the stairs, "well, not too much fun..."

Hiccup stops in his tracks to stare back at his father with wide eyes.

"Dad!"

Stoic just laughs at his Son's reaction. Hiccup looks away and tries to hurry the rest of the way up the stairs.

Parents could be so awkward!
Chapter 2

Hiccup awakes at dawn the next morning, feeling more nervous than he had before his first real flight with Toothless. That experience had been both terrifying and exhilarating, but seems now to pale in comparison to the potential of what today promises to hold for him.

Dashing down the stairs with an awkward gait due to his leg, Hiccup grabs some dried venison to eat on the way to the forge. He didn't know how early Astrid intended to be in meeting him, but he didn't want to keep the girl waiting.

The village is predictably empty as the boy makes his way through the streets, chewing on his breakfast while hobbling hastily towards the forge.

A few roosters start to crow as the sun peaks over the horizon. His bad leg bothers him in the morning cold, making the journey uncomfortable, but he ignores it. The nervousness churning in his gut drives him to a near run. He feels ridiculous, that he just might be a fool for going this early to wait for her. Normally, the forge didn't open for business until at least a couple of hours after dawn.

As he turns the last corner before the forge, Hiccup halts in surprise, stumbling a little on his artificial leg when he looks across the way to see Astrid appear, turning a corner on the other side of their mutual destination. The girl was jogging while carrying her dragon saddle, but then stops short as her gaze falls upon him with wide eyes. It's hard to tell, being so far away in the early post-dawn light, but Hiccup is sure that he sees her cheeks flush a bright red.

The two teenagers look at each other in shock, neither willing to move first. Astrid clutches the saddle to her, while Hiccup shifts his weight nervously. He still finds that balancing with his new foot can be a bit tricky, especially in the early morning when he was still stiff and the air was yet cold.

Finally, Astrid sets her jaw and strides forward, clutching her saddle to her. Hiccup swallows and immediately follows suit, hobbling forward to meet her. The two watch each other intently as the distance narrows, until at last they stand together in front of the blacksmith shop. Hiccup looks at her quietly, noting that she's wearing just a plain cloth skirt, instead of her typically armored one. He wonders why, as the two watch each other in awkward silence for a while.

"Hi," Hiccup finally greets her, his gut churning nervously.

"Hi," Astrid replies with a slightly anxious voice, glancing at him with a shy gaze.

The two keep trying to look at each other in the nervous silence, blushing as they both look away whenever they make eye contact.

"Soooo...you're here early," he hesitantly comments.

"I wasn't sure what time you opened the forge," she answers with a hint of defensiveness as her cheeks color a shade of red. "You're here just as early, so obviously I was right."

He grins, meeting her gaze as she watches him indignantly. Astrid then looks at him thoughtfully and asks, "but what about you, Hiccup?" He looks confused and she lifts an eyebrow, challenging him, "do you always start work this early?"

Hiccup falters, sputtering a little as he answers, "ahm, well, uh, yeah! Of course! I mean, there's lots to do, ya know?"
Astrid smirks at his answer, clearly reading the truth in his eyes. Now it was Hiccup's turn to blush, clearing his throat as he starts to rub the back of his neck while watching her anxiously. "Yeap! Lots of saddles to fit and repair, nothing but busy, busy, busy!"

Astrid's expression falls a little at his comment, and Hiccup immediately feels bad for bringing it up. "Yeah, sorry about this," she starts to say, shifting the saddle guiltily in her hands.

"No no no! It's okay!" he blurs anxiously, cutting her off. She looks at him in surprise at his outburst. "I mean, we can't fly together until I fix your saddle, right?" he asks with a slight grin.

Astrid smiles shyly again at his reply and answers, "Yeah, that'll be pretty fun." Their eyes meet as they share an nervous smile, the both of them blushing. Neither spoke for a while, the silence growing thick.

"So, um, here's my saddle," Astrid suddenly blurs, pushing the heavy leather equipment into his arms. Hiccup grunts and stumbles a little bit, having difficulty with his false leg, wincing as his stump throbs a little at the additional pressure.

"Sorry!" Astrid cringes, looking on with a guilty expression, half reaching for him as if worried he was going to topple over.

"It's okay!" he assures her, waving a hand as best he can while he manages to recover his balance. Hefting her saddle, he forces a smile. "Let's get this fixed, so we can go."

Astrid nods with an embarrassed smile as he walks towards the door. He fumbles with the latch while hefting the saddle, looking back at her with an awkward smile. Astrid giggles silently, covering her mouth as she watches him with adoring eyes, which only causes the boy to blush as he struggles. The latch finally releases with a metallic jingle, and Hiccup looks back at the door to push it open.

The girl hesitates at the doorway as he walks in. Hiccup makes his way into the cold and dark forge, dropping the heavy leather onto a table. Taking a deep breath, he looks around for Astrid, a smile playing upon his lips when he sees her waiting at the door.

"You can come in, you know," he tells her with an amused voice, watching as she blushes again.

"Oh...yeah. Thanks," she answers simply, awkwardness written across her face as she slowly walks into the room, looking around at the various weapons, saddles, and smithing tools. Hiccup turns with a grin and hefts the saddle, spreading it out on the table. "So where're the broken straps?" He asks with a suddenly business like tone, looking over the leather assembly with a critical eye.

Hiccup had, of course, designed and made all of the dragon saddles for the various breeds, even going as far as to start customizing them for individual riders and dragons. He always hated it when his equipment broke, since as often as not in these yet early days of tame dragons, it was because of a design flaw. Riders' lives were dependent upon his creations, he couldn't afford to be Hiccup the Screw-up anymore.

Hiccup's question draws Astrid's attention back from eyeing the assortment of items hanging on the wall. "Oh, it's right here," she answers eagerly, quickly walking to the table in an attempt to point out the damage. As she does, Hiccup turns to look at her, inadvertently moving into her path. She bumps into him, knocking the boy backwards as his balance was shifting to his prosthetic. He yelps in panic at the sensation of falling, waving his arms about him.

"Hiccup!" Astrid cries out in alarm as she reflexively grabs his forearms to keep him from falling. Her rescue is so aggressive that she inadvertently pulls him to her, causing his body to bump heavily
against hers. Hiccup grabs her waist as he struggles to stay upright, trying to keep from knocking her over in the process.

The two teens look at each other with wide eyes as they suddenly find themselves face to face while embracing tightly, their breath coming in heavy gulps. Astrid's grip tightens about Hiccup's forearms as she feels the warmth of his thin body pressed against hers. He isn't bulky, but she can still feel the firm, lean muscles of his frame, the result of his many hours of dragon riding. She flushes a deep red as she stares into his eyes, her heart pounding in her chest.

For his part, Hiccup can't put a single thought together. He has the girl of his dreams snuggly wrapped in his arms, and by the look on her face, she is just as amazed by this sudden turn of events as he is. He can feel her curves pressed against him, her quickened breath warming his neck and face, her heart racing along with his. Involuntarily, his hands tighten upon her waist as he feels her grip his forearms firmly.

Neither one of them move, the seconds that tick by seem like hours. Hiccup barely breathes, for fear of breaking whatever magical enchantment was keeping this angel in his arms. He wants nothing more than to kiss her, but is terrified at the prospect. The boy looks at her with wide eyes, swallowing heavily as he tries to muster the courage. Astrid watches him with an anxious gaze, biting her lip.

In spite of everything that had happened, Hiccup can't bring himself to do it. The fear of rejection is too great. His gaze falls from hers as he starts to release her.

Astrid's tightens her grip on his forearms, holding his hands right where they are on her waist. Hiccup looks back up at her in shock, meeting her gaze just before she leans in to kiss him passionately, her lips pressing hungrily against his as he yelps against her mouth with surprise. Hiccup hesitates only for a moment before kissing back fervently, again gripping her waist firmly.

Astrid moans weakly against his lips as he suddenly and passionately returns the kiss. The three times she had kissed him previously, he had been too surprised to do anything. Now, his lips press firmly against hers, making her whole body heat up and flush with excitement at his eagerness as she simply melts inside. She slides her hands up his arms, caressing his neck and face. Her fingers glide through his hair and then she wraps her arms about his neck, deepening the kiss, her tongue pushing its way between his lips.

Hiccup whimpers as Astrid kisses him more intimately, his knees going weak as she leans into him, pushing him back against the table. His arms wrap tightly about her waist, pulling her slim form snugly against him as his tongue entwines with hers. The two teens kiss with wild abandon, pressing up again each other as they lose themselves in the moment.

"Well, it's about time you two got on with that!"

Hiccup and Astrid jump apart at the sound of Gobber's voice. Both flush a deep red, looking over with wide eyes at the grinning smith as he hobbles into the shop.

"Gobber!" Hiccup exclaims nervously as he glances over at Astrid, sharing a guilty glance with her, the both of them blushing all the more as their gazes briefly meet and then quickly break apart. "W-w-what're you doing here?" he asks, looking back at the smith.

"Well, it's only my shop, isn't it?" The large man replies, "So why would I be here...?"

"I mean, why are you here so early?" Hiccup amends.
"Well someone's got to light the forge for the day," he answers as he sets about that very business, leaving Hiccup feeling like an idiot. Though he almost never came in early enough to do it, the boy knows well enough that the forge needed to be lit a couple hours before business started in order to get the furnace hot enough before opening.

"Obviously you're too busy to do it, so I guess that leaves me." Gobber grins with his typically sarcastic tone upon he sees Hiccup's frown, then adds, "I'd ask what you two are doing here, but that's pretty obvious..."

The two teens both look all the more guilty at Gobber's jibe. Astrid clears her throat, attempting to look him in the eye. "I...I brought my saddle over for Hiccup to fix," she starts to say, until Gobber interrupts her.

"Oh, is that a new way to fix saddles, Hiccup?" The smith asks with a wide grin, chuckling at the sight of the teens squirming awkwardly. Astrid turns an even brighter red and looks down, snapping her mouth shut.

Gobber chuckles and waves his claw at the two, turning to see about the forge. "Go ahead and fix 'er saddle, Hiccup." His apprentice nods anxiously, half turning back to the workbench, but then turns back to the smith.

"Uhm, Gobber?" he starts off hesitantly as the large man glances back at him with a raised eyebrow. Clearing his throat, Hiccup continues nervously, "would you mind if I took the rest of the day off, after that?"

"Oh? Now why would you be wanting that?" he asks knowingly.

"I...I invited him to go flying with me after he fixed my saddle," Astrid interjects meekly, blushing even more than before.

The smith smirks at the two. He says nothing for a moment, letting the two squirm under his gaze. Neither can look him in the eye.

"Be off with ya," he says with a chuckle, turning away to tend to the forge.

The teens breathe a sigh of relief, turning back to the saddle, when Gobber adds, "have fun, you two...but not too much fun!"
Chapter 3

Hiccup and Astrid cringe at Gobber's jibe, both choosing to say nothing, lest they encourage the salty smith to further torment them. Instead, they turn their attention to the saddle spread out on the table.

"So, uh, where was the damage again?" Hiccup asks Astrid as she steps close to him, having put a fair bit of space between them when Gobber had interrupted just before. "I didn't quite see where you were pointing when I asked the first time," Hiccup adds with a grin, making Astrid smirk at him.

"Can't imagine why that would be," she quips, meeting his gaze as she leans into him a little bit.

"You two are never going to finish fixing her saddle if you keep that up," Gobber calls over, causing the two to flush deeply and look away from each other.

"It's, uhm, here," she quickly says, pointing at a couple of the straps used to secure the saddle to the dragon. Each is cut off near the base, the edges jagged.

"How did that happen?" Hiccup asks incredulously.

"Stormfly chewed on them," Astrid said matter-of-factly. Hiccup glances over at her with a lifted eyebrow. "I…I might have been teasing her with them," she admits sheepishly.

"Seriously?" he grins wryly at her, hobbling over to a part of the workshop where long strips of leather hung. "Didn't you think she might do this to your saddle when you taunted her?"

Astrid's only answer is to smile enigmatically and shrug, meeting Hiccup's gaze while he walks back to the bench with the replacement straps. The boy furrows his brow. She simply smiles all the more as she hops up on the table to sit, watching him knowingly.

Hiccup shrugs with a sigh as he starts to work on the saddle. Wordlessly he cuts open the seams that hold the torn ends of the damaged straps, removing the ruined leather, and sets about replacing them with the new strips that he cuts to length. The longer he works in silence, the more uncomfortable he gets.

"So…you're quiet," he says Astrid, looking over his shoulder at her.

The girl shrugs, "I like watching you work," she says simply, still smiling at him mysteriously. Hiccup furrows his brow, confused by her answer, but continues once he realizes he's not getting anymore insight from her.

He focuses on the task at hand, trying to ignore the lovely blonde who seems enraptured by his performing such a simple task. Still, he finds it hard to focus while he threads the oversized needle with the heavy thread needed to sew the leather back together. Astrid had avoided him for several weeks, yet now she was here in the forge with him, happy to simply watch him work and to be in his presence.

There was also the matter of their kiss. It made her previous three kisses pale in comparison.

The sudden change bothers him, though he finds comfort in the fact that she wants to go flying with him after he fixed her saddle.

With a heavy sigh, he tries to push that all from his mind as he sets to sewing in the new straps. After a few minutes, Astrid asks suddenly, "So…has your father talked with you about marriage
contracts?"

Hiccup spears his finger on the heavy needle at Astrid's unexpected question, his jaw hanging half open. "Ah, uhm... yeah, a little," he admits after sucking on his wounded finger for a moment.

"What's he been looking at?" she asks, an edge of nervousness in her voice.

"Nothing specific," Hiccup answers, trying to sound casual while attempting to focus on his leatherwork. He glances nervously at Astrid. She's watching him with a penetrating stare, but looks down at his gaze. He quickly goes back to his work while elaborating, "Before last month, he was toying with the idea of an alliance with another tribe, but now that everything's changed, he's not so keen on the idea."

He glances back over at Astrid who nods in understanding. The changes that Hiccup had brought to their village had been incredible for their own people, but also had already caused discord with the other settlements, who were not so eager to embrace the new ways of Berk. As such, the prospect of any alliances were becoming remote, since no other village was willing to entertain the notion of being friendly with dragons.

In fact, Berk was quickly become something of a pariah community, growing in its isolation from the other Viking tribes.

"What... what about you?" He asks the girl nervously, pointedly keeping his eyes on his work as he continues his stitching.

Astrid sighs in frustration, hesitating before she answers vaguely, "My Dad's... been looking at a few options, but he hasn't decided on anything yet."

Hiccup nods, trying to hide the mix of concern and excitement he feels. He would like nothing more than for his father to sign marriage contract with Mr Hofferson. The idea of wedding Astrid is beyond his wildest dreams, and now something that actually almost seems maybe attainable.

Astrid says nothing more on the topic. Hiccup stays silent, being too nervous to pry any further.

It's not long before he's finished the work, tying off the last of the stitches with a sharp tug, then cutting the heavy cord with a short knife that was sitting on the table.

"Done!" he proclaims enthusiastically, tugging on each of the four ends of the two straps, showing how sturdy the replacements are.

Astrid smiles widely, hopping off the table to admire his handiwork. "It looks great, Hiccup," she says as she likewise tugs at the leather, nodding appreciatively. "I feel safer already."

"Don't let him fool ya, lass," Gobber interjects from across the smithy as he picks up a damaged axe, drawing the gaze of the two teens. "There's nuthin' simple about those saddles that Hiccup created. He's really out done himself this time," he says with a grin and a sideways glance at the two before he goes back to fixing the axe in his tongs. The smith spent most of the time working on damaged weapons, since Hiccup was still teaching him how the saddles worked. That left the bulk of the
saddle creation and repair to Hiccup, though Gobber was picking up more tasks as time went on.

Astrid looks over at Hiccup with a smirk as the boy clears his throat again, glaring slightly at Gobber. The boy was still adjusting to the idea that everyone suddenly thought his creativity and inventions were the greatest thing since Odin defeated the Frost Giants, and not a series of disasters waiting to happen.

Astrid smiles all the more, touching Hiccup's arm. His gaze quickly abandons the smith, focusing instead on the fair blonde in front of him. "He's right, Hiccup," the girl encourages him with a wide smile as he meets her gaze. "Your saddles really are amazing."

The boy watches her with a guarded gaze, still trying to reconcile the distance she had set between them with all of the attention that she's suddenly lavishing on him now. Astrid hesitates at his cool reaction, reluctantly withdrawing her hand as she turns away from him, her cheeks burning.

Hiccup happens to glance over at Gobber, who's looking at him like he's crazy. He makes a gesture as if to say, 'what are you, daft?!' and suddenly Hiccup realizes how foolish he's being.

"Soooo, Astrid," he begins, boldly reaching out to touch her arm. She hesitantly looks back over at him, surprised at the contact. "Now that I'm done fixing your saddle, how about we go on that ride you promised me yesterday?" he asks with a wide smile, lifting his eyebrows. She lights up at his words, the smile returning to her lips.

"That sounds wonderful," she answers, meeting his gaze. Hiccup's heart skips a beat as they look into each other's eyes.

Hiccup hefts her saddle up, intending to carry it all the way to her house for her. Instead, she takes it out of his hands, smiling at him. "Thanks, Hiccup," she says simply, as if he had intended to hand it to her.

He furrows his brow, but then shrugs it off as she starts to lead him out of the shop. "See you tomorrow, Gobber," Hiccup waves to his mentor as the two teens leave.

"Be good, you two," he warns as he picks up another weapon that's in need of repair. "But...not too good," he adds with a chuckle, winking at the two blushing teens who hustle out of the shop before he has yet another chance to embarrass them.

As the pair step outside, the sun is well over the horizon and the streets are now starting to fill with people as they go about their daily business. Hiccup tries to walk closely with Astrid, though her fast pace makes it difficult, especially with his bad leg.

"So, uhm," he begins, causing her to pause and look back at him. "should I come with you to your place? I can help you fit your saddle to Stormfly," he says with a nervous smile.

"No, that's okay," she tells him with a reserved smile, glancing around the street quickly. "How about we just go get our dragons and meet out at Deadman's Peak?" she asks hastily, referring to one of the old towers that had been used to watch for incoming dragon raids, before Hiccup changed everything.

"Uhm, yeah, sure," Hiccup answers, nodding hesitantly at Astrid's suddenly reserved demeanor. "So, I'll see you up there in a few minutes?" he asks with a measure of worry in his voice.

Astrid looks about her once more before she nods. "Sounds good," she says, quickly meeting his gaze with a tight smile. Hiccup steps closer in hopes of kissing her, but the blonde warrior turns on her heel without another word and quickly heads off the way she came.
Hiccup watches her with a puzzled frown, now feeling more upset and confused than he had yesterday during his flight with Toothless. He ponders his options for a couple of moments, but then shrugs his shoulders with a sigh, turning to make his way home to prepare Toothless for their ride.

The wind blows fierce and cold, biting Hiccup's cheeks as he sits on the outcropping of rock next to the stone tower that looms behind him on Deadman's Peak. The teen picks up yet another stone and tosses it off into the abyss in angry frustration.

He'd been waiting for Astrid for quite some time now, feeling increasingly like a fool the longer he waited. He really didn't know why he thought that things were getting better since yesterday. Astrid had needed a favor, and she had conned him out of it with a little affection and a promise that she never intended to keep. Now, here he sits like an idiot, waiting in vain for her to show up.

Sighing heavily, he stands and hobbles over to Toothless, who had curled up in his own bout of frustration. The dragon lifted his head at Hiccup's approach. His boy had landed him almost right after their takeoff, when the dragon had expected a proper flight. Instead, they simply flew to this far point on the island and sat in silence. He could sense that his boy was upset, and for the life of him, he couldn't imagine why. The sky was clear and perfect for flying, what more could he need?

"Oh, Toothless, why am I such an idiot?" he rhetorically asks the dragon as he rubs the sleek creature's neck. Toothless warbles in response, standing and stretching as he leans into Hiccup's rubbing hand. "Yeah, let's go, buddy," he says with a heavy sigh, moving to mount his dragon, who suddenly turns his head to look up at something behind the boy.

"Hiccup!" Astrid's voice calls out as he feels the whoosh of air from Stormfly landing behind him. The smith's apprentice turns to see the blonde girl waving frantically with one hand while gripping her newly repaired saddle with her other hand to keep her from falling off as the blue dragon lands a little roughly.

The boy looks on in surprise at her sudden appearance, his disappointment instantly churning into a confused mixture of excitement and anger.

Stormfly doesn't quite finish her landing before Astrid leaps off of her back, dashing over to tackle Hiccup in a tight hug, pressing her lips tightly against his.

The frustrated boy cries out in surprise as her charge pushes him back against Toothless, who tilts his head and rumbles in confusion. Hiccup loses himself in her kiss for a moment, unable to resist the siren's call of her lips and the seductive feel of her shapely body pressed against his. He grips her hips in his hands for a moment, lingering before he pushes her away, breaking the kiss a little forcefully.

"What's wrong?" she asks, looking genuinely confused.

"Astrid, what's going on?" he asks, frustrated and bitter.

"What do you mean?" she asks, looking concerned now.

"You said that we'd meet in a few of minutes, that was like over an hour ago!" he exclaims as his anger starts to boil again.

Astrid scowls at his outburst, furrowing her brow as she glares back at him. "Well, sorry!" she barks back in a way that doesn't sound at all apologetic. "My parents made me do a few chores before I was able to escape, or I would have been here right away!" She looks furious now, which only serves to increase Hiccup's ire.
"Astrid, y-you can't do this! You can't just go back and forth from kissing me to ignoring me for
weeks, then kissing me again, then blowing me off again…" He chokes back any further words, his
throat tightening with emotion as he turns away, clenching his fists.

Hiccup tenses as he expects her to erupt again in fury, but is surprised by her silence. Turning back,
he's shocked that she's looking at him with a saddened, crestfallen expression.

"I know," she says simply, hugging herself as she meets his gaze with a pleading expression. "I'm…
I'm sorry," she says with an anxious voice.

Moreover, she knew she had been hurting him? "Then…but, why…?!"

Astrid cuts him off, "Hiccup, I'll explain everything to you, just not here," she says urgently, looking
above as if she expected a dragon to attack, like in the old days.

"What!?!" Hiccup asks in a loud and frustrated tone, now very confused.

"Please," the blonde pleads, taking a step towards him, flinching when he takes a step back. "Let's…
let's just go on our flight. There's someplace I want to take you. We can talk there…" Hiccup
hesitates, watching her warily.

"Please?" She asks again, her voice even more plaintive.

The battle rages within Hiccup, but the sight of Astrid nearly in tears and begging for his
understanding pierces his heart.

"Fine," he says with a heavy sigh, turning to mount Toothless. The dragon watches his boy climb
aboard, looking between him and the girl as she mounts the Nadder. The sleek black dragon couldn't
fathom why the two were fighting so when they seemed clearly interested in mating, but then, so
much of the customs of people were strange to him.

Astrid looks over at Hiccup as she secures herself to her saddle, half worried that he would change
his mind and just leave her. Instead, he latches himself to Toothless and looks over at her, waiting
with a stern expression. The blonde swallows with difficulty, then urges Stormfly up into the air. She
looks back nervously, breathing a sigh of relief as Hiccup and Toothless follow her. She looks
forward anxiously, steeling herself for what's to come.
Chapter 4

Hiccup follows behind Astrid as she leads the way from Deadman's Peak. His mind swirls with confusion as he ponders what's happening, his heart churning with a mix of emotions. He tries to ignore his feelings as they soar to their secret destination, only paying half attention as they fly further and further away from Berk, crossing over open waters and several other islands.

Finally, Astrid dives down on Stormfly towards an island a little ways off from all of the others, which seems no different than the rest, just a series of looming piles of rocks jutting out from the frigid ocean. Hiccup and Toothless follow behind her, the boy furrowing his brow in curious confusion as he sees her land on a short beach with a particularly massive rock structure.

As he lands behind her, Hiccup watches the girl lead Stormfly over the small beach to the rocks. He blinks in surprise as he realizes that the structure is actually a huge cave, which Astrid and her dragon then enter. Hiccup hesitates for a moment before dismounting and following suit.

The inside of the cave is nothing if not beautiful. Its vaulted walls are made of gleaming rocks, partly covered with glistening green moss, which combine to catch and reflect the sunlight filtering in through a small hole above. The ceiling is a lofty dome stretching up above the soft sands below. Hiccup finds it difficult to walk through the sand with his peg leg, but he manages to trudge forward, urged on by his need to hear what Astrid has to tell him.

"So why here?" he asks, his voice echoing through the large cavern.

"Because it's hidden," Astrid answers, still facing away from him. Hiccup scowls, his confusion and frustration only growing. What, was she ashamed to be seen with him?

"Okay, Astrid," he says with a frustrated voice as he approaches her, still having difficulty with his false leg in the sand, "what's going on?"

Astrid turns to look at him, her face full of emotion. She's not quite crying, but she's close. Hiccup is taken aback, halting in his tracks. He's never seen such a display from the girl, in all the years he's known her. The sight softens the edges of his anger, but he still seethes inside at the way she's treated him.

"Hiccup, you have to understand, this wasn't my choice," she pleads, taking a step towards him. He furrows his brow, still very confused. "What wasn't your choice?" he asks.

"Staying away from you," she says simply, causing him to blink in surprise.

"What?" he asks, trying to figure out where this is going.

"Do you remember that hunting trip my father took me on, just after you woke up?" she asks, referring to his recovery after their fight with the Green Death.

He hesitates at her words, furrowing his brow as he thinks it through. "Sure," the boy nods as he starts to see where this might be going. It was no secret that Astrid's father didn't much like Stoic, but Hiccup had never thought that the man would let that affect his decisions regarding his daughter. He waited anxiously for Astrid to confirm his new suspicions.

"The only reason we went on that trip was because I kissed you front of the whole village that day," she says, unable to hold his gaze now as she looks down at the sand beneath their feet. "He took me
off to the mainland to hunt, so that we could talk alone. He told me a lot of things, but most of all he said that under no circumstances was I to see you again."

Hiccup breathed a heavy sigh as her words hit him, suddenly making sense of everything. His anger melted away like the mountain snows in the spring, only to be replaced by fear. Astrid was one of the most intense, stubborn, and strongwilled people that Hiccup knew, but he could never imagine that she would cross her father.

Thorsten Hofferson was not a man to be trifled with. He would have been chief if it weren't for Stoic, and he still had many friends within the tribe who thought that he should lead, not Hiccup's father. It was only through the triumverate of Stoic, Gobber, and Snoutlout's father, Vali Jorgenson, that the peace had been maintained and Thorsten was kept in check.

But everyone knew that he still lusted after power. He was a violent, viscious man, with little mercy in him. The way he raised his daughter was a testimony to his outlook on life. His wife was the complete opposite, a sweet and caring woman. She was proabably the only reason Astrid wasn't like her father.

The girl standing before Hiccup continues, "he told me that you were a lousy match for me, that you and Stoic had weakened the tribe by befriending the dragons. He said that he would find me a better match in one of the other villages, so that I could live a life with honor and follow the old ways."

There's more than a trace of sarcasm in her voice now, tinged with bitterness. Hiccup swallows heavily as his heart contracts with fear at her words. He silently listens, hanging on her every word, watching her with worry and concern.

"I tried to be a good daughter," she says, wringing her hands. "I tried to honor my father's wishes, even though it tore me apart inside." She looks at him with a pleading stare, meeting his gaze intently.

"Astrid," Hiccup breathes with a heavy heart, taking a step towards her.

"But I don't care anymore," she says, suddenly looking down again. "I tried to stay away from you, Hiccup. I tried so hard. But I can't do it." She closes her eyes tightly, squeezing out tears as she shakes her head. "I can't stay away from you anymore."

"Astrid," Hiccup tries again to interject, taking another two steps to her, but she cuts him off once more, her voice shaking as she holds back further tears.

"Hiccup, I know I've treated you badly and I have no right to ask anything of you, but…"

Hiccup quickly hobbles forward to close the distance between them, wrapping her up in his arms. She gasps in surprise at the contact as he holds her to him, then presses herself against him. A heavy sob wracks her body as she buries her face into his shoulder.

"Astrid, don't even talk like that," he says against her cheek, pressing her to him as she slowly starts to fall apart in his arms. His brain doesn't know how to process this. Astrid Hofferson, the toughest girl he knows, is crying like a newborn babe in his arms, all because she was afraid of losing him when she didn't even quite have him yet. All he knows to do is hold her tightly as she sobs, stroking her hair as he presses his lips to her cheek.

To think he was afraid she didn't like him.

He chuckles at the irony of it all. "You have to know I'm completely in love with you, right?" he whispers in her ear before he knows what he's doing. Astrid's sobbing suddenly stops as Hiccup
freezes, his stomach lurching while time stops. His whole body tenses up as he realizes what he just confessed to her.

He feels like a fool.

She doesn't move for the space of several ragged breaths. Hiccup's insides twist all the more as he fears what she'll say next.

"What…" she pauses, swallowing heavily. "What did you say?" she whispers against his neck, her voice raw with emotion. She pulls back enough to look at him with wide, red-rimmed eyes while staying within his arms, her hands resting upon his chest. He can feel her trembling against him.

Hiccup stares back into her eyes, his gut churning with sickening anxiety. His whole body shakes as he tries to speak.

"I…I said," he pauses as his voice cracks. Stopping to clear his throat, he draws a deep breath, then opens his eyes to look at her.

"I said I love you."

She stares into his eyes for less than a breath more before she grabs his collar and pulls him to her, kissing him deeply with a frantic passion. Hiccup's heart jumps into his throat as she does, his whole body bursting with joy and excitement and relief as he feels her lips pressing firmly against his.

He quickly responds as she invades his mouth with the force of a conquering army, his tongue meeting and wrestling with hers. Her kisses are as demanding as her personality. The skinny lad feels overwhelmed, intoxicated.

He's never been happier in his life.

Before he knows what's happening, Astrid is pulling him down into the sand, her lips still ravishing his as she lays back beneath him. Hiccup's mind spins dizzily when she wraps her arms about his neck, holding his lips to hers as she spreads her legs, pulling him more snugly against her body.

Hiccup's head swims as their bodies press together. He moans into the kiss as he feels his stiff erection press firmly against the soft warmth of her crotch. As she kisses him hungrily, she lifts her hips against him, adding pressure. Unable to resist, he starts to rock his hips against hers, grinding his hardness against her body. She moans throatily into his mouth as she kisses him all the more eagerly, her arms tightening about his neck.

His pulse surges and he starts to feel overwhelmed as he worries about where she was taking this.

"Astrid," he says against her lips, trying to pull back while she struggles to keep him close.

"Mmmph," is her only response as she kisses him deeply. She rolls her hips against his, encouraging him to grind against her once more, which he readily does without thinking about it. He can't help but kiss back for a while, continuing to rock his hips against hers, stroking his length against her willing body as the girl beneath him moans softly with the motions of his hips against her. Feeling overwhelmed again, he pulls back more forcefully this time, breaking the kiss and looking into her eyes.

"Astrid, we shouldn't…" he starts to say again, but she interrupts him.

"I love you, Hiccup," she says passionately, staring back at him with the heat of the sun. His eyes grow wide and his voice falls silent at her words. He closes his eyes and swallows heavily as the
emotions pour over him. Astrid smiles sweetly as she looks upon his face, her one hand moving to stroke his cheek. He leans into her touch, whimpering softly.

"I love you," she repeats forcefully in a husky whisper.

Whatever resolve Hiccup had crumbles at the words he's wanted to hear from her for so long. He opens his eyes to look at her, taking in the sight of her beautiful visage as she stares up at him, her eyes still red-rimmed with her tears from before though she now smiles happily, her hand still caressing his cheek.

He leans in and kisses her, his tongue delving between her welcoming lips. She greets him eagerly, wrapping her arms tightly about his neck once more and wrapping her legs snugly about his waist, pulling him closer against her crotch while rolling her hips again. He matches her rhythm, grinding his length against her tenderness, drawing another throaty moan from her and this time he groans along with her. Astrid slides her hands down his body until she reaches his breeches, which she starts to tug at desperately.

Hiccup's reason again surfaces as he feels her thumbs hooking inside of the fabric, touching his skin as she tries to free him of his clothes, causing his heart to surge. In spite of himself, he's very thankful for her lack of success as he tries to regain his willpower.

"Astrid we shouldn't..." he murmurs against her lips as she reaches between them, her hand stroking over his length, pressing it firmly against his body. "Oh Gods," he murmurs and with that he again loses all capacity for logical thought, instead moaning huskily against the girl's lips as she pulls him down to her and kisses him passionately once more, sighing happily when he relents.

Astrid then rolls him over onto his back, continuing to rub his erection with one hand while also undoing the laces in the front of his breeches with the other. As he feels his garment being losened, he starts to protest again, but before he can even form a word, Astrid's hand slips inside, her cool fingers playing with his stiff length. He breaks the kiss to gasp loudly, the noise echoing through the cavernous chamber as he grips her thigh.

Astrid smiles widely as she sits up to kneel upon his legs while she nervously explores, watching him intently, her heart pounding in her chest. She hesitates, then pulls his breeches down further, revealing his penis to her. Hiccup swallows as he feels the cold air hit him below the waist, shivering as her fingers continue to lightly play with him. The girl straddling him looks down at his smooth length with wide eyes as she traces her fingers from the base up to the purplish head, breathing heavily as she lightly gently caresses him.

Hiccup stares up at her in a daze, overwhelmed by what she's doing, feeling positively lightheaded. She looks back at him with a deep blush on her cheeks, as if she's equally astounded by her own boldness. It looks to him like she's trembling. The two teens stare at each other as she caresses him, her fingers gliding touching him more and more with each movement as the both of them breathe heavily.

He watches with amazement as Astrid lifts herself up and starts to push down her own skirt and leggings with her free hand, her gaze never leaving his.

"Astrid," he starts to protest, grabbing her wrist.

In answer, her fingers wrap fully around his shaft as she takes him completely in her hand and squeezes him tightly. He closes his eyes and whimpers, struggling to maintain his grip upon her wrist, but she easily brushes him off.
"I want this," she whispers forcefully, pushing her skirt and leggings down past her knees, baring her lower half to him. Hiccup opens his eyes at her words, then looks on in shock as he sees her revealing herself to him. He can't help but stare in amazement at her bare sex, his eyes wide as he gasps in shock at the sight of glistening, short blond hair that almost hides her folds of skin. She smiles shyly, blushing profusely as he looks upon her, his breath quickening.

He closes his eyes as he struggles to resist. "Astrid, we'll make things worse if we…" She silences him again by grabbing his hand and pushing it against her crotch. Both of them close their eyes and gasp as his fingers touch her soft skin, Astrid's fingers tightening around his wrist as her other hand again squeezes his hard length.

"I don't care," she says as she starts to slowly stroke his erection. Unable to resist, Hiccup opens his eyes and watches her as he explores her moist sex with his fingers, utterly amazed that he's doing this to her, that she wants him to do this to her. He looks up at her as he feels the soft, velvety, wet heat of her sex, watching with sheer joy as her face contorts in all kinds of wonderful ways when he runs his fingers over her skin. She moans weakly at his exploration, slowly moving her hips as his fingers caress her.

He finds her slick opening and pushes a finger just a little inside. Astrid gasps loudly, gripping his stiffness all that much harder, making Hiccup likewise cry out. The boy shivers excitedly at the feel of her flesh squeezing his finger as he slides it in deeper, his mind whirling at the thought of putting his penis inside her.

After a moment, she says urgently, "I need you, Hiccup." Her voice drops to a whisper as she opens her eyes to look down at him with a heated stare, "I love you…"

Hiccup sits up and presses his lips to hers, kissing her deeply. She wimpers against his lips while he fondles her. He then moves his finger around inside of her, stroking it in and out, his tender touch drawing a mewling sound out from the girl as she kisses back weakly. He then moves his finger around inside of her, lowering her sex towards his.

He pulls back from the kiss, reaching up with his free hand to caress her cheek while he says urgently, "Astrid, I love you too, but if I get you pregnant…"

At that word, Astrid stops and looks into his eyes at his words, hesitating. He stares at her intently, stroking her cheek with his free hand as time slips by.

She groans in frustration, dropping her head on his shoulder and releasing her grip on his shaft. He sighs heavily in relief, kissing her cheek tenderly while taking his hand off of her sex, wrapping that arm about her shoulders, hugging her to him. He smiles as he smells her nectar on his fingers.

"Dammit," she mumbles against his neck. "Why do you always have to be so sensible?"

Hiccup chuckles at her words. "Believe me, nobody's more upset about it than me," He remarks dryly, to which she scoffs bitterly. "I want nothing more than to…" he clears his throat, unable to say it. "Well, you know…" he tries to say, blushing all the more.

Astrid lifts her head and looks at him consideringly, a small smirk playing upon her lips.

"What?" he asks.

Her grin grows absolutely wicked as she looks into his eyes. "Well…we don't have to do…that…at least, not yet. We can do…other things…"
Hiccup looks at her with wide eyes as he processes her words, but before he can protest, Astrid once more takes the initiative and again starts to squeeze and stroke his length, causing him to suck in his breath quickly and grip where her neck joins her shoulder with the hand he was caressing her face with. She smiles from ear to ear at the look on his face as she does, a heavy moan escaping his lips. He closes his eyes, crying out as she squeezes him firmly.

Finding the position difficult, Astrid moves so she's no longer straddling him, but instead kneels beside him. Now with a better angle, her hand starts to move faster upon his length, causing him to breathe heavily, his face contorting in a fit of pleasure. She presses her lips to his, kissing him passionately as she strokes his erection. He kisses back hungrily, his mind whirling at the reality of Astrid Hofferson eagerly and happily touching him like this. He grabs her bare hip as he starts to moan into her mouth with every breath, driving Astrid to pump even faster. His hips buck with her frantic motion. He can feel the pressure quickly building up inside as her hand rapidly strokes him with a firm grip.

Suddenly his whole body tenses up and he cries out against her lips as she feels his penis spasming in her hand. Unable to resist the urge to see, Astrid breaks the kiss so she can watch as he spurs his sticky fluids into the sand in front of him. Hiccup's cries echo into the cave as he's overwhelmed. The girl looks on with wide eyes, her hand still pumping as he cries out, his hand gripping her hip almost painfully. She smiles happily at what she's doing to him, pumping harder even as he goes soft in her grip.

To her surprise, Hiccup grabs her wrist, stopping her motion with a grip that's stronger than she'd have thought he could muster. "Too…too much," he gasps between ragged breaths.

"Sorry," she says awkwardly as she reluctantly releases him, to which his only reply is to grab her behind her head and pull her into a passionate kiss. She smiles against his lips as he invades her mouth, and she kisses him back hungrily.

"I can't believe you did that," he whispers against her lips, his breath still coming in heavy gulps. He looks at her and she blushes, shrugging.

"I…I wanted to show you how I feel," she answers, half pleading while looking into his eyes. The smile upon his lips melts her heart.

"So do I," he says, his smile suddenly turning wicked. Astrid's eyes grow wide as she realizes what he means, just as his hand that still rests upon her hip moves to cup her bare sex again. She sucks in her breath as he explores, and she grips his shoulders firmly.

"H-Hi-iccup…" she starts to say in protest, but he silences her by slipping his finger inside of her again. She yelps at his penetration, staring into his eyes as she starts to rock her hips with the strokes of his digit into her.

"It's only fair," he argues as his thumb roams around her folds until he finds a point that makes her grip his shoulders all the more firmly, her eyes falling shut as a shuddering moan escaping her lips. "You started this," he reminds her as he starts to rub that spot while still wiggling his finger around inside of her. She looks at him with a heated, half-lidded gaze, her face contorting with pleasure.

Astrid squirms at his touch, wimpering as he caresses her. With his other hand he grips the back of her head, pulling her to him. He slips a second finger into her and kisses her tenderly as she writhes against his hand, his lips caressing hers firmly as he deepens the kiss. Now and again he stops his fingers to rub his thumb over that raised spot, making Astrid whimper louder each time. Hiccup is amazed at how wet her flesh is down there, it seems to be getting more and more soaked the longer he plays with her.
Her cries into the kiss become more frantic the more he rubs her. Hiccup moves his fingers faster inside of her the more urgent her sounds become, his fingers driving deep into her as her breath comes in heavy gulps. He keeps rubbing his thumb over that raised spot and the girl squirms against him, rocking her hips with his motions until at last she feels a white hot fire in her core as she peaks.

Her vision goes white as she breaks the kiss to scream his name at the top of her lungs, the sound echoing loudly throughout the cave. She grips at his shoulders until her knuckles are white as he keeps plunging his fingers inside of her while rubbing his thumb against that wonderful spot. Her body shakes violently and she screams again, this time her voice incoherent as he keeps rubbing her spasming flesh, the feeling growing more intense inside her as she curls her toes inside of her boots.

"S-stop!" she finally screams in a desperate and trembling voice as he keeps playing with her. His hand stops at her demand.

He lingers in touching her, smiling widely as he watches her face with an amazed expression. Her hot breath spills out over him heavily in ragged gulps as she tries to calm herself, but her heart pounds violently in her ears as she shakes.

Hiccup pulls her to him again, kissing her tenderly. She melts against him as he withdraws his hand from her crotch, wrapping his arms about her to pull her close. Pressing her weight against him, she pushes him down again, climbing atop of him as their lips linger together.

"Well," she breathes raggedly against his lips, "that was certainly unplanned…"
"You mean you had a plan when you brought me out here?" Hiccup asks Astrid with an amused grin as she lays atop of him, her breath still heavy and ragged, though it becomes a little more steady each time she inhales. She shrugs at his question, waiting to answer until she can catch her breath.

As she collects herself, the boy's mind whirls at the enormity of what had just happened. He finds he can't wrap his brain around it. Astrid loves him. Not only does she love him, but she was ready to have sex with him. He starts to kick himself for refusing that, but quickly reminds himself that it's for the best of they wait. Their time will come.

He hopes.

Still, in the meanwhile…she had touched him there, she had made him…find his release. What's more, she bared her sex to him, even made him touch her there and let him do the same to her. The boy hugs her excitedly as he remembers what it felt like to slip his fingers inside of her, to make her scream his name in a fit of ecstacy.

Hiccup simply can't believe it all.

After several moments, Astrid lifts her head to look at him."I had a plan to tell you what was going on and apologize, so you would stop thinking that I wasn't interested." She hesitates and starts to blush, then looks away from his gaze. "I…wasn't expecting you to just come right out and tell me that you love me…” she smiles as she glances shyly at him. Hiccup finds her bashfullness very strange, considering what they just did and the fact that they were lying together without wearing any pants.

He chuckles, squeezing his arms about her waist and sliding his hands over her back, "Well, you know me - always doing something stupid or crazy…"

Astrid smirks knowingly at his words, tracing his lips with her finger. "I know," she says, "that's part of the reason I fell in love with you…”

Hiccup's smile is contagious as he hears her speak those wonderful words again and it makes him tingle from head to toe. His hands slide up her body to the back of her head, pulling her down into another kiss. She smiles at this, happy beyond words with his initiative, pressing her lips firmly to his, and without hesitation as they kiss deeply.

The cave suddenly echos with the trill of Astrid's Nadder. The teens quickly break the kiss, looking over in surprise. They see two sets of dragon eyes watching them with intense curiosity as the beasts lounge lazily near the mouth of the large cave. Stormfly has her head cocked, while Toothless watches them intently with a furrowed brow.

Astrid groans, turning away from their companions to rest her forehead on Hiccup's head with a thunk. "Oh Gods, were they watching us the whole time?!” she asks rhetorically, her voice laced with embarrassed misery.

"Well, it's not like they had anything else to entertain them," Hiccup muses, earning him a pinch on his side. "Ow," he protests.

"Not funny," Astrid chides him. "We are not having an audience the next time we do this," she says with a frustrated sigh, causing Hiccup's body to surge with excitement.
Astrid wanted to do this again. She was even planning the details of the matter. In his head, he had been almost certain that a repeat of this was inevitable, given their mutual confession of being in love, but to hear her say it so casually...

Well, it just left him giddy.

"What?" she asks him as he looks at her happily.

"Uhm," he hesitates, blushing as he shrugs. "I'm just excited you want to do this again," he says with a foolish grin on his face.

She smirks at his words, brushing her bangs from her face, though they fall immediately back into place. "Well of course I do," she says plainly. "I love you," she explains tenderly. Hiccup thrills at hearing those words again. The girl hesitates for a moment. "Besides, you made my toes curl," she tells him with a teasing voice. "I'd be an idiot not to want to do that again…"

His eyes grow wide at her words and he feels ecstatic at her description of his prowess. She lifts an eyebrow at the look on his face. "Don't let that go to your head," she warns him, pushing a finger into his chest.

"Got it. Don't get a big head," he says with a smirk. She rolls her eyes at his weak double entendre, choosing to ignore it.

Hiccup grins all the more, trying to pull her in for another kiss. She hesitates for a moment, giving him a teasing look, but then with a playful smile she leans in and presses her lips to his. He's happy beyond words that he can just do this whenever.

As they kiss, though, he can feel Astrid's mood change, her movements growing more tense. They linger for a while before she pulls away, resting her forehead on his with a sigh.

"Hiccup…what're we going to do?" she asks with a measure of desperation in her voice. "My dad will literally kill us if he finds out about this…about us…"

Back to Midgard they crash.

"We'll think of something," the boy says sincerely as he holds her tightly. Now that he and Astrid were a couple, he would do anything to protect her and to keep her. Actually, he would have done anything before today, but now it doubles his resolve. "I'll talk to my Dad, he'll help us figure out a way to make this work."

Astrid sighs in frustration, sitting up. Hiccup follows suit, happy that she stays in his lap. He can't help but steal a glance down at her nakedness, sucking in his breath at the sight. That and the feel of her bare legs against his almost giddy, in spite of the gravity of their situation.

"Do you think he can?" she asks worriedly, the sound of her voice drawing his gaze back up to hers. She looks into his eyes with concern. "I don't know, my Dad is pretty scary,…"

Hiccup cups her face in his hands, silencing her with a kiss. She likewise grabs his face, pressing her lips against his desperately. "We'll figure it out," he whispers against her lips. "I'm not going to lose you…"

Astrid pulls back to look into his eyes at the passionate words, her breath trembling. She smiles, caressing his cheeks as she kisses him again, the two lingering for a while in an intimate embrace.

When they finally part, Astrid shivers. "Let's get dressed, I'm freezing." Hiccup nods as she stands
up and starts pulling up her leggings. He does the same while on the ground, lifting his butt to pull his breeches back up, then drawing the strings tight to tie them.

He starts to try and stand, gritting his teeth when he finds that sand has made its way in between his stump and artificial leg. As he tries to put his weight on it, his peg leg sinks down into the sand, twisting uncomfortably against his stump, grinding his flesh against the grit now lodged in his prosthetic, which is surprisingly coarse and sharp. He quickly loses his balance and lands on his rear with a gasp.

His cheeks color a dark red as he casts a fleeting glance up at Astrid, who’s watching him with a concerned expression. The sight of it burns inside, and he scowls as he tries to get up again.

The girl wordlessly takes his hand in hers and tries to pull him up, but he resists, pushing her hand away.

"Hiccup!" she cries out in surprise, as he flounders again, wincing at the same grinding feeling and falling back to his posterior. "Let me help you!"

"I can do this!" he protests, trying and failing once more, sending a fair amount of sand spraying. Astrid holds up her hand to deflect the spray from her face, scowling. "Dammit, Hiccup, take my hand!" she barks at him.

"No!" he snarks back, struggling more, his breath coming heavily from all the effort.

"Why won't you let me help you?!" she asks harshly.

"Why do you want to?" he snarks back.

"Seriously!?! Because I love you, you idiot!" she shouts back at him as he tries and fails again. "That's what people in love do, they take care of each other!"

Hiccup closes his eyes with a scowl as he breathes heavily. "I'm not helpless," he says.

"Of course you're not," she says tenderly. "You're the man I love." He looks up at her, staring blankly.

Her expression hardens as she stands, releasing his hand. "Now, are you going to let me help you up?" She crosses her arms indignantly. "Or, should I let you thrash around until you're completely exhausted and then just carry you over to Toothless like a sack of potatoes?"

Hiccup closes his eyes in frustration, taking a few more heavy gulps of air and thrusts his hand up at her. She doesn't take it, and he looks up at her. "I'm sorry, Astrid," he says earnestly as she lifts an eyebrow. "Really…I'm sorry. Could you help me up? Please?"

The girl pauses, considering before she nods, taking his hand and hefting him up with not as much effort as he had expected. In the same motion, she pulls him against her, wrapping her other arm about his waist to press him against her as she continues to hold his hand tightly, almost painfully. She angrily and wordlessly stares into his eyes, now so close to hers that their noses about touch,
lingering in silence as she leaves him to squirm under her penetrating gaze.

"Don't you ever do that again," she says sternly. He swallows heavily, nodding as he listens intently. "If we're together, then we're together. You take my help when you need it, and I'll take yours when I need it, no arguing. We count on each other. We look out for each other. Oh, and no more of this bullshit about being a cripple, and no more feeling sorry for yourself. That's not the man I fell in love with."

In stunned silence, Hiccup blinks at her words, marvelling at how beautiful she is, even as she speaks so harshly to him. He slowly nods, his eyes never leaving hers. "I…I promise," is all he can think to say, his voice little more than a whisper.

Astrid's scowl slowly fades at his words, and she nods. "I promise too," she says resolutely, and suddenly Hiccup feels the enormity of what has just passed between them. Still, he can't resist the urge to say what comes next to his mind.

"You promise to not think you're a cripple?" he asks with a sardonic smirk, his gaze still locked on hers. Astrid frowns and squeezes his hand that's still in hers.

"Ow ow ow…!" he cries out in pain, then she stops, but doesn't release him.

"That's for being a stupid jerk," she says sternly, as he tries to flex his throbbing hand still locked in her iron grip. He blinks as he waits for what should follow, but Astrid doesn't move, instead she smirks in amusement. Hiccup shifts nervously, waiting hopefully, but after the space of several breaths go by, the boy looks down forlornly with a sigh.

Astrid releases his hand and lifts his chin, pressing her lips against his, kissing him tenderly.

"That's for everything else," she whispers against his lips.

Stoic the Vast walked up to the blacksmith's shop and looked inside, furrowing his brow when he only saw Gobber.

"ello, Stoic!" the smith greeted him, glancing over from his work at the Chief's arrival. "What brings you 'round, then?" he asks, turning his attention back to the hot piece of metal that he was beating into shape.

"I'm looking for Hiccup," he says gruffly, frowning slightly when he doesn't see the lad.

"Ah, well, he's taken the day off," Gobber answers, dipping the metal into a nearby bucket, nodding as the billow of steam pours out. "Went flying with Astrid, unless I'm mistaken," he adds.

"Aye, that's what I was afraid of," Stoic says heavily.

Gobber looks over with concern. "An' what'd be wrong with that?" he asks. "I thought you liked the idea of them together…?"

Stoic nods heavily. "Oh, I do, Gobber, I do," he sighs. "But I just had a talk with th'girls father…"

Hiccup and Astrid kiss for a long time, just holding each other. After a while, Hiccup starts to shift restlessly in her embrace, his stump growing sore from standing too long in the cold while his good leg aches from carrying most of his weight, given the difficulty that the sand gives him. The boy tries to ignore it and continue kissing the girl of his dreams, but Astrid is having none of it.
She pulls away just enough to look into his eyes. "Are you okay?" she asks, lifting an eyebrow.

He's about to answer with some sort of ridiculously faux-macho, very sarcastic proclamation that he's just perfectly fine, but between her penetrating stare and his memory of the promise she had just extracted from him, he simply says, "My bad leg's kinda aching, and my good leg's getting tired." He sounds defeated, but honest.

Astrid smiles with a measure of satisfaction before she steals one last kiss from him. Pulling out of his embrace, she puts her arm around his back and under his arm to support him. Hiccup naturally puts his arm around her back and holds onto her shoulder.

"Let's go sit down, then," she says as she starts walking him over to a large rock with a particularly flat surface. Hiccup nods wordlessly as he lets her lead him over, hobbling along and then accepting her help to ease him down to sit upon the boulder. He looks at her as she sits down next to him, swallowing bitterly.

"Stop that," she tells him, meeting his gaze.

"Stop what?" he asks guiltily.

"Stop feeling bad about needing help," she says firmly, glaring at him.

He sighs. "I'll try." He pauses, adding, "It's not easy, though."

"I know," she says, taking his hand in hers, entwining their fingers together. He glances over at her, "but I'm here for you." He smiles, squeezing her hand. "Even if I have to disown my father to be with you," she adds bleakly, her face growing troubled.

"We'll figure this out, Astrid," he assures her, gripping her hand firmly. She smiles faintly, leaning against him. Hiccup releases her hand to wrap his arm about her shoulders, pulling her to him. "In the meanwhile, what do we do?" he asks.

"Well, I can't be seen with you in public," she says with a weary voice. Hiccup sighed but didn't say anything. He understood well enough the concern. Berk was such a small village, rumors spread like a brushfire. One slip up and her father would know about them before nightfall.

Astrid continues, tracing a finger over his leg "but I...I need to see you. The more the better." Hiccup's heart races at her admission and he squeezes her, overjoyed as she snuggles against him.

"Who can we trust?" She asks.

"Well, my Dad," he says and she nods as he adds, "and Gobber."

"We can trust my Mom," Astrid says.

Hiccup frowns slightly, glad she can't see his face. "Are you sure?" he asks.

She nods her head resolutely. "She hates my Dad. I've never had to worry about her, she's always protected me from him," she explains. "I've never kept any secrets from her. She even knew I was coming out here with you today."

"Okay," he answers. "We should probably leave it at that. The less people that know, the better."

"Yeah," she sighs. "But, I hate being so secretive," she complains forlornly, still touching his leg, rubbing him absentmindedly. "I want to tell the world about us, to shout it out from a mountaintop."
Hiccup squeezes her to him, grinning in spite of the dire circumstances they find themselves in. "I can't believe you're so excited about… this… about us," he says with a touch of giddiness in his voice. "Heck, I can't even believe there is an 'us'," he amends.

"Why?" Astrid asks incredulously, pulling back to look at him.

Hiccup smirks at her confusion. "Because… you're… you're Astrid!" he tells her enthusiastically, causing her to blush slightly. "You're the most beautiful girl I've ever seen! You're smart, you're clever, you're tough, you're… just all around amazing."

Astrid's cheeks turn a bright pink as she listens and the girl looks remarkably self conscious. "Come on, Hiccup, I'm not special or anything," she argues, looking down to fuss with her skirt. "I didn't even make top of my class in Dragon Training," she says with a smirk, glancing at him from under her bangs.

Hiccup chuckles, blushing a little at the memory and meeting her gaze with a wry grin. "Did I mention you're also funny?" he asks. She smiles as she wraps her arms about his neck, leaning into him.

"I think that's more your thing than mine," she protests, pressing her lips to his to silence him. Hiccup meets her lips happily, quickly deepening the kiss. The girl moans as he does, idly playing with the hair on the back of his head as their tongues dance together lazily.

They linger for a while again, content to just enjoy each other. Hiccup completely loses himself in the moment, happy beyond words when suddenly he hears Astrid's stomach growl noisily, the sound carrying in the cavernous space. The lovestruck teens stop mid-kiss, each opening their eyes to look at one another. They pull apart as Hiccup lifts an eyebrow and smirks while Astrid blushes, looking sheepish.

"Hungry?" he asks rhetorically.

She scowls at him. "Boy you really are a genius, aren't you?" she snips, causing him to grin all the more. "I skipped breakfast, okay?" she chides him.

Hiccup smirks at her as he remembers their dawn meeting at the forge, lifting his eyebrows. "Oh, you were that eager to see me?" he asks with a hint of conceit.

Astrid continues to scowl at him, blushing all the more. She crosses her arms indignantly, getting up in a huff and walking off.

Hiccup groans. He's already pissed her off, and they haven't been a couple for a day yet. "Astrid, come on," he calls out to her. She walks quickly towards Stormfly without a hitch in her stride. Hiccup gets up to chase after her, gritting his teeth at the pressure on his stump. "I was teasing you. What, I'm not allowed to tease you?"

The girl reaches her dragon as Hiccup starts trying to run, which he finds very difficult in the sand. "Astrid, I'm sorry, please don't go," he says urgently, pleading. He watches as Astrid pets her dragon, talking to it sweetly, then reaches towards the saddle.

"Astrid!" Hiccup calls out desperately, hobbling as fast as he can in the sand, cursing his leg.

The girl reaches behind her saddle and pulls out a leather sack, untying it from the back of her seat. Turning to leisurely walk back towards Hiccup, she lazily opens the bag and looks in, rummaging around before she pulls out a strip of jerky that she takes a bite of. Hiccup stops in his tracks as he watches in her in disbelief as she walks up stand before him.
"Oh, Hiccup!" she says in mock surprise as she swallows the bite. The boy huffs in heavy breaths from the exertion as he starts to glare at her. "You didn't have to get up, I was bringing the food back," she says all too sweetly, her eyes making it clear she knew exactly what she just did to him. Reaching in, she pulls out a large piece of meat still on the bone. "Smoked turkey leg?" she asks charmingly. Hiccup glares at her.

"Okay," he pants, still trying to catch his breath and bending over, resting his hands on his knees, "that...was downright mean..."

Astrid smirks at him. She puts the food back in the bag and slings it over her shoulder, wrapping her arm supportively around him as he stands up straight again. "What?" she asks sardonically, "I'm not allowed to tease you?"

Hiccup frowns at her as he puts his arm over her shoulder and she walks him back to the rock. She shakes her head with a sigh. "You know, for such a genius, you really are dense," she says bluntly.

Hiccup looks at her incredulously, "and why do you say that?" he asks irritably.

She sighs heavily as she helps him seat himself again. "Hiccup, I just admitted that I love you, after I told you that I'm going against my father's wishes to see you," she points out plainly as she puts down the bag and looks intently at him. "Not to mention that we were just...very intimate," she adds, clearing her throat as they both blush, her words bringing a brief grin to his face. "Do you really think I'm going to walk out on you just because you teased me a little?"

The boy blushes, looking chagrined as he rubs the back of his neck. "I dunno," he mumbles, shrugging while looking down at his feet. "I guess...I'm kinda worried that you're going to come to your senses and realize what a mistake I am."

"Hiccup," she says quietly, reaching over to caress his cheek, turning and lifting his face towards her. "You're no mistake. You're the most amazing man I've ever met," she says simply. He looks at her with a measure of disbelief.

Astrid smiles gently at him, asking quietly, "Do you want to know when I fell in love with you?" She leans closer to him while looking into his eyes. He nods wordlessly staring back at her, his gaze trapped in hers.

"It was when you took me on my first flight," she tells him in an almost whisper as she leans in closer, her fingers stroking his cheek gently. "After stupid Toothless finished scaring the hell out of me when we first took off, and I opened my eyes to find myself floating high above the ground..." She closes her eyes, breathing in deeply as she relives the moment in her mind, "It was the most beautiful thing I'd ever seen. The world wheeling far below me, the clouds at my fingertips, the cold wind of the heavens blowing through my hair and biting at my cheeks..." She sighs happily as Hiccup covers her hand upon his cheek, opening her eyes to look at him with such a passionate stare of love that he sharply draws in his breath, swallowing nervously.

Her smile blooms all the more as she explains, "After stupid Toothless finished scaring the hell out of me when we first took off, and I opened my eyes to find myself floating high above the ground..." She lifts her hand to hold his, entwining their fingers together. "I wondered how you ever managed to convince Toothless to carry you on his back in the first place, how you could have won his trust like that. For you to have done that made me realize how special you are..." She squeezes
his hand tightly, smiling with unbridled joy as she stares into his eyes.

"That...was the most amazing night of my life," she breathes, hesitating a moment before she blushes and adds with a knowing grin, "well...so far, at least..." Hiccup grins while clearing his throat as he blushes along with her, squeezing her hand tightly in his.

She beams at him, leaning in closer still, until he can feel her breath upon his face. "That night I fell in love with you, Hiccup," she tells him with a tremble in her voice, staring heatedly into his eyes. "That night I realized I could never be happy with any other man." The boy squeezes her hand tightly, swallowing heavily as his breath comes more quickly at her words, staring at her with wide eyes. "It scared me to death, but I knew in my heart and in my head that you were the one, the only one, for me." Hiccup closes his eyes, trembling against her now.

Tears burn in Astrid's eyes as she leans in and kisses him lovingly, releasing his hand to caress his face. Hiccup answers her kiss passionately, pressing his lips against hers, moaning weakly. He wraps her up in his arms as she slides her arms around his neck and the two embrace tightly. "I love you, Hiccup," she whispers between kisses.

"I love you too, Astrid," he answers weakly.

They kiss deeply and passionately, losing all sense of time.
Chapter 6

After some time, Astrid finally and reluctantly starts to pull away from Hiccup. He groans in protest, leaning in to try and keep her in his embrace. Momentarily enticed, she lingers, but then mutters against his lips, "As much as I love kissing you, I need to eat something." She gives him one last quick kiss, then pulls away and turns her attention to the forgotten bag of food sitting next to them. After a moment of rumaging around, she pulls out a smoked turkey leg and proceeds to take a big bite while offering the bag to Hiccup.

"You came prepared," he comments while looking inside the bag, then fishes out a piece of bread. He glances at her as he breaks off a piece and pops it in his mouth. "You weren't kidding yesterday when you said we could spend the day together."

Astrid grins at his words, looking at him with a coy grin as she swallows her bite. "I told you, I want to spend a lot of time with you," she reminds him. "I don't know when we'll get the chance to do this again, so I want to make the most of it," she says, taking another bite.

Hiccup furrows his brow, asking with genuine confusion, "why couldn't we spend the day again soon?"

The girl chuckles, rolling her eyes. "Hiccup, it'd get kinda suspicious pretty quickly, don't you think? We're already pushing our luck as it is with the two of us going completely missing for an entire day. The more we do it, the more obvious it'll be to everyone." Hiccup sighs at her point as he takes another piece of bread. Astrid picks at her food, adding, "like I said, we're going to have to be careful."

Hiccup nods again as his girlfriend eats more of the hunk of meat. He answers, "Well, we'll just have to do what we can. I'm sure Dad, Gobber, and your Mom will help us out." He pauses, then adds with a grin, "I can live with stolen moments, as long as it means we get to be together."

Astrid smiles happily, looking at Hiccup with adoring eyes. The two enjoy their meal in silence for several minutes.

"So, I've been wondering," she starts to say, watching him with a curious gaze, "what was going on that night during Dragon Training at the forge, when you just disappeared while we were talking?"

Hiccup smirks at her question, chuckling a little. "Oh, that," he answers. "I had been testing my latest saddle design with Toothless earlier and we lost control. We landed kinda roughly." Astrid furrows her brow in concern but he continues without noticing, "it bent the clip on the strap I was using to secure myself to the saddle, so we were stuck together."

"So you waited until nightfall to sneak in and fix it?" she asks.

The boy chuckles as he takes a bite of bread. "Well, I couldn't just parade through the village on Toothless' back, now could I?" he asks with a grin, which she answers with her own smirk. "You scared me to death by visiting us," he says, to which the girl glances at him with an amused look in her eyes.

"I can imagine," she says, looking over to Toothless. After thinking for a moment, Astrid furrows her brow. "You must have had a few rough landings while trying to learn to ride Toothless," she observes.

Hiccup nods. "Yeah, I think I got more beat up from that than Dragon Training," he answers with a
smirk.

The girl nods knowingly, eyeing him with a thoughtful gaze. "I'd often wondered why you acted like you had so many bruises, when you never got hurt in training after the first couple of weeks," she observes, referring to when he started to apply his newfound knowledge from his time with Toothless.

With a lifted eyebrow, Hiccup looks at her consideringly. "I'm surprised you noticed that," he remarks. "I didn't think you had even paid any attention to me, before…" Astrid chortles at his words.

"Oh, I noticed you," she says somewhat sarcastically, smirking at him. "Everybody noticed you, after you started doing well in Dragon Training, Hiccup." She half glares at him as she pauses, her grin lilting all the more as he blushes and squirms uncomfortably.

Hiccup clears his throat. "I, uh…" he hesitates, smiling nervously at her. "Yeah, I guess you weren't really happy about all that, were you?" The girl smirks all the more at his words, meeting his gaze intently.

"Yeah, I wanted to kill you," she says in such a matter-of-fact way that Hiccup swallows nervously.

"What, uh…what about before that?" He asks hesitantly, watching her intently.

She hesitates, then sighs, "yeah, I didn't really pay you any mind." The boy nods in understanding, though he can't hide the disappointment he feels. Astrid frowns slightly, watching him with a slightly guilty expression.

Furrowing his brow, he asks, "So…I might regret asking this, but…would you have been interested in me, if all this hadn't happened?"

She looks at him pensively, shrugging. "Honestly," she says, then shakes her head and answers, "Probably not."

Hiccup nods sullenly, having expected the answer. "Soo, what then? Someone like Snoutlout?"

Astrid looks at him like he's grown a second head. "Are you kidding me? Hel no," she says firmly, looking disgusted at the idea. "EW," she adds for emphasis as Hiccup blinks in surprise.

"Really?" he asks. Astrid sighs.

"I'm not going to get out of answering this, am I?" she asks plaintively.

Hiccup holds his hands up defensively, "Hey, if you don't want to talk about it, that's okay by me…I probably would be happier not knowing."

With a sigh, she rolls her eyes. "No, you might actually like it," she answers, her voice laced with irritation. Hiccup furrows his brow with a curious gaze. She shrugs and explains, "I wasn't really thinking of stuff like that," she says simply as she picks at her turkeyleg.

"I was only focused on my skills and on becoming the best warrior on the island," she says, glancing back at Hiccup who watches her with interest. "My Dad has pushed me mercilessly since I could barely walk. It was my only interest" she hesitates, blushing as she looks down again, fussing with a bit of skin on the leg. "So, at first I wasn't interested in you because you were such a screw up. My whole world revolved around perfection, and I thought you were the farthest thing from it. Then you started to do well in the ring, better than me, and I kinda went a little nuts with jealousy."
She looks back at him and shrugs, adding, "The whole time, I couldn't get past what I thought you were. Before, you were just annoying because of all your accidents, then I kinda hated you because of how you just magically showed me up at every turn." The boy nods sullenly, looking downcast as he glances at his food in his lap.

Astrid pauses and grins, watching him for a moment or two before adding, "But it turns out I was the one who was clueless." Hiccup glances back her. "So clueless, that it took all of that," she says, gesturing at the dragons, "for me to see how much I was missing in all of this," she waves her hand to gesture at Hiccup's body.

The boy blushes as Astride looks into his eyes with a smile, "once you kidnapped me and showed me what you and Toothless had done together…” she pauses, drawing in her breath deeply as she stares into his eyes before adding, "I could suddenly see it so clearly. You turned my world upsidedown, Hiccup," she says, caressing his cheek. He smiles happily, leaning into her touch as she adds, "and I couldn't be happier with realizing how wrong I was," she hesitates before withdrawing her hand and adding with a grin, "at least, just this once."

Rubbing the back of his neck, Hiccup smiles sheepishly at the girl sitting next to him, smiling widely as he looks at her happily.

"Wow…” he says as she grins at him.

"Told you that you'd like it," she says with a shrug, watching him contentedly until her brows furrow slightly.

"But what about you?" she asks.

"Huh?" Hiccup asks, and the boy is instantly annoyed by his own completely inarticulate answer.

"Hiccup, I've been sitting here for a while, telling you all the little details about how I fell in love with you," she explains, lifting an eyebrow at him. "I think you owe me the same…"

Hiccup blinks at her words, hesitating, then grinning from ear to ear at her. "You're joking," he says with an astounded voice.

Astrid frowns, looking at him indigantly. "It's only fair," she protests. To her further irritation, he only laughs. "Hiccup!" she barks, ready to start beating him up again.

"Astrid," he says incredulously, still chuckling while staring into her eyes, "I've been in love with you for as long as I can remember! Ever since I started thinking about girls that way," he says sincerely, grinning as he watches her expression change to shock, her anger instantly evaporating.

"Oh…." she says, suddenly blushing deeply as his words sink in.

"You mean to tell me you never noticed?" he asks incredulously, grinning at her still.

She hesitates, then answers, "I-Uhm, I…no…I…I didn't…" She looks down as she suddenly feels very chagrined.

Hiccup sighs with a nod, suddenly feeling embarrassed. He looks down, picking at his food. "It's okay, I kinda thought so," he says, unintentionally twisting the knife of the guilt she felt. She looks at him and opens her mouth to say something, an apology maybe, but then he continues. "I can't explain it like you did," he says, almost mumbling. "I just…there was this one day, a few years ago," he starts to tell her, then hesitates. Astrid watches him intently, quietly waiting for him to continue.
"I saw you walking into the village square…and…something happened inside of me. My heart started to pound like a hammer, my palms got sweaty, my stomach felt like it was filled with butterflies," he tells her, blushing all the more. "I realized I'd never seen anyone so beautiful." Breathlessly she watches him in awe, her eyes wide as he opens up to her. He hesitates, grinning slightly. "You saw me and smiled a little, giving me a quick wave."

He chuckles, "I knew you didn't mean anything by it, you were just being friendly, but I couldn't stop thinking about you after that." Clearing his throat, he glances up at her bashfully, before quickly looking back down and continuing, "I don't know what happened, but ever since then I've just been completely in love with you. The more I saw you, the more I heard your voice, the more I learned about you…" He sighs, shaking his head. "Even though you never looked twice at me, and I knew I had no chance in Hel with you, I…" Astrid reaches out, taking his hand in hers. He looks up in surprise, meeting her gaze.

"I love you, Hiccup," she says plainly, squeezing his hand as she looks intently into his eyes. He closes his eyes and shivers, gripping her hand firmly.

"I will never get tired of hearing you say that," he says in a breathless whisper.

Astrid smiles sweetly, just a little annoyed that she finds herself again on the verge of tears. She never cried, she was way too tough for that, yet this boy has brought her to the brink and beyond more times today than she cares to count.

"Good," she answers him as she leans in close, brushing her lips teasingly against his. He whimpers, causing her to smile. "Because I will never get tired of telling you that," she breathes against him before kissing him soundly. Hiccup squeezes her hand tightly then wraps his arms about her, holding her tightly to him. Astrid likewise embraces him, moaning softly against his lips.

They kiss lovingly, losing themselves to each other yet again, happy beyond words.

Stoic walks off from the forge after his conversation with Gobber, frowning as he thinks about his chat with Astrid's father. He gives a heavy sigh as he starts to make his way towards the Great Hall, figuring some food and drink would do him well right about now.

"Stoic!"

The great man turns at the sound of Vali Jorgenson's voice, smiling tightly at the sight of his friend and ally.

"Hail, Vali!" he replies as the two grasp each other's forearm in greeting. "How d'ye fare t'day?"

"Well enough, I suppose," he answers with a furrowed brow. "I just had a very interesting talk with Thorsten about Astrid…"

"Oh?" Stoic lifts an eyebrow in concern. He frowns as he listens to Vali's tale.

Just when the chief thought things couldn't get any worse for the two lovestruck teens.

Astrid and Hiccup part, the two of them silently smiling as they go back to their food.

After a few minutes, Hiccup looks at Astrid with a curious eye. "So, how's Stormfly been as your dragon?" he asks her inquisitively.
"What do you mean?" she replies, furrowing her brow as she finishes a bite and starts on the next.

"Well, she was used to train new recruits like ourselves for a while," he answers as he picks at his bread. "I've been wondering how that's affected her as your pet."

Astrid nods in understanding, shrugging. "She's been fine," the girl comments. "Very kind and attentive, always ready to go for a flight together. She greets me every morning when I wake up, and likes to get scratched behind her jaw as much as I'll do it for her." Hiccup nods as he listens to her. "We often enjoy our meals together, and she's very well behaved."

"Except for when she chews on your saddle," Hiccup observes. Astrid looks at him with a smirk. The boy's brow furrows as he considers something. "I wonder if it's chaffing her," he says, looking over at the cave entrance where Stormfly is curled up along side of Toothless. Both dragons appear to be sleeping. "Maybe I should check it's fitting, there could be room for some adjustments," Hiccup adds thoughtfully.

Astrid giggles, drawing Hiccup's gaze back to her. "I don't think so," she tells him.

"Why not?" Hiccup asks as he takes another bite of bread.

She says coyly, "I already told you, I was teasing her with the straps before she chewed them off."

Hiccup furrows his brow. "Oh yeah," he says, having forgotten about that. There's something about the way Astrid's looking at him that makes him think there's more to the story. "Why were you doing that, anyway?" he asks. "We sell dragon toys at the shop now, it would have been easy to get you something that she could have torn to shreds and it wouldn't have caused a problem."

Astrid smiles all the more, watching Hiccup with an adoring gaze now. "I know," she says simply. Rubbing the back of his neck, he looks even more confused and again asks, "Then... why the saddle?" She says nothing as he continues, his gaze falling away as he thinks it through, "I mean, you had to know she'd damage it when you started teasing her with it, then you'd have to come to me to get it fixed, since Gobber can't do saddle repair yet..."

His voice falls silent as suddenly everything drops into place. He blinks a couple of times as he suddenly feels like an idiot for not seeing it in the first place. Lifting his gaze back to her, he sees her watching him with an amused gaze.

"You wanted her to ruin your saddle, so you had an excuse to come see me..." he states with a touch of wonder in his voice.

She nods, smiling from ear to ear as he puts it all together. "It almost didn't work, though," she admits. "My father was about to use it as an excuse to get rid of Stormfly, but my mother was able to talk him down from that." Hiccup watches her with a very interested gaze. "She's gotten pretty good at manipulating him, over the years."

With a playful voice, Hiccup asks, "So have you been taking notes? Do you plan to have me wrapped around your little finger?"

The girl laughs, watching him with sparkling eyes. "I think I already do," she tells him. He opens his mouth to protest, but then shrugs.

"Yeah, you probably do," he says with a sheepish grin. "I think that's just what happens when a man loves a woman, though," he says. "The way my dad talks about my mom, I'm sure they were the same way together."
Astrid giggles, "it's hard to imagine Stoic like that."

Hiccup chuckles, nodding. "Yeah, I think the only one that could manage my Dad was my Mom," he says with a smile.

As he eats more of his bread, Astrid's expression darkens. "Hiccup," she hesitates, "what if your Dad doesn't approve of us?"

The boy shakes his head, "My Dad likes the idea of us together, we've talked about it."

She smiles faintly, then her smile disappears and she asks, "does he know that my Dad's forbidden me to see you?"

Hiccup hesitates, furrowing his brow. "I don't know," he answers, frowning a little. Astrid's expression falls as worry overtakes her. "Hey," he tells her, covering her hand with his. "It'll be fine. I'm sure my Dad will support us being together, in spite of your Father." Astrid sighs, clearly unconvinced. She looks down at her food as she picks at it.

Hiccup frowns slightly. He puts his hand under her chin and lifts her gaze back to his. "Astrid," he says intently, taking her hand in his. "No matter what happens, we're going to be together." His voice is firm, resolute. She watches him intently with a worried gaze. "I'm ready to run away with you, forever, if it comes to that."

She swallows heavily at his words, looking deeply into his eyes. "You'd…you'd do that for me?" she asks quietly, "You'd give up everything you have, just to be with me?" Hiccup nods solemnly as he stares back into her gaze.

"I was ready to run off because they wanted me to kill a dragon at the end of Dragon Training," he explains, to which she lifts her eyebrows in surprise. "I'm certainly willing to do the same to be with the girl of my dreams." She smiles, blushing at the way he describes her as he adds, "I'm willing to do that, and more." Astrid draws in a deep breath at his words, watching him with amazement.

"It's you and me," he tells her, staring deeply into her eyes. "No matter what." She smiles all the more, moving her hand in his to entwine their fingers together as he adds solemnly, "I swear it to you by all the Gods." She swallows heavily, staring at him happily as she squeezes his hand in hers.

He hesitates, looking down at their joined hands, then adds nervously, "maybe…maybe my Dad can convince your Dad to…sign a marriage contract."

Hiccup nervously glances up at her to find that she's staring at him with wide eyes.

"You…want to get married?" she asks breathlessly, her voice faltering.

Hiccup clears his throat, suddenly regretting his words. "Well, I, uhm…yeah," he answers as he blushes, terrified that he's made a huge mistake. "I…I mean, if you don't…"

Astrid quickly leans in to kiss him, passionately pressing her lips to his as she wraps her arms about his neck. A wave of relief washes over the boy as he embraces her and kisses back lovingly, a ragged sigh escaping him.

"I want to marry you, Hiccup," she whispers against his lips, kissing him deeply again before she pulls back to look into his gaze, staring intently at him as she caresses his cheek. "I want to spend my life with you, no matter what." He smiles at her with a goofy looking grin, looking deeply into her eyes such a complete aura of happiness that Astrid can't help but giggle, watching him with an adoring gaze. She kisses him again, just because she can, then after a while pulls away and sighs
happily. Once more she takes his hand in hers and rubs the back of it with her thumb as she looks at him.

"So... do you... do you think he can?" she finally asks, a trace of hope in her voice.

Hiccup blinks a few times, asking, "who can what?"

The girl rolls her eyes as he looks on while still apparently dazed from her accepting his awkward proposal. She sighs. Boys could be so dramatic. "Your Father... our marriage contract... convincing my Dad..."

Hiccup blinks a few more times. "Oh... right." He clears his throat, looking somewhat chagrined as she watches him with an amused eye. "If anyone can, he can," Hiccup affirms, nodding. "I'll talk with him tonight," he says.

Astrid smiles, though she still isn't sure she shares Hiccup's confidence. She knows better than anyone how stubborn and pig headed her father usually is. Still, Hiccup's father is the Chief. He had bested her father before, there's no reason to believe he couldn't do it again.

Even if he couldn't, they would find a way to be together. Hiccup had just sworn to her that he would give up everything to be with her. He had even proposed to her. That amazed her, and left her absolutely breathless and giddy that he loved her so completely. Her mind was still reeling at the events of the day. When she had woken up, she had been terrified she would lose the boy because, like an idiot, she had for so long obeyed her father's stupid orders to stay away from him. Now, by some miraculous twist of fortune, she and Hiccup confessed their mutual love, shared their love in intimate and scandalous ways, and had promised themselves to each other, forever.

She couldn't be happier.

At the same time, she curses herself for not having told Hiccup how she felt from the beginning, for not explaining everything right away. Still, she tries to put those feelings aside.

It doesn't matter how they got here. All that matters now is what lies ahead.

Looking at the boy in front of her who so completely stole her heart, she knows she can face whatever may come, if it's with him. They'll make it work, together.

Somehow.

Astrid squeezes his hand once more, smiling at him as he squeezes back. She then works on finishing her meal. For his part, Hiccup also has a better appetite, eating his piece of bread and even fishing around in the bag to find another turkey leg, which he starts eating.

The two eat in silence for a while, until Astrid asks, "So, you were planning on leaving, after you beat me at Dragon Training?" Something in her tone of voice when she says the last part makes him look at her with a twinge of fear. She lifts an eyebrow at him as she picks at the bone of her turkey leg.

"Uhhm, yeah," he answers after a few moments of silence. "That's what I was getting ready to do when you followed me to find where Toothless was, actually," he answers.

She watches him thoughtfully. "So if I hadn't shown up, you would have just run away?" she asks.

He nods, almost feeling a little guilty now. "I wasn't going to kill a dragon, Astrid," he says resolutely.
She nods, quickly answering, "I know. I'm glad for that," she says. "If you would have, then none of this would have happened. I might not have fallen in love with you," she adds thoughtfully. He nods in understanding.

After a few moments, Hiccup's brow furrows. "So, about that whole, 'beating you at Dragon Training', thing," Hiccup begins as he thinks about how she's mentioned it several times today. He hesitates, then asks nervously, "You're not, like...still mad about that, or anything...are you?" His words hang in the air as she studiously picks at her bone. Astrid then glances up at him from behind her bangs.

"Hiccup, do you honestly think I'd hold a grudge?" she asks, far too sweetly as she grins at him.

"Uhm..." he hesitates, suddenly feeling like he's sailing in very dangerous waters here. "Well, you know I...I wasn't trying to beat you," he answers anxiously, avoiding her question.

"I know," she says, looking back at her food. He breathes a sigh of relief and looks back down at his piece of bread. She waits a moment and then grins, adding with a dangerous tone, "yet you did it so easily..."

Hiccup looks up at her with a fresh bout anxiety, meeting her gaze with wide eyes as she looks back up at him with a glint in hers. He clears his throat as he watches her for a moment.

"Sooo," he starts nervously, "let's just say - hypothetically - that you do hold grudges." He quickly holds up his hands quickly, "not that I'm saying you do, but if you did..." he hesitates as she lifts an eyebrow. "What might handling of said grudge entail?" he asks nervously.

"Oh...I don't know," she shrugs before she looks to the mouth of the cave and whistles loudly, carelessly tossing her turkey leg out towards the dragons. Stormfly's head pops up at the sound and she quickly jumps up to grab the bone in mid air, crunching it noisily in her powerful jaws while Hiccup and Toothless look on in wide-eyed surprise.

The boy glances nervously back at Astrid, who smiles at him devilishly. She then looks in her bag and pulls out a strip of dried venison. "I hadn't really given it much thought," she says with a bored tone. Hiccup smiles at her anxiously as she smiles too sweetly at him, her eyes gleaming with mischief.

"Uh...oookay," he says, feeling more worried than ever. He pauses, thinking, then asks, "But, if you were the kind of person to hold a grudge, you wouldn't do that to the man you just promised to marry, would you?" To his irritation, Hiccup's voice cracks as he speaks. Clearing his throat, he adds, "you know, the man you love, who you'll be spending the rest of your life with?"

The girl smiles at him from ear to ear, but in a way that sends a chill down his spine. Her eyes glint mischievously as she tries to keep from giggling.

Tormenting him is just entirely too fun.

"Why, Hiccup," she says all too sweetly, "that just means I have the rest of our lives to carry a grudge..."
Hiccup swallows nervously at Astrid's proclamation that their union will give her the rest of their lives to take her revenge for his besting her at Dragon Training, and who knows what else. Astrid only grins all the more, watching him with a devilish look in her eyes.

After thinking about it for a minute, the boy shrugs, "Yeah, I guess I can live with that," he answers, smirking back at her.

Astrid's eyes light up at his answer, her smile lilting into an adoring grin. "Well, you'd better," she tells him, looking back at the food in her hands. "Because you don't have a choice in the matter anymore. You're stuck with me," she explains to him, glancing back up at him from behind her bangs.

Hiccup hesitates in answering and furrows his brow, as if he were pondering her answer, when in fact he's happily jumping up and down with excitement on the inside. "Well, if I have to be," he says with a pretend sigh, looking into Astrid's sparkling eyes with a barely suppressed grin. She's likewise having difficulty keeping a straight face, especially when he adds, "but you should watch out. I might make a break for it," he tells her with a wry grin. "You won't be able to keep all this," he adds, gesturing to himself, "raw viking power contained!"

She snorts in derision to hide her giggle, shaking her head. "I think we both already know you can't outrun me," she says, crossing her arms.

"Well, that just means I need to be sneaky about it," he replies. "All I need to do is make it to Toothless, and you'll never be able to catch me," he explains with a grin, watching her smirk at his words.

Shaking her head with a chuckle, Astrid answers, "We'll see about that," she says with a narrowed gaze, "I bet I can outfly you on Stormfly…" Hiccup lifts an eyebrow as she continues, "but it doesn't really matter, because you'd never make it to your dragon. Sorry to tell you Hiccup, but you're not at all stealthy."

He frowns slightly, causing her to smirk all the more. "I can be plenty stealthy," he protests indignantly.

Astrid snickers, thinking he's adorable when he pouts. "Oh? Remember how easily I followed you to the secret cove where you were hiding Toothless?" she points out with a triumphant look. Hiccup scowls all the more. "You didn't even know I was behind you until I hopped up on that boulder and started sharpening my axe!" she reminds him with a glint in her eyes.

Hiccup's gaze darkens all the more as she adds, "Face it, stealth is my thing, not yours."

He glares at her for a moment, then shrugs, not ready to be bested. "Well, I'll just have to sneak away when you're not looking," he says with a confident grin. "You can't watch me all the time," he says resolutely.

Astrid smiles. "That's true," she answers. "But it's also easily fixed. I'll just chain you to the bed," she rebuts with a grin. "It even has a side bonus, you'll be right where I need you to be, whenever I'm in the mood," she says with a scandalous look, stifling a giggle as Hiccup's eyebrows lift high up on his forehead, his eyes growing wide.

"Is the beautiful Astrid Hofferson sitting here and telling me that she's going to chain me to her bed
to make me her sex slave for life?" he asks rhetorically as Astrid watches him with gleaming eyes. "Somebody pinch me, because I'm either dreaming, or I've died and gone to Valhalla…"

The girl can't contain her laughter any more, and she bursts out into a fit of giggles as Hiccup smiles from ear to ear, watching her with an adoring gaze. She leans in and presses her lips to his, kissing him briefly, but lovingly. Hiccup smiles against her lips, sighing happily as she pulls back to look into his eyes. "I really have died and gone to Valhalla," he says dreamily, causing her to blush in spite of herself.

"But, you know," he says with a dastardly grin, "I'll bet there's one thing I can do to escape your dastardly clutches."

Astrid furrows her brow, genuinely intrigued with his sudden change of demeanor. "What's that?" she asks, a trace of wariness creeping into her voice.

"A Tiny Terror told me that you're ticklish," he says with a smirk as her eyes fly wide open in shock.

Before she can move, Hiccup tackles her and starts to dig his fingers into her ribs, rubbing furiously. Astrid shrieks in alarm, but her voice quickly dissolves into an endless stream of giggles as the boy tickles her relentlessly. Never one to surrender, she reaches around as best she can to try the same against his ribs, and is gratified by the howl of laughter that he involuntarily rewards her with.

The teens fall off of the rock into the sand as they wrestle for the better position, rolling around as they tickle each other relentlessly, the cavern echoing with their screams and laughter.

The two dragons near the entrance tense at first in alarm when their companions seem to attack each other, both creatures confused and unsure what to do. As the cave fills with the sounds of the teens' laughter, the two reptiles then relax and settle in with a bored look as the couple wrestles fiercely.

Humans could be so strange.

Gobber pounds mercilessly on the shapeless metal he holds in his claw, frowning as he considers what Stoic told him about the meeting with the girl's father. The situation did not bode well, and he worried for the young couple.

"Gobber! Where's Hiccup?" The smith winces at the sound of Snoutlout's voice. He found the boy to be nothing if not obnoxious.

"He's not here," Gobber answered without looking up.

"Well, where is he?" The irritating teen asked with a gratingly loud voice.

"I don't know," the smith lied. He wasn't about to compromise his apprentice. "Why don't you go ask him?"

"Well maybe I will!" The boy rebutted, incensed by the smith's tone.

"You can't ask him, moron," Gobber heard Tuffnut rebuke the other boy. "You don't know where he is!"

"I know that!" The boy snaps back. "What I meant was, I'll ask him where he is, once we find him!"

The smith sighs as the boys linger while they bicker at his shop window. Turning to look at them, he finds Snoutlout standing in the center, flanked by Fishlegs and Tuffnut. Ruffnut stands beside her
brother with her typically bored expression.

"Well, why don't we ask Astrid where he is?" Fishlegs suggests in his usually helpful manner.

"She's not going to know, idiot," Tuffnut barks back. "She hasn't gone near him for weeks."

"Yeah," Snoutlout starts to say with a very arrogant tone, "she probably realized what she was missing by not choosing me." He flexes one of his biceps, patting the large muscle appreciatively. "It's probably just matter of days until she comes to beg me for a date." He nods smugly at his own words.

"Yeah right," Ruffnut chuckles. "Like Astrid would want anything to do with you."

"Oh yeah?" The burly teen barks back, "how would you know?" He asks angrily.

"Cuz she told me, moron," he girl answers simply. "She's still got the hots for Hiccup," she tells him as if it were the most obvious answer in the world.

"No way!" Tuffnut exclaims in utter shock.

"Yeah," the girl shrugs. "Her Dad told her to keep away from him, so that's what she's been doing." Ruffnut chuckles, "that won't last, though, she's got her panties totally soaked for him."

Gobber doesn't like the way his conversation was going, for more reasons than one. At the worst, the four teens are about to put two and two together, which would leave Hiccup and Astrid in dire straights.

Besides which, the middle aged smith really doesn't need to hear this level of teen gossip, especially about the boy he very fondly sees as a nephew and the girl that boy was so desperately in love with.

"Why is it you're looking for Hiccup?" The smith wearily asks just as Fishlegs was about to say something, making sure he's loud enough to interrupt their conversation. Of the four of them, that boy is most likely to put it all together, but even then, maybe not. While smart, the large teen is fairly clueless when it comes to people.

"Maybe I can help you with whatever it is you need," Gobber adds, though it's really the last thing he wants to do. Hiccup is going to owe him big for covering his ass like his.

"We need him to settle an argument for us," Tuffnut answers.

"And what, precisely, are you arguing about that Hiccup can solve?" Gobber asks, though he fears he's going to regret it.

"It's about dragons," Snoutlout explains in a tone that suggests he thinks that would disqualify Gobber from filling in for Hiccup.

"Well, as it happens, I know a lot about dragons," Gobber says irritably.

Fishlegs interjects, "Yeah, but, no offense, you only know about what we used to think we knew about dragons, not about what we now know we really know." Everyone pauses to look at him with furrowed brows. "Ya know?" he asks weakly.

Gobber sighs heavily, watching the four teens with growing impatience. "Well, why don't you try me, and if I don't know the answer, I'll be sure to ask Hiccup for you next chance I get," he says with a thin veneer of friendliness that barely conceals his irritation.
"Okay," Tuffnut answers. "So here's the thing, Snoutlout is convinced that Hookfang is smarter than Barf and Blech, but that's like, not possible."

Ruffnut interrupts, adding, "Yeah, cuz our Ziffleback has like, two heads, so that would make him twice as smart as any other dragon, right?"

"No way!" Snoutlout interjects brashly. "Hookfang is a Monstrous Nightmare! Those were always some of the toughest dragons to go against, before…you know…"

Tuffnutt snaps back, "Yeah, but that was because they set themselves on fire! How smart can they be to do that?" he asks indignantly.

Fishlegs interjects, "Well, given they're immune to fire, it's actually a pretty good tactic."

"There, see?" Snoutlout answers, crossing his arms triumphantly. "That settles it!"

"Like Hel it does!" Ruffnut explodes as she and her twin seeth at the other two.

Gobber groans wearily, rubbing his hand across his face as the four teens start arguing vehemently, shouting over one another. The smith starts to question his decision to get in the middle of this. Hiccup had better appreciate the favor he was doing for the boy, he thinks to himself with a sigh as he tries to figure out how best to remove the four bickering teens from his shop.

At the very least, he hopes Hiccup and Astrid are enjoying themselves, given the trouble he and Stoic were going through on their behalf.

Astrid roughly rolls Hiccup over in the sand onto his back, straddling him with a snarl, grabbing his wrists fiercely and pinning his arms above his head. Her breath comes in heavy gulps as she tries to regain her composure, something more easily said than done after one's new boyfriend goes on a very successful full frontal tickle assault. She's not sure how he managed to get the better of her during some of their scuffle since she knows she's stronger than him.

"That…was mean," she says between heavy breaths, with a hard edge to her voice as she stares down at Hiccup who barks out an indignant laugh.

"This from the girl who let me think she was walking out on me earlier?" he asks sardonically between his own gasps for breath. "Oh, and let's not forget how you've beat me up on several occasions." Astrid smirks at him as he adds, "I think on the scale of meaness, my tickling you ranks pretty low."

"Maybe," she considers with a playful look, clearly enjoying her position of dominance.

"Besides, you got me back pretty good," he says. "I was having trouble breathing there, just now."

She snorts indignantely. "Well, just consider that payback for you reaching up my skirt to tickle my inner thighs." Her cheeks color a shade of red at the memory of how it felt when he touched her there. Of course, she had loved every second of it, but she wasn't about to admit that.

"Well, it's, uhm…" he hesitates. "It's not like I haven't touched you there before," Hiccup points out sheepishly, blushing as he struggles to keep eye contact.

Astrid swallows, blushing and falling quiet at the memory that his words invoke. She stares deeply into the boy's eyes as he looks back at her, his face telling of the same eager anxiety that she suddenly feels in the pit of her stomach. She inhales deeply, her cheeks flushing all the more as she
feels him harden against her crotch. The boy blushes a deeper red as he sees her expression change with his reaction to her nearness. The two stare at each other silently, both still breathing a little heavily, their attempts to calm down failing miserably with this new turn of events.

The girl feels herself warm inside at the feel of his erection pressing against her sex. She still tingles at the memory of what he did to her, earlier today. As they stare at each other, she bites her lip and starts to slowly rock her hips against his, grinding against him. A smile blooms upon her face as she watches his face contort with pleasure, then she gasps in surprise as he starts to grind back against her, pushing up hard enough to lift her slightly.

Hiccup groans as he presses up against her, watching intently with a smile as he sees the pleased look on her face as she reacts. His breath starts to come more quickly as his mind reels at the prospect of being naughty with Astrid for a second time today. The girl arches her back as she closes her eyes, and he can't help but stare at the rise of her breasts. The two settle into a slow, steady rhythm, both of them moaning now and again.

She leans down to press her lips to his, keeping his hands pinned above his head. There's something intoxicating about being in control like this and it combines deliciously with the feel of Hiccup pressing against her crotch to make her positively light-headed.

His lips greet hers eagerly and he immediately deepens the kiss. They both moan, rubbing their hips together more urgently with every movement. Hiccup tries to free his hands from hers, but she resists, continuing to keep him pinned beneath her. The boy grunts into her mouth with frustration as she smirks against his lips, her tongue entwining playfully with his. She asserts her advantage, continuing to roll her hips against his, grinding herself against his extremely rigid length.

The cave echoes with their heavy breathing and moans as they move together, both increasingly frustrated with the clothes that keep them separated. Astrid ponders her dilemma - she can't take off his clothes or hers without freeing his wrists, but she's having a wonderful time keeping him pinned beneath her.

Hiccup settles the matter for her, suddenly rolling her over onto her back. She yelps in surprise as she unwillingly releases him. His hands slide down her arms as she tries to figure out how he did that. He presses himself against her crotch with renewed vigor. Astrid moans throatily into his mouth as her heart surges, and she wraps her legs around his waist, pulling her tightly against him as she moves with his rhythm.

His hands continue to snake down her shoulders and downwards. The girl sucks in her breath as he dares to slide his palms over the curves of her breasts, pressing firmly and squeezing as he lingers there. Hiccup's heart hammers in his chest as he takes a hold of her sweet curves, eagerly cupping her soft mounds in his hands. He feels her nipples harden beneath her top, his thumbs instinctively starting to rub them. The girl squeals against his lips, her whole body stiffening as his touch.

Not to be outdone, Astrid moves her hands down his body until she touches his breaches. Before he can react, she's undone the string that holds them in place. He sucks in his breath within the kiss as he feels her fingers slide inside his clothes, her touch hot against his skin. Breaking the kiss, he lifts his head to look at her as she reaches down further and wraps her fingers around his hard shaft. He shivers as her hand grips him firmly. She stares back into his eyes with a half-lidded, lusty gaze, her heart racing as she strokes his length.

Hiccup groans as she caresses him, moving his hand down to cup her crotch. The girl moans at his touch, suddenly very frustrated by the clothing that still separates his touch from her bare flesh. Releasing him, she quickly moves to remedy the matter, blushing profusely yet smiling widely as she feels his hands alongside hers, gripping her pants and skirt, pulling them down just as eagerly. She
swallows heavily as she bares herself to him yet again, her heart racing as she feels his hands touch her bare thighs, slowly sliding up towards her body.

Her breathing already ragged, she quickly reclaims his stiff penis, wrapping her fingers about his length eagerly, staring up into his eyes as she starts to stroke him at just the time she feels his fingers part her drenched folds. Hiccup's head is swimming as he again explores her silky, hot flesh, marvelling out how wet she is. He sucks in his breath heavily as he feels her grip and stroke his erection, swallowing as she pumps his length with eager strokes. The boy lays down next to her, wrapping his other arm about her body as he continues to play with her tender folds.

Astrid braces herself as she feels him caress her throbbing flesh, watching him intently as he finds her opening, his fingers tracing around its outside. She whimpers when he slides a finger inside of her, and she squeezes him tightly as her whole body shivers. Hiccup groans heavily at the feel of her hand gripping him tightly as she strokes him, a sensation that blends deliciously with the tightness of her velvet flesh wrapped about his finger. He starts to stroke in and out of her, smiling as Astrid shivers against him, her breath becoming ragged. She stares at him with a heated gaze as she moves her hand faster along his length, squeezing tightly.

The boy slips another finger inside of Astrid and she cries out, struggling to keep her eyes open. Hiccup matches the rhythm of her hand upon his shaft, rockings his fingers in and out of her as he watches her face contort with pleasure. He can feel her body moving against his as they stroke each other, her hot breath spilling over his neck and face as he leans in close, but not enough to kiss. She squeezes him again and he shivers as she keeps up the same pace, both of them panting together as he continues to plunge his fingers deep inside of her. Her thumb finds the raised part of her flesh and starts rubbing gently.

Astrid feels her heart hammering in her chest as his thumb rubs that sweetest of spots, her slim body shivering against his as she grips his length, pumping for all she's worth. His brown eyes seem to consume her as he stares at her, his face a portrait of the same passion that's laced with anxiety that she feels in her heart. She shivers as he plunges his fingers deep inside while fondling her with his thumb, a heat building up in her core as she struggles to keep her concentration enough to stroke his length, half smiling in her passion at the look on his face as she does.

Hiccup's breathing comes in heavy gulps as he feels her drawing him to his peak again, and he rubs his fingers inside of her with renewed vigor. Astrid cries out as he does, closing her eyes briefly as the feelings wash over her and she presses her body closer to his. He sucks in his breath as he keeps rubbing with his thumb, watching her as she forces herself to look up at him again, panting as she teeters on the edge.

The sight of her impassioned gaze pushes him over, his penis starting to spasm in her hand as she strokes him hard and fast. "Astrid!" he calls out urgently as she feels his length throbbing in her hand. She swallows heavily, staring at his face as the pleasure overtakes him, then gasps heavily as the boy rubs his thumb faster over her raised mound while his fingers continue to plunge hard and fast into her.

The feel of his fingers inside of her, his warm body pressed against hers, the feel of his penis jerking in her hand as she strokes him and the sight of his pleasured face are all too much. She cries out his name, her body flushing with heat as she rocks her hips against his hand, screaming at the top of her lungs as her drenched and hot flesh spasms around his fingers.

Hiccup cries out hoarsely along with her as he feels her contract around his fingers, all the while his penis spasms in her iron-like grip whileshe strokes him furiously. He leans in and presses his lips to hers as she screams again and again, her body shaking against his like a leaf in a storm. She kisses
him passionately as she bucks her hips against his hand, gripping his spasming erection all the more tightly. He tightens his arm about her as they orgasm together, each of them screaming, their bodies shaking against one another.

They both stop at about the same time, pressing their bodies against each other as they tremble, gasping for breath. Their kisses slow but they linger, becoming more tender as they both breathe raggedly against one another. Astrid squeezes him in her hand, earning a shuddering gasp from the boy. She smiles against his lips, but then sucks in her breath with a squeak as he wriggles his fingers inside of her. He chuckles against her lips as she pouts within the kiss, sighing but not ready to separate just yet.

After a while, he pulls away to look into her eyes. "I thought we weren’t going to have an audience the next time we did this," he teases her with a wry grin. She blushes, smirking back at him. "I couldn’t wait that long," she confesses. Hiccup sighs happily as he leans in to press his lips against hers again, kissing deeply as she greets him eagerly. They lie in each other's arms, moaning softly as their tongues entwine, warming each other with their flushed bodies.

Astrid sighs happily as she savors the moment, but then she glances past him to the opening of the cave, catching a glimpse of the lowering sun over the waters. It occurs to her that they'll have to go home very soon. The day is drawing to a close, and they still have to fly back to Berk.

But she doesn't want this to end.

Hiccup's arm tightens about her, pressing her body against his as he comes to the same realization, sensing their time in this magical place to be slipping away. He kisses her more furiously now, his need for her driving him to again claim her lips for his own. Astrid whimpers into the kiss, meeting his passion, wrapping her free arm tightly about his neck as their tongues wrestle fiercely.

Eventually her hand slips away from his now soft penis as his hand pulls away from her sex. They part just enough to look into each other's eyes, both feeling the heavy weight of their upcoming departure.

"I don't want to go," she whispers, stroking his face with her hand.

"Me neither," he answers her, kissing her deeply again. She presses her lips firmly against his, moaning needily into his mouth as he hugs her to him. Her hand slides around behind his head to hold him to her. They passionately and desperately kiss each other, as if they could stop time with a kiss.

They again part, burying their faces into each other's necks. "Just remember, Astrid," he says, "I'm yours, no matter what. We'll just strike out on our own, if we have to…"

She nods firmly at his words, squeezing him tightly. "Promise?" she asks again, her voice weak. It's still amazing to her that he has such a hold on her, but it's as real as anything in this world, and she wouldn't have it any other way.

"I promise," he whispers in her ear solemnly, kissing her there.

"I promise too," she answers, kissing his neck sweetly.

They hold each other tightly for a while longer, keeping each other as close as they can.

Finally, reluctantly, they slowly start to part, their hearts heavy as they try not to think about what comes next.
Astrid and Hiccup reluctantly pull out of each other's arms, sitting up with a mind to get ready to leave, as they know they must. They each start to sullenly pull their clothes back on, when Astrid notices something.

"Shit!" she says with panic in her voice, striking Hiccup with fear.

"What's wrong?!!" he asks hastily as he looks up at her.

She looks at him with a terrified, angry expression as he instantly sees what the problem is. Her shirt is covered with stains, courtesy of himself. When she looks at him, her expression is becomes even more mortified. Glancing down, he realizes that when they embraced, he picked up some of the fluids on his own shirt.

Hiccup blushes deeply from his ears to his collar as he looks back into her eyes. "Oh Gods, Astrid, I am so sorry," he pleads, suddenly very afraid of her reaction.

"How the Hel am I going to hide this from my parents?!" she asks in a terrified voice.

Hiccup's mind races furiously. Washing is out of the question, it would never dry in time, even if they used a fire. If she were to turn her shirt inside out or backwards, it'd be obvious that something wasn't right. He looks down at his own shirt. It's not nearly as messy, baring only a couple of spots, and his vest is clean.

His vest.

"Here," Hiccup says, taking off his fur vest and shifting towards her so he can help her put it on.

She recoils, looking at him like he's insane. "Hiccup, we're trying to keep you and me a secret!" she shouts, her temper roiling as she panics. "I can't just stroll into my father's house while wearing your vest and pretend nothing happened!"

"Look, this will cover you up until you have a chance to change your shirt," he says. "You've got another, right?" he asks, suddenly worried about that.

Astrid sighs in frustration. "Yes, I've got one or two more that I can change into, but did you hear what I said?" she asks in an furious voice.

He blushes as he feels the guilt for causing this situation. "Well, I think that ship has kinda sailed, Astrid," he says meekly, blushing all the more as she glares angrily at him. "At least if you walk in wearing my vest, then all you have to explain is why you were with me, and why you have my vest." He swallows heavily under her seething glare.

"Would you rather try and explain those stains on your shirt?" he asks.

The girl stares at him angrily, then violently yanks the vest out of his hand. Fuming, she casts her eyes down at her shirt as she puts on the garment and starts to lace the front together, refusing to look at him.

Hiccup sighs heavily, embarassed and ashamed beyond all reason as he watches Astrid. He finishes doing up his own pants and starts to stand up, stumbling again as he feels the sand that's caught in his prosthetic, the grains once more digging into his flesh. His stump has been burning since he tried to
get up the first time, and feels worse now. Idly he wonders if he's bleeding, but decides it's better to wait until he gets home to check it.

Pushing through the agony, he forces himself up, leveraging the large rock they had been sitting on. He's thankful that Astrid is too busy with her own troubles to see how his face contorts with the pain. The last thing she probably wants right now is to be bothered with is his disability.

Astrid refuses to look at him as she hops up and finishes pulling her pants and skirt back up, then stalks back over to the rock. Hiccup watches her for a moment as she passes by him without a glance. With a resigned expression, he sullenly turns to hobble back towards Toothless.

His gut churns as he worries about what she's thinking. His teasing her was one thing, but this? Would she change her mind about him over this?

Astrid grabs her bag, taking the half-eaten food still on the rock and stuffing it forcefully back in the container. She pauses as she looks back over at Hiccup, watching him hobble and struggle through the sand towards Toothless. Wordlessly she watches him, her insides roiling with a mixture of anger and shame over what happened, coupled with fear of what she would now face at home.

As she watches him limp slowly along, her expression softens when she sees him stop for a moment, half crouching to rest his hands on his knees, collecting himself before he trudges onwards. Astrid watches him for a moment more, pensive.

With a heavy sigh, she quickly walks over towards him.

Easily catching up, she puts her arm around him to support him again.

As he feels her arm snake around him, Hiccup looks over to her in shock, swallowing heavily. She glances at him, then quickly looks away while blushing.

"Put your arm over my shoulder," she mutters, "it'll make this easier."

Wordlessly Hiccup complies, his mind racing as she half carries him to Toothless. The dragon stands up and stretches, watching the two with mild interest.

When he can put his weight against his dragon, Hiccup turns to her, "Astrid, I'm so sor-"

"Shut up," she commands him, not able to look at him. He closes his mouth and grits his teeth, his stomach twisting as he fully expects her to break up with him.

The girl keeps looking down at the sand, moving her foot around, watching the grains sift around her boot as she steels herself.

"Hiccup," she starts, then hesitates as the boy readies himself for what she's about to say.

"I'm...I'm sorry," she says in a strained voice, glancing at him but then looking down again.

"Astrid, I..." he starts to protest, about to try and reason with her why they shouldn't end their relationship over what happened, but then he hesitates as his brain catches up with his mouth. "Wait, what?" he asks.

"I said I'm sorry," she repeats with an even more tense voice, forcing herself to glance up at him and not look away. He looks confused beyond words. "I...I shouldn't have gotten mad at you," she admits sheepishly, looking down again, unable to keep looking into those deep brown eyes of his.
"It…wasn't your fault, what…what happened."

Closing her eyes, she hesitates. "If it was anyone's fault, it was mine," she admits, shaking her head ruefully. "I was the one…pulling on the handle…" She glances up at him again, blushing furiously at her own words as she meets his gaze. The boy likewise colors a deep crimson in his cheeks, but smiles sheepishly at her words.

Hesitating, she adds, "I…I was just scared about what I'm going home to, now." The girl sighs in resignation.

Hiccup purses his lips and nervously wraps his arms about her. To his relief, she readily leans into his embrace, sliding her own arms around his waist as she rests her head upon his shoulder. "I'm still terrified, actually," she admits in a voice too small for the warrior girl.

Hiccup sighs as he rubs her back, squeezing her to him. "Astrid, I'm sor-"

"Shut up," she says bitterly again, pulling back to look into his eyes. "I told you, this was my fault."

He grins slightly, "Well, not really. I kinda have more experience in what happens when you, uh…pull on the handle like that," he forces himself to say, and they both again turn a deep scarlet. "I…should have warned you, or…done…something to make sure it didn't, uh…hit you," he says, struggling to keep looking at her as they talk about this.

Astrid too is having difficulty maintaining eye contact, each of them glancing away, but then back again. She refuses to be the one to completely look away. "Well, it's not like…I didn't know what was…coming," she admits sheepishly. "I'd…seen it the last time," she confesses, to which he lifts his brows high upon his forehead. Her cheeks burn as she realizes he hadn't seen her watch him release the first time.

"Besides," she admits, now feeling like she could crawl under a rock from embarrassment, "you were a little…preoccupied when it happened, as I recall…" The girl can't help but smile at the smirk that turns his lips, the two still forcing themselves to look into each other's eyes.

"I think we both were," he says, and she goes red all the way to her ears as he grins at her.

After a moment or two, he adds, "that was pretty fun."

"Can't wait to do it again," she admits with a shy smile, giggling as he looks at her with excited eyes.

He blushes all the more, hesitating before he adds, "Maybe next time…with less clothes?" Her eyes grow wide at his suggestion and he hastily adds, "you know…so we don't make another mess that we can't clean up." She smirks knowingly at him, watching him silently as she ponders the offer.

"Deal," she says. The excited look that comes over his face thrills her to no end.

Hiccup can't believe what just happened. He went again from being terrified that she was going to end things to once more realizing how much she loves him. Unable to resist, he leans in and presses his lips to hers, sighing happily as she kisses him back tenderly, lovingly.

Astrid glides her tongue over his lips, smiling as he opens up for her, greeting her with his own. She coos softly into his mouth as they kiss intimately, both of them holding onto each other for all they're worth.

To Hel with her father. He can rant and rave all he wants, the only thing she needs is right here.
Nothing will stand between her and Hiccup, she decides. It's not even a question anymore.

The two kiss for a while, before finally parting. Astrid looks out the mouth of the cave as the sun nears the horizon. "We need to go," she says with a heavy sigh. While she knows it must be done, every fiber of her being is crying out to just stay here with this amazing boy.

"I know," Hiccup laments. His eyes never leave her as she looks outside. He knows the sun was setting, he doesn't need to look away for that. The way the light hits her face makes it perfectly clear, the shadows that play upon her face only highlight her beauty for him, even as they torment him with the knowledge of the imminent departure.

All he needs right now is to savor every moment with this wonderful girl.

A thought suddenly occurs to him, as their farewell looms large. "How soon can I see you again?" he asks urgently as the worry about what comes next washes over him.

Astrid looks back at him as she suddenly shares in his anxiety. She hesitates, thinking about when she might be able to next sneak away.

"How about tomorrow?" she blurts out. As soon as she says it, she realizes she's not sure how she'll manage it, but it doesn't matter. She will make it happen, even if she has to sneak out.

Hiccup thrills at the prospect of such a quick reunion. "Okay, when? First thing in the morning?" he asks eagerly, smiling happily at her. Astrid rolls her eyes.

"I don't think I can slip away that early, Hiccup," she answers with a slight grin. "I'll probably be facing some sort of punishment when my father finds out that I went to see you today." Her gut churns at the prospect of having to explain wearing his jacket, then twists with fear as she wonders if she can keep the stains hidden from her parents.

The boy nods in understanding, a guilty expression crossing his face. "Yeah, sorry about that," he says, only for her to cover his lips with her fingers.

"Would you stop?" she asks with a sigh, looking him in the eyes. "I knew what I was doing when I came to see you." He lifts an eyebrow at her words, and she blushed. "Okay, so...I didn't know we were going to do...that..." He smirks at her, causing her to blush all the more.

"Twice," he reminds her with a wicked look in her eyes, and suddenly her insides are all quivering again.

She blushes, looking into his eyes as she rubs her fingers over his lips. "And I loved every minute of it," she whispers, while smiling sweetly at him. "Being with you is worth whatever comes, Hiccup..."

He sighs happily, embracing her again. She hugs him tightly, resting her head on his shoulder, her insides twisting at the knowledge they have to go within minutes.

"Okay then, when and where?" he asks, going back to their original topic.

Astrid considers it for a moment. "Tomorrow night, after sunset, at Toothless' cove," she says, after trying to think of the best place for them to have some privacy and elude anyone who might try and follow them. "Just you and me. We should leave our dragons at home," she adds as an afterthought.

"That makes sense," he answers, rubbing his hands over her back. "I can't wait until then," he says with a heavy sigh.
"Me neither," she whispers, leaning in to press her lips against his. He meets her eagerly, kissing passionately and deeply as they embrace tightly, very much in love and very fearful of what will happen when they go back to Berk.

They linger for a long time, longer than they should, until Astrid finally pulls away abruptly. She doesn't dare look at Hiccup. One glimpse into those gorgeous brown eyes of his and she'd be back in his arms again, second guessing her decision to go back home tonight. Tears sting her eyes as he hastily makes her way to Stormfly.

"I love you," she hears Hiccup call out, his voice twinging with desperate need. She looks over at him as she reaches her dragon, her eyes glistening. She can see from here he's also on the verge of tears.

"I love you too, Hiccup," she says sincerely as she stares at him intently, her heart aching. "I'll see you tomorrow night, I promise." He nods resolutely, the both of them then mounting their dragons.

She calls to him, "Follow me until we're a couple of miles out from Berk, then we should split up."

He nods, sighing heavily but adding, "Good idea. I'll circle around to come in from the other side of the island, so it doesn't look like we're coming from the same place.

She nods resolutely, though she crumbles on the inside at the prospect of separating from him, even for just a day. It probably wouldn't be so bad if things were more certain at home, but there was a very real chance that her father would try keep her from seeing him tomorrow night.

She wonders if he would actually lock her up.

"I love you," she suddenly calls out, feeling the same desperation that Hiccup must have just experienced.

"I love you too, Astrid," he says with a heartfelt voice. The look on his face makes her want to jump off the back of her dragon and run to him. Gritting her teeth, she looks away and urges Stormfly out of the cave and up into the sky. Glancing back, she sees the black shadow that carries her lover up behind them.

She swallows heavily as she steers her companion towards Berk, fighting in vain the tears that come anyway.
With a heavy heart, Hiccup follows behind Astrid for the flight home. It might be his imagination, but their journey back seems longer than when they first flew out. As they near the end of their journey, the sun slips below the waves. Thankfully, the moon is waxing and will be full in a few days, so there's enough light for them to see the rest of the way home.

The boy's heart is a tumultuous mix of emotions, swirling about like the storms that sometimes rage their home. On the one hand, he feels deeply saddened at having to part from Astrid, especially given the uncertainty they are flying back to. He feels shame and guilt for making an already difficult situation more problematic, by his…mess that she now wears on her shirt, hidden beneath his vest. Hiccup dreads what he is sending her home to and feels like a failure, that he's only made matters worse.

On the other hand, he is ecstatic beyond all words that his wildest dream have come true.

Astrid loves him. She loves him so completely that she's ready to run away with him, if it comes to that. The entire trip home, he keeps reminding himself of that, even as he becomes more worried about what is to come as they fly closer to Berk.

Hiccup glances out towards the horizon and sees the bonfires burning brightly in the outer markers of Berk that jut out from the tumultuous sea. He's about to call out to Astrid that he's going to head north, when she turns back to wave at him and point in that direction. He waves back and nods, crouching down on Toothless as he urges the dragon on.

"Okay, bud. Let's go home," he says.

The dragon rolls his head with determination at the command, glad to finally push forward to pass the Nadder. The Night Fury had been frustrated the entire trip back, his boy having kept him from racing ahead of the blue dragon and her rider. Now that he has the chance to really stretch his wings, he takes full advantage.
Hiccup holds on tightly as the two quickly gain on Astrid and Stormfly, the girl watching with a growing smile as they approach. The two teens stare into each other's eyes as they get closer.

"I love you!" Astrid calls out once their dragons' wings were almost touching.

"I love you too," he answers, swallowing heavily. "Tomorrow night!" he reminds her.

"I'll be there, I promise!" she says, gripping her saddle tightly as they linger for another moment or two.

Gritting her teeth, Astrid veers away from Hiccup as she tears her gaze away from him, tears again stinging her eyes. The flight back had been a mixture of heartbreak and fear for her, as she dreaded both the time away from her love and the prospect of facing her father. Once Stormfly is on her new course, the girl astride her back glances behind to watch as Hiccup and Toothless finish their turn and quickly disappear from sight, swallowed up into the night sky as they soar away.

The boy likewise looks back as they part, watching the girl he loves for as long as he can before turning forward once more to focus on their final leg home. It takes him a few minutes to fly around the island so that he can make his descent from the northern side of Berk. During the entire trip, he looks about constantly, watching to see if anyone is out flying that might spot him. The skies are clear, which is what he expected. Of the vikings now flying on Berk, few were daring enough to yet venture out at night.

Hiccup guides Toothless down from the skies to his home, the dragon landing in their backyard, as usual. The boy unbuckles and starts to dismount, stiff and sore from the hour or so of riding in the cold, though he pauses with a grin to consider how much better he feels inside than he did last night, when he made a similar landing after a likewise long flight.

He marvels at how much had changed in just one day.

Sighing happily at the memories of the day he just spent with Astrid, the boy finds himself jolted back to reality as he puts his weight on the prosthetic, a dull pain burning in his stump. He sucks in his breath sharply, wincing as he waits for the hurt to subside. He needs to get in and see what the damage is.

First, though, he realizes he needs to feed Toothless. He hobbles over to the back of the house where they keep the wicker baskets that they use to store the dragon's supply of fish. With a grunt, he tugs on the rim and manages to tip it over, spilling the fish over the ground. His father won't be happy that Toothless is eating right outside the door, but there was no way that Hiccup could move the basket with the pain he was feeling in his stump.

Toothless growls happily at the sight of his dinner, jumping forward to help himself to the slimy pile of fish. The boy smiles at the sight, rubbing his dragon's neck. "That's it, bud, you enjoy yourself," he tells the feasting lizard, who completely ignores him as he scarfs down fish after fish.

Sighing, Hiccup turns around and hobblles the short distance to the door, wondering what food might be around for his dinner, but then pauses as he hears voices from the other side. Furrowing his brow, he waits as he listens, trying to make out what they were saying. He can't understand the words, but he quickly recognizes his father's voice, and what sounds like Gobber. A third man is in the room, but Hiccup can't identify him. His heart jumps into his throat as he worries it might be Astrid's father.

Gritting his teeth, Hiccup braces himself for the worst and opens the door.

The warmth and light of the firepit in the center of the room washes over the boy as he steps inside,
the men falling silent and turning to look at him. Hiccup's gaze immediately falls upon Stoic and Gobber, confirming his expectations, then move to the third.

Vali Jorgensen.

What is Snoutlout's father doing here?

"Hey guys," Hiccup greets them with a nervous half smile as the three men look at him darkly. "What's, uh…what's going on?" he asks as he starts to shut the door, though they way they look at him makes him feel like he should leave it open, just in case he needs a quick exit.

"Son," Stoic says sternly, "we need to talk."

Astrid guides her dragon towards Berk, clenching her teeth as she fights back the tears. She feels foolish. It's not like they don't live in the same village, a mere ten minute walk from each others' house.

But then again, her father had forbidden her to see him, and he will likely be angry beyond reason when she walks in while wearing the boy's vest. She swallows bitterly while she guides Stormfly down towards her house, her sadness at leaving Hiccup now eclipsed by both her fear about what's to come and her apprehension as she realizes she has no idea how she'll try and explain the vest.

As the blue dragon lands behind her house, kicking up a strong breeze, Astrid decides she won't deny anything. She doesn't like the idea of lying anyway, even if it's to her unreasonable, miserable father.

The girl hops down from the back of her dragon once they've landed, stroking the creature's neck and quietly telling her what a good girl she's been. The dragon trills appreciatively, bringing a smile to Astrid's lips in spite of what she now faces.

Walking over to the backdoor, Astrid picks up a wicker basket of fish, carrying the heavy load to her dragon, which bobs its head excitedly.

"Are you hungry?" the girl quietly asks the cobalt dragon, which continues to bob its head happily, starting to stomp its feet in anticipation. "Yes you are, yes you are!" Astrid continues to coo at the creature, smiling as she dumps the contents on the ground between them.

The dragon instantly dives in and scoops a fish, swallowing it whole before proceeding to another. The teen standing before the large lizard smiles sublimely as she watches it eat for a moment. Then, with a sigh she trudges back to the house. Setting the basket down from where she picked it up, Astrid then turns to the door.

She hesitates, gritting her teeth at the prospect of facing her father. The closed portal looms large before her, feeling like the door to Hel, instead of her home. Taking a deep breath, Astrid grabs the handle and opens the door firmly, striding in with resolute determination to face whatever may come.

The girl walks into the small house, the light and warmth of the fire washing over her as she crosses the threshold and closes the door behind her. She looks into the room and sees her father and mother sitting opposite each other around the fire. Both of them stare intently into the flames, neither looking up at her. Astrid grits her teeth as she looks at her mother's face and realizes she's been crying.

The teen can guess why. She's seen this before.

Turning her gaze to the man who sired her, she glares at him with hatred. The large, burly man says
nothing, he merely pokes the fire with a long iron rod as he looks into the flames. The girl waits, the tension in the room growing with every passing second.

"You're wearing his vest," he says to her, his voice level and calm.

Immediately Astrid's gut twists anxiously inside, though she fights to keep her anxiety from being visible.

"Yes," she answers simply, hoping now that her decision to not lie was a wise one.

Silence follows. The girl standing by the door grits her teeth as she waits.

"So you went to see him," he says, his voice heavy with accusation.

She swallows. "I told you I was going to," she answers bitterly. "My saddle needed to be fixed."

"And that took all day?" he asks immediately, his eyes never leaving the fire. His voice was cold and hostile, full of anger that roiled just beneath the surface.

"No," she answers simply, deciding not to elaborate. It was rare that Astrid saw him like this, it certainly wasn't what she had expected to come home to. Bellowing, shouting, throwing things, and threatening, perhaps. Those things she was used to and knew how to handle, but this?

This scares her more than all of the rest.

Again, the silence.

"It doesn't matter," he says resolutely. "I'm putting an end to this matter. In a few days, maybe a week, it will all be settled."

Astrid frowns, fear suddenly welling up in the pit of her gut.

"What do you mean?" she asks, annoyed as her voice cracks and betrays her emotions.

"What do we need to talk about, Dad?" Hiccup asks, suddenly very nervous that his father was starting an apparently very weighty topic with Gobber and Vali sitting along with him around the fire.

"Come and sit down," Stoic answers, waving the boy in as he watches him with a stern gaze.

Hiccup swallows nervously at the command, but wordlessly complies, wincing as he puts weight upon his stump again, hobbling over with a severe limp to the spot between his father and Gobber. The smith lifts an eyebrow as he watches the boy make his way.

"Something wrong with your leg, Hiccup?" he asks with concern.

"I, uh," the teen hesitates, "I got some sand between my stump and my new leg," he answers, adding, "It's been kinda irritating me."

The smith frowns slightly. "You'd better take it off so we can make sure you're alright," he says.

With a sigh, Hiccup nods and starts to unbuckle the straps that hold his leg in place, rather glad to be removing the metal from his body. He was typically sore at the end of the day, but today is far worse than usual.
"Son," Stoic begins as his son works to remove his leg, "I had a talk today with Astrid's father."

Hiccup freezes, swallowing heavily. "Really?" he asks, forcing himself to continue undoing his leg, wincing as the metal starts to separate from his stump with a sickeningly wet sound.

"Aye," the large man answers. Hiccup feels the three mens' eyes upon him as he focuses on his leg. The boy's father continues, "He told me that he had forbidden the girl t'see you..."

Hiccup grits his teeth, the pain he feels in his leg mingling with the twisting feeling in the pit of his stomach as he removes his leg, the action causing him to suck in his breath. His father falls silent as the boy reveals the bloodied end of his stump. Hiccup stares at the wound with a shocked expression. The scarred flesh covering the end of his stump is torn and jagged, and stings all the more when the air hits it.

"Aye, that's what I thought," Gobber says with a sigh, standing up and hobbling over to the door. "I'll be right back," he says as he opens up the portal. "I need t'get some water t'clean his stump with," he says with a glance at Stoic, who nods. The smith disappears, closing the door behind him.

Hiccup looks at his leg, still dumbfounded. It had hurt, but he didn't realize it was this bad.

"Here," his father tells him as he gets up and walks into the house, coming back with a clean rag. "Use this t'start getting yerself cleaned up," he says, sitting down as his son wordlessly obeys. Hiccup sucks in his breath as he gently places the fabric on the wound, his mind spinning as he waits for his father to resume their discussion.

"So, did you know about what her father told me?" he asks after Hiccup has a few moments to start the process. The boy looks up at his father, then glances at Vali briefly, still wondering why he's here.

He glances back at Stoic and explains, "I didn't know until today. She told me after we were out on our flight." Looking down at his leg, he continues to tenderly pat at his wound, using the fabric to soak up the blood. There's a lot of dried, clotted bits amongst the moist surface of his stump, making the effort to clean himself a difficult one.

Stoic nods, "that's good," he says, adding "Now that y'know, don' be going off t'see her again."

Hiccup scowls at this, but says nothing. He's not about to stop seeing Astrid, just because his father has forbidden him now, too.

Just then, the door opens and Gobber returns, carrying a bucket full of water. Stoic looks up at the smith, the two men nodding to each other. The chief then glances over at Vali, who nods.

"Son," Stoic goes on to say, "Vali here was approached by Astrid's father...

Hiccup looks up at his father with concern at both what he said and the tone of his voice.

"What about?" Hiccup asks nervously, fear creeping into his heart.

"Her father wants Vali to sign a contract for Astrid to marry Snoutlout..."

"What do you mean, 'it will all be settled', father?" Astrid spits the last word as she asks again with an anxious voice, her body tensing as she suspects what the answer will be.

Her father still says nothing for another moment or two as he pokes at the fire. "I've asked Vali Jorgenson to write up a marriage contract for you and Snoutlout," he answers flatly, as if he were
talking about the weather. Astrid's heart twists painfully in her heart as she absorbs the news.

"What?" she asks, her voice cracking. Clearing her throat, she swallows heavily, asking, "what did he say?"

"He said he'd stop by tomorrow to talk about it, but I suspect that he'll probably have a contract in hand," he answers, his gaze flicking to his daughter as he grins slightly. The girl stares at him with a shocked expression as a feeling of numbness chills her inside. She glances over at her mother, who stares intently into the fire.

At least Astrid knows now exactly why her mother had been crying.

Looking back at her father's leering smile, she says adamantly, "I don't want to marry him."

"I know what you want," her father answers with a disgusted voice, meeting her gaze with a glare of hatred. "But you'll do what I say," he commands. "I am still your father, even if you chose to consort with my enemy," he says with a stern voice, scowling at her in disapproval.

"Hiccup isn't your enemy," she insists, standing firm under his gaze. "He's an amazing…"

"He's the son of my enemy, and that makes him my enemy," her father interrupts her, raising his voice for the first time since she got home.

Now this was familiar. This, she knew how to deal with.

"Funny, I thought we were all part of the same tribe," she says with a bitterly sarcastic voice. "That the enemy was out there!" she says loudly, jabbing her finger towards a random wall.

"Yes, the enemy was out there, then the spawn of Stoic went and brought them in here!" He says, jabbing his finger down at the floor, his voice rising to a near shout as his blood starts to boil, as she knew it would.

"Dragons aren't the enemy either, father!" she exclaims, matching his volume with her own, taking a step forward as she stares into his eyes.

"What would you know about who is our enemy?" he roars, jumping to his feet as his daughter glares at him. "You didn't spend your entire life fighting for our home and our village, only for our chief," he spits the word, "to betray us all and befriend the beasts because his cripple, weakling son told him to!"

"That's not what happened, and you know it!" she shouts back, balling her hands up into fists. "You were there with the rest of us!" she yells passionately, "you know that Hiccup and Toothless saved all of us from our own stupidity!"

"Mind your place, girl!" her father bellows, taking a step towards her as he grips the fire poker more tightly in his hand.

"Oh, did I hit too close to the truth!?" she asks bitterly, refusing to back down.

"SILENCE!" he shouts at the top of his lungs. "You WILL marry who I say, and you WILL show me respect, child!"

"Or what?" she asks quietly, unyielding in her stance and attitude.

Thorsten stares daggers back at his daughter as she continues to challenge him, her gaze into his eyes
one of pure hatred. He huffs silently for a few moments, before laughing.

"There is no 'or' anything, child," he says contemptuously. "I am your father, and by the law, you will marry who I sign a contract for, even if I have to drag you to the altar in chains."

Astrid clenches her fists so tightly it hurts. Her insides twist sickeningly as she feels fear mixed with loathing. She trembles as she stares at him with unbridled hatred, willing him to die on the spot. Her father merely laughs softly at her vitriolic, yet mute reaction.

"Go to bed, daughter," he tells her. "You've caused enough trouble for one day."

Hiccup blanches at the news. "Dad, you can't let…"

"Silence, Hiccup!" his father barks sternly, flicking a glance at Vali, who grins with an understanding look.

Stoic nods at this, sharing a fleeting glance with Gobber. The smith sits himself back down beside Hiccup, setting down the buckets and taking a clean rag he brought in with him from the laundry line outside.

"Now then, this is going to sting a little," he says as he washes the cloth and starts to more roughly clean the stump. Hiccup hisses in pain, gripping the bench he sits on as he struggles to stay still for Gobber.

"What, doesn't Astrid get any say in this?!" Hiccup asks in frustration, his voice tight as Gobber works on his wound.

"She does if Thorsten says she does," Stoic says plainly. Hiccup's heart sinks.

"Dad, but…you're chief, you can stop this…!" Hiccup says emphatically, causing Stoic to stand up suddenly.

"That's ENOUGH Hiccup!" he bellows furiously, glaring at his son. The boy falls quiet, his gaze dropping to the floor. "Don' disrespect our guest by talking like that in front of 'im!" Stoic says sternly. "I can't jest tell Vali he can't pursue this contract if that's what he and Thorsten want ta do."

He sighs as he watches Hiccup fume in his seat as Gobber finishes washing the wound and the smith then reaches for a bottle of whiskey sitting on the table.

Gobber looks up at the chief, who nods and then waits as the smith douses another clean rag with the pungent liquid. Before Hiccup can react, Gobber applies it to the boy's wounded stump. The three men wait quietly as the boy cries out in pain, gripping the bench until his knuckles are white.

"There, that's over lad," Gobber tells him quietly as he takes a fresh cloth and starts to wrap the leg and stump with it.

"Hiccup," his father starts again, his voice more compasionate.

"It's alright, Stoic," Vali says, finally breaking his silence. "I can understand the boy's frustration," he says.

"No, you can't," Hiccup says to the large viking. "I love her, Dad," Hiccup tells him passionately.

"We know, son," he says with an understanding chuckle that the two other men join in. "Everybody knows how you feel about her," he says, when Hiccup interrupts.
"But Dad, she loves me too!" he says emphatically, shifting in his seat with anxious frustration, wishing he could stand up.

The three men look at him with surprised expressions. "Does she now?" Stoic asked with serious interest.

"Yes," Hiccup says plaintively. "She told me so today," he says, cutting himself off before he says too much.

"When you went out for your flight together?" the large man asks with a playful grin. "What did she do, shout it t'you while you two soared among th'clouds?"

"No, Dad," Hiccup says, growing a little nervous. "We…landed and, uhm…we spent the day together," he says, trying to leave out as much detail as possible.

"You spent the day with her, did'ja?" he asks softly. The three men watch Hiccup intently, making the boy squirm in his seat.

"Uhm…yeah," Hiccup answers.

Silence. Hiccup looks down at the floor, wishing he had never come home.

"What did th'two of you do, I wonder?" his father asks. Hiccup only blushes and refuses to look at any of them. His father sighs.

"Hiccup, did you…?" his father asks, hesitating at the end.

"It's not what you think, Dad," he says at that, forcing himself to look up at his father. "We didn't do…that…"

His father looks at him intently, asking, "but you did do…something…?" He hesitates, lifting an eyebrow.

"Oh Gods," Hiccup laments, looking down again as he blushes furiously. In doing so, he misses the knowing look that the three men share.

"Well, we don't need more details than you've given us," Stoic says, then looks back over at Vali. "I'm sorry, my friend, it seems like my son has already done some damage to Astrid's purity."

Vali chuckles. "Oh, I don't mind," he says with a grin, "the boy didn't completely ruin her for Snoutlout," he says with a shrug. Hiccup looks up at him, stunned by his words. "Hel, this is actually good, now I can negotiate Thorsten down on the bride price," he says, looking over at Hiccup as the boy stares at him in shocked disbelief. "I suppose I should actually thank you for that, boy," he says with a smile.

Anger wells up inside of Hiccup at the man's words, and he opens his mouth to let loose with a furious tirade, but the combination of Gobber's hand on his shoulder and his father's words stop him.

"Make sure you hammer him down but good, Vali," Stoic says, to which Vali nods. "In fact, you might even be able to negotiate an increase of the dowry," he ponders, tugging on his beard in thought. Hiccup looks on in stunned silence as his father joins Snoutlout's father in planning the negotiation for Astrid.

"Aye, I think you might be onto something there," Vali says, the two men sharing a wry grin.
Hiccup looks on in disbelief, emotionally drained as he realizes that his father is not only going to allow this, but he seems to be encouraging it.

"Well," Vali says as he stands up, "I should be going." He walks over to Stoic and the two clasp forearms firmly, looking intently at one another. "Thanks for inviting me over, Stoic," he says.

Hiccup's father nods in answer, "Always glad t'have ya, Vali," he says. "And thank you for agreeing t'his." Vali grins smugly as Stoic does the same, the two nodding.

"A pleasure, Stoic," he says as the two part and he makes his way to the door. "I think this'll work out just fine…” The man opens the door and disappears into the night, closing it behind him.

"I can't believe you, Dad," Hiccup says as soon as Snoutlout's father is gone. "You actually want this to happen?!" he asks, his rage starting to boil inside.

Stoic glances back at Hiccup, looking at his son with a considering gaze. "No, I don't," he says plainly.

"Then what was all that about?!!" Hiccup asks frantically, his emotions overwhelming him. "You just said you asked Vali to agree to it! You were talking with him about how to haggle for a better bride price for Astrid, the woman I love!" the boy is shouting by the time he finishes.

Stoic shares a glance with Gobber, then looks back at the boy. "Son, you don't know the whole story here," he says.

"Well please, tell me!" he says in a desperate voice, tears coming to his eyes as he tries to fight them back.

Stoic shakes his head. "No," he tells his son. "Not until the time is right."

Hiccup looks at his father incredulously. "When would that be, when Astrid and Snoutlout are married?!!" he asks, his voice choking on the last word.

The man looks back at Hiccup sternly, answering simply, "You need to trust me on this one, Hiccup."

"Why should I trust you, since you're encouraging Vali to do this?" Hiccup asks desperately.

"Like I said," his father answers, "you don't know everything."

Hiccup closes his eyes, swallowing bitterly. "Dad, please…just…tell Vali that he can't do this. Go to Thorsten and tell him you want to sign a contract for me and Astrid."

Stoic shakes his head, sighing, "Oh, son…d'ye think it's that simple?" he asks. Hiccup clenches his teeth as his father continues, "th'girls father has forbidden her to see you. Why would he want to sign a contract with me for th'two of you t'wed?"

"But…but you're the chief," Hiccup answers, his voice small and weak.

The great viking sighs again, smiling at his son with a sympathetic, understanding gaze. "Aye, that's true," he says, "but th'men and women of this tribe don' follow me 'cause I order them to." He pauses, looking at his son intently. "They follow me because they want to," he explains. "Because they respect me and look up t'me." He pauses, and then asks, "how much d'ye think they'll still respect me if I put a stop t'his contract that Thorsten and Vali want t'pursue, jest because my son is in love with Astrid?"
Hiccup swallows, looking down as his father continues. "Don' forget," he says, "Thorsten still wants t'be chief. If I were to deny him this, that'd be jest the excuse he and his followers need t'challenge me fer leadership of th'tribe." Hiccup's shoulders slump in defeat as he listens.

Stoic gets up from his bench and sits next to Hiccup, looking at Gobber, who still sits on the other side of the boy. The two share a troubled glance as the chief then returns his attention to his son. "I need you to trust me on this one, son," he says.

The boy looks up at him with a furrowed brow, tears streaming down his cheeks.

Stoic goes on, "I should have listened you before, when you were tryin' to tell me and the village what you'd learned of dragons," he admits. "I should have trusted you then. If I had, maybe ye'd still have yer leg."

Hiccup swallows, about to say something when his father continues. "I can't change that now, but I can make it up to you in other ways," he says. Hiccup's brow furrows in confusion at his words. "I know what you want, and I know what'll make you happy," he says, placing a hand upon his son's shoulder. The boy's expression is one of confusion and contemplation, as he considers his father's words. "But I need you to trust me now. I've been chief for a long time. I know how t'play these games," he says, with a glance at Gobber, who smirks knowingly.

Hiccup starts to get excited. "So...you're going to try and fix this?" he asks eagerly.

Looking back down at him with a stern expression, Stoic asks, "What're you talking about, Hiccup?" he asks as he stands up, towering over the small lad. "I jest told y'before, I can't get in the way of Vali and Thorsten pursuing that contract," he says with a shrug. "It's between them whether'r not they sign it."

Hiccup looks thoughtful at his father's words, looking down as he considers them. Stoic frowns, then says warningly, "Don' you be getting any ideas," he says, his words drawing Hiccup's gaze back up to him. "You stay well away from both of them, an' don't do anything t'interfere...!" Hiccup swallows guiltily as he nods sullenly. "Make sure Astrid doesn't either," he further warns.

Hiccup furrows his brow, "but...I'm not supposed to see her," he says in confusion.

Stoic nods, "That's right, and don't you forget it...!" he says sternly. Hiccup isn't sure because of the beard, but he thinks his father might be smirking. "Now, get yerself t'bed, ye've had enough excitement for one day, I'll wager."

Hiccup reaches for his leg, but Gobber takes it before the boy can lay a hand on it. "Oooh no, ya don'," he says, getting up and putting the leg on the nearby table. "Ye're in no shape t'be wearing that thing again for a while," he says.

"But...Gobber, how am I going to get around?" he asks, suddenly feeling very naked without his leg.

The smith hobbles over to the corner and picks up the crutch that Hiccup had used in the first few days of getting used to his new leg. The boy scowls as he sees the simple wooden pole, adorned only with a handle about two thirds up and topped with a contoured bar for his shoulder. Hiccup looks up at the smith.

"Don' look at me like that," the man says as walks back over. "Ye're the one who went and did this t'yerself." Hiccup frowns all the more and looks down. "Why didn' ya just take yer leg off and remove th'sand?" he asks with a lifted eyebrow.
Hiccup hesitates. "I…" he sighs, "I guess I didn't want Astrid to see me without my leg," he says. The smith sighs as he offers the crutch to Hiccup, who takes the hated support with clenched teeth.

"Well, that was foolish," he says, "now look where y'are." Hiccup refuses to look at him as the smith sets the crutch down and uses it to heft himself up. "D'ye really think she cares about yer missing leg, Hiccup?" the smith asks. Hiccup glances up at the man, blushing slightly as he shrugs.

"I dunno," he says with a sigh, looking down.

He pauses, "How long until I can use my leg again?" he asks, looking back at Gobber, who shrugs.

"Oh, probably in about a week or so, maybe more," he says. Hiccup's shoulders slump as the smith continues, "You need t'give yerself time t'heal, now." Gobber grins, "but don' think this means you get out of coming t'work t'morrow," he warns, shaking a thick finger at the boy. "Yer not gettin' two days off in a row!"

Hiccup sighs, nodding at the man. He sullenly makes his way to the stairs, his journey punctuated by the tapping of his crutch. Upon reaching the stairs, he climbs up slowly, needing to crawl, being without the use of his one leg. The two men below watching him in silence.

"G'night Dad, Gobber," he says as he disappears up above.

"G'night son," his father answers as Gobber likewise bids the boy good night, the two waiting until he disappears.

"Well, Stoic," the smith says, "time for me to be goin' home, m'self," he says, making his way to the front door.

"Aye," the chief says as he walks with his friend to the exit. "Thanks fer yer help t'nigh," he says sincerely as the two clasp forearms.

"Ach, t'is nothin'," the smith says with a wide grin. "I love th'boy like he were me own kin. I'll always be there t'help ye with him," he says. Stoic nods appreciatively. The smith lingers for a moment, then asks in a whisper, "So d'ya think this'll really work?"

Stoic grins from ear to ear, chuckling. "Oh, aye," he says just as quietly. "That it will."
Astrid lay in bed, wide awake. She had tossed and turned for the last couple of hours as she worried about how her worst fears had been realized. In addition to her father disapproving of Hiccup and forbidding her from seeing him, he had now taken steps to see her married to someone else. The fact that he had chosen Snoutlout only adds insult to injury, though really, anyone her father chose that wasn't Hiccup would have angered and upset her.

She'd never go through with it, of course.

Hiccup had said they would run away if they had to...well, it looked like they had to.

That should be enough for her, but still she can't sleep. It's one thing to say they would run away, but it was a different matter entirely to actually follow through with it. They would have to cut all ties from the people they knew and loved, to leave forever the place they had always called home.

She doesn't care, in the end. If that's what it takes to be with him, then that's what she'll do.

But she can't help feeling a little terrified.

Suddenly she wonders if he would really go through with it. If she feels this scared about running off, now that it was a certainty, what will he feel?

Will he actually do it?

Astrid sits up in her bed and sighs. There is no chance of getting to sleep, she's such a bundle of raw nerves. Suddenly she comes to a realization. The only thing that will make her feel better is to see Hiccup again. She needs to tell him what's happened. She needs to make sure that he meant everything he said, that they would run away together.

She needs to know that he won't leave her.

The girl gets out of bed, sheds her nightgown and pulls on a fresh tunic. Hastily she pulls her leggings and skirt on, then slips on her boots. She puts on her hairband, but doesn't bother doing anything else with her long hair, which flows freely down her back since she brushed out her braid out in her nightly ritual before going to bed. Moving to the window, she pauses and listens intently.

On the other side of the one-room house, she can hear her parents' steady breathing as they sleep behind the heavy drapes that section off their bed from the rest of the cramped house.

Nodding to herself, Astrid turns to the small window and opens up the shudders. One of the hinges squeaks noisily, causing her to flinching. She freezes, listening intently for her parents.

After a few moments, without any sound from within the house, she breathes a silent sigh of relief, then opens the shudders the rest of the way and lifts herself out through the window. As soon as her feet hit the ground on the other side, she closes the shudders again, wincing as the one hinge again squeaks. She hesitates once more, listening for a sound from the inside.

After the space of several breaths, Astrid relaxes and turns on her heel, dashing from her house as quietly as she can manage. She runs through the streets, keeping to the shadows while making her way to the hill upon which Stoic's mansion sits. As she gets near, she takes the long way around, so that she can stick to the trees and approach the house from the back.
Upon reaching the imposing structure, she suddenly realizes the flaw in her plan. She's never been in the chief's home and has no idea where Hiccup sleeps. The girl hesitates, seriously considering turning back, but the gnawing anxiety in her gut urges her onward, even as the risk of discovery weighs more heavily upon her.

She has to see Hiccup, to tell him what her father has done.

She needs to know that he meant what he said, that he'd run away with her.

She can't lose him. Not now, after everything they've shared.

The girl dashes over to the house, sprinting and making barely a sound. When she reaches the large building, she looks around. The large structure looms above her, leaving her feel small and intimidated. Clenching her teeth, she searches for a window.

After a minute or two of searching, she's almost ready to give up when suddenly the glint of metal in the moonlight up high on the roof catches her eye. Squinting to try and make it out, she realizes that it's the hinges for a pair of shudders.

Astrid looks around and realizes the decorative wood carvings on the corners of the house are ideal for climbing. Without a moment's hesitation, she scurries up the vertical column, easily making her way to what must be the second story. The roof curves in as she climbs upwards, sloping to the point where she can walk across it, if not with some difficulty.

Slowly she creeps across the curved roof of the mansion, making her way to the shudders. With each careful step she hesitantly shifts her weight from one foot to the other, fearing the timbers beneath her might creak to give her away. Somehow, miraculously, she reaches the window without causing a sound. Her gut churns nervously as she suddenly realizes how foolish this is. For all she knows, Stoic is asleep on the other side of these shudders.

He may even be awake behind them.

Once more, she hesitates, thinking of just sliding down the roof and running home. Then she thinks of laying back down in her bed, alone, without having seen or spoken to Hiccup, without finding out for certain that he wasn't going to abandon her to the wedding that her father planned to force her into.

Steeling herself, she places her fingers between the shudders and slowly starts to lift the one.

A small yet very audible creak accompanies her action, causing her to freeze as she winces, her heart jumping into her throat. Grimacing, she waits, listening for any sound from inside. All she can hear is the wind gently rustling the leaves of the trees near the house and the hammering of her heart in her chest.

Bracing herself again, she finishes opening the one shudder. Moonlight spills in through the window, giving Astrid her first glimpse inside.

With the curve of the roof, the window is on the lower part of the arched ceiling of the small, second story room. A closed door is on the wall opposite to the window that she looks down through. Against the wall to her left is a table, which sits in the bulk of the moonlight. The surface is cluttered with papers that are covered with strange drawings and various notes, along with a couple of books and charcoal pencils.

Astrid smiles at the sight, her heart skipping in excitement as she realizes this must be Hiccup's room.
Opposite the table is a bed, mostly hidden in the shadows. Though it is shrouded in darkness, the girl can see that someone lays in it, curled up under its covers. Astrid leans in slightly, peering intently at the bed as she tries to see exactly who is there, though she has little doubt at this point. Holding her breath for a moment, she waits to let her vision adjust to the shadows while staring at the bed.

The sleeping figure moves, allowing her to see how small the person is. Her smile blooms as she sees the familiar mop of brown hair. Sighing a breath of relief and thinking a quick prayer of thanks to Freya, Astrid opens the other shudder. The window is just wide enough for her to squeeze through. Gripping the frame, she lowers herself into the room, careful not to make a sound as she drops the last half a foot to the floor.

Astrid takes the few steps needed to reach the bed, entering into the shadows. Her lips bloom into a sweet smile as her eyes adjust and she starts to see Hiccup more clearly. In the dim light, she can just make out the features of his face. The lad's expression is tranquil and relaxed. His body moves ever so slightly with his slow and soft breathing as he rests in a deep sleep.

The girl hesitates, feeling guilty for waking him with bad news when he looks so peaceful, but she's come too far to turn back now. Kneeling down by his bed, Astrid leans in close, taking a moment to just listen to him breathe. Staring at him, she brushes his hair from his face. She savors the moment while considering how to wake him quietly, her brow furrowing in thought.

A pleased smile crosses her lips as she quickly makes her decision. With the tips of her fingers, she strokes his cheek tenderly and leans in to press her lips to his, kissing him sweetly.

At first, the boy doesn't move. Then, each breath becomes deeper as she rubs her lips tenderly against his. Soon she's rewarded with a soft, tender moan as she continues to kiss him. Daringly the girl slides her tongue over his lips, pleased beyond reason when he opens up for her. She immediately deepens the kiss, exploring as he stirs, his lips finally starting to respond. Her hand strokes his cheek firmly now as she kisses him deeply, and she sucks in her breath as she feels him greet her tongue with his own. The boy kisses back now, though his movements are sluggish and slow.

Astrid feels his hand covering hers upon his cheek as they kiss, the boy's movements becoming more responsive with each passing moment. Hiccup's hand squeezes hers, then slides up to stroke her hair, his fingers entwining into her freely flowing tresses, wrapping around to hold the back of her head and press her to him. He kisses her intently and the girl moans softly against his lips. She feels like jelly inside, sighing happily against his lips, savoring the sweet kiss for a while until finally, reluctantly, the girl finally pulls back just enough to look into his eyes. Hiccup smiles dreamily at her as he sighs happily, his hand moving to caress her neck and cheek.

"Hi, Astrid," he says with a happy, but very sleepy, sluggish voice, his half open eyes not quite focusing right.

"Hi, Hiccup," she answers with a wide smile, stroking his cheek tenderly as her heart sings at being with him again. She can't help but yearn for being able to wake him up like this every morning.

As she watches, the boy's eyes start to open more completely as he finishes waking up. A look of alarm comes over his face as he becomes completely aware of his surroundings, his eyes growing wide at the sight of her.

"Astrid?!" he asks in a panic, struggling to keep his voice down. "Wh-What're you doing here?!"

The girl winces apologetically. "I had to see you," she whispers, her voice more needy than she would have liked. "We need to talk," she adds urgently.
Hiccup's brows knit together in concern at her words and he props himself up on his elbow to bring his eyes level with hers. "What's wrong?!" he asks fearfully, his heart pounding in anticipation of more bad news.

Swallowing with difficulty, Astrid forces herself to spit it out. "My father wants Vali Jorgenson to offer a contract for me to marry Snoutlout." The girl braces herself for his reaction.

Hiccup blinks a couple of times, "Oh…is that all?" he asks.

Astrid's jaw drops in shock. "What do you mean is that all?!" she asks far more loudly than she should. Hiccup shushes her, glancing over at the door in a panic. The girl blushes a bright red even as her gut twists in confusion and anger at his cavalier reaction to her earth-shattering news.

The two sit in silence as they wait, listening intently. The girl switches back and forth between watching the door in fear and glaring angrily at Hiccup. The moments slip by as the teens hear nothing but silence. Both breathe a sigh of relief, neither having realized they were holding their breath.

Hiccup turns back to his girlfriend, explaining in a hushed whisper, "Astrid, I already knew about that. I was afraid something else had gone wrong." She blinks a few times as she watches him silently, absorbing his explanation.

"Oh," the girl answers sheepishly, blushing a little as she settles down at his reason. "How did you find out?" she asks as quietly as he had.

"My father told me," he answers simply, choosing not to elaborate.

Astrid remembers their talk from before and asks, "Did you tell Stoic we want to get married? Can he stop this?"

Her heart sinks as the look on his face tells her the answer. "I asked," her boyfriend explains as he looks down from her to the bed, "but he said he couldn't tell Vali not to pursue it." Astrid swallows anxiously, a new wave of fear washing over her.

"Hiccup, what're we going to do?" she asks in a hushed, frantic whisper, careful not to raise her voice too much again, in spite of the renewed panic she now feels. He looks at her when she speaks, but then hesitates, not sure what to say.

Astrid's insides twists into a tight knot as she feels her fear overwhelm her. Her gaze falls to his feather mattress, focusing on Hiccup's hand that rests between them. Reaching forward, she covers his hand with hers. She hesitates, then says with a shaking voice, "You…you'd said you would run away with me…if…if we had to…" Her gaze flicks anxiously up to him again, her whole body trembling now as she faces the moment of truth.

Hiccup looks into her eyes as she stares at him helplessly, her fear plain as day when he looks upon her face. He smiles sweetly at her, amazed to see her so vulnerable. Turning his hand to hold hers, he wraps his other arm about her shoulders to pull her to him.

"Of course I will," he whispers as he presses his lips to the top of her head. "I love you, and I made you a promise." Astrid breathes a ragged sigh of relief as she hears his words and feels him embrace her, pressing her head against his chest. She squeezes his hand and closes her eyes, listening to the sound of his heart beating through the heavy cotton nightshirt he wears. The girl allows herself to linger there in his embrace, content to simply be close to him, to bask in the satisfaction that he was not going to abandon her, that he loved her no matter what.
Astrid lifts herself up to sit on the bed next to him and he follows suit, sitting up fully as she looks into his eyes intently. He smiles faintly at the sight of her beautiful face, half shrouded in shadows from the pale moonlight. The sight reminds him of how she looked that night in Toothless' cove, after their first flight together when she gave him that first, innocent kiss on the cheek. Only now, with her hair tumbling freely down her back, she's all the more beautiful. He smiles at the memory of that night she fell in love with him. Reaching up, he caresses her cheek tenderly as he stares at her.

The girl leans into his touch, closing her eyes. She then looks at him and moves forward to press her body against his, kissing him passionately. Hiccup greets her with eager lips, his tongue meeting hers as she forces her way in. They embrace tightly, taking comfort in each other's arms, lingering in the kiss for some time.

Finally, Astrid pulls back to look at him. "When should we leave?" she asks quietly. "Tomorrow?"

Hiccup swallows heavily, the reality of it setting in. He would not hesitate to run away with her if it came to that. But still, what his father had said to him at the end of the evening weighs upon his mind.

"I don't think we should leave just yet," he whispers cautiously, watching Astrid intently. She frowns, again looking nervous.

"Hiccup, if your father won't help us..." she says plaintively, her face painted with worry.

"Actually...I think he will," Hiccup answers, the girl furrowing her brow at his answer.

"What do you mean?" she asks. "You said..."

"I know, I know," Hiccup tells her. She watches him intently as he goes on, "He said he couldn't tell your father and Vali not to sign a contract if they wanted to, but..." he hesitates, looking down as he tries to explain it. He wasn't sure he really understood it himself, yet.

"But what?" Astrid asks anxiously.

"He said...he said that he knew what I wanted, what would make me happy...and he asked me to trust him." Listening to his words, Astrid's heart starts to pound excitedly in her chest.

"So he's going to help us?" she asks breathlessly, almost speaking too loudly.

Looking back at her with an uncertain gaze, Hiccup answers, "I think so?"

She furrows her brow at his lack of conviction. "How?" she asks, a little apprehensive.

"I don't know," he admits, his brow furrowed as he thinks about the difficult and confusing evening. "But Vali was there tonight, and he and Stoic were..." he hesitates.

"What? They were what?" she asks, confused at the mention of Vali being there.

Grimacing, Hiccup says, "Dad was telling Vali to negotiate your father down on the bride price, and to ask for an increase of the dowry."

Astrid looks at him like he's got two heads as she absorbs his answer. Hiccup cringes as he watches, expecting her to take his head off. As such, he's quite surprised when she starts to smile.

"That might actually work," she says in a hushed whisper.

"What?" He answers quietly, furrowing his brow in confusion.
The girl's lips start to twist into a smirk. "My father's always boasted about what a great price I'll fetch when he finally marries me off," she explains. "We've never had much money, so he's been looking forward to my marriage as a way to improve his fortunes," she says as he thinks the matter through. "If Vali tries to negotiate him down…" she smiles slightly, then pauses.

"Wait," she says, starting to frown. "How would he justify offering a lower price?" she asks, looking at Hiccup with a confused expression. Her mood quickly changes to anger as she waits and sees him squirm uncomfortably beneath her gaze while he fails to answer.

"Hiccup, what did you tell them?" she hisses in a hostile whisper, glaring at him.

"I didn't tell them anything," he says, pleading. "They figured it out for themselves…"

The girl's eyes narrow, "They figured what out for themselves?" she asks dangerously.

Clearing his throat Hiccup hesitates before admitting, "they figured out that you and I…did… stuff…"

"Hiccup!" she cries, entirely too loudly, causing the boy to glance at the door in a panic as he hushes her again. "I can't believe you!" she whispers harshly at him, punching him in the shoulder as her anger roils inside of her.

"Astrid, please," he pleads anxiously while rubbing where she hit him, "I didn't say anything to tip them off, my father was sniffing around for it," he says as she fumes at him. "He asked me if we… had sex, and I denied that, but then he asked me if we did anything else."

"And you couldn't have lied to him?" she asks hysterically in a sharp whisper, struggling to keep her voice down. She feels a twinge of guilt inside as she realizes her own hypocrisy, but decides to ignore that for now.

"He's my father, Astrid," Hiccup says flatly. "I've never lied to him."

Astrid narrows her eyes at him. "What about Toothless?" she asks pointedly.

Hiccup frowns, answering indignantly, "I didn't lie to my father about him." Astrid lifts an eyebrow, "I just…didn't tell him what I was doing," he further justifies. "But I never told him an outright lie…!"

"So why didn't you just omit what we did?" she asks harshly.

Hiccup sighs. "Astrid, he asked me directly. I didn't have a choice…!"

The girl huffs, crossing her arms as her cheeks flush with embarrassment at the thought of Stoic having this conversation with Hiccup about what she did with him. It was even worse that Vali had been there. She scowls at the boy sitting next to her as he shifts uncomfortably under her gaze.

"Look, it's a good thing I admitted it, right?" he asks in a pleading voice, feeling all the more nervous as she lifts an eyebrow at him. "You just said that if they can beat him down enough on the price, then your father might change his mind…?"

Astrid frowns, even more annoyed at his very logical point. That was right, and it was what she said. But she's still pissed at Hiccup for sharing any information about their very new love life with anyone.

Especially his father.
How would she ever look Stoic in the eye again?

Not quite through being annoyed, she asks him bitterly, "So he thinks Vali can bargain for a lower price because you defiled my purity?" Her voice drips with sarcasm at the last few words.

Swallowing nervously, Hiccup nods slowly. "That's pretty much it," he answers, looking at her with a degree of fear.

Her breathing levels as she starts to settle down, thinking the matter through. "And you said that you made it clear to your Dad that we didn't go all the way, that we were only fooling around?" she asks.

Hiccup furrows his brow, nodding slowly again. "Uhh, yeeaah…" he says as he watches her with growing apprehension.

Astrid starts to smirk devilishly at his words, enjoying the sight of his fearful reaction at her change in demeanor.

"Uuhmm…what're you thinking, Astrid?" Hiccup asks anxiously.

She grins all the more wickedly at his reaction. Leaning in closer to him, she brings her face so close to his that he leans back apprehensively. He looks into her eyes nervously as she says nothing. Then she whispers to him in a scandalous voice, "Why, Hiccup…if Vali can ask for a lower price just because we fooled around, just imagine what would happen if we went ahead and had sex…" she thrills inside as Hiccup's eyes go wide at her words. "Vali might just refuse to even offer a contract…"

The boy stares at her as she makes her rather indecent proposal, his body suddenly awash with both waves of nervousness and excitement as she scoots her bottom closer to him on the bed while staring deeply into his eyes. He swallows heavily as her hand drifts over to his crotch, touching him briefly and pausing as she feels the stiffness of his erection push back against her probing fingers.

"Well, I see you like that idea," she says with a grin as she wraps her fingers around his length, squeezing him through his nightshirt. Hiccup groans huskily as she slowly plays with him, shutting his eyes as she leans in to press her lips against his. She kisses him passionately while she gently rubs his length through his nightshirt. The lad whimpers against her, kissing back as her touch overwhelms him.

Breaking the kiss, she stands and grabs her skirt and leggings at the waist, getting ready to strip her lower half naked.

"Waitasecond!" Hiccup whispers sharply as he grabs one of her wrists firmly, staring up at her intently. "You want to have sex with me?"

She chuckles, answering with a smirk, "Hiccup, I though I'd already made that plenty clear, back on the island…"

Exasperated, Hiccup shakes his head. "No, I mean… you want to, like, right now?" he asks incredulously

Astrid lifts an eyebrow as she pauses. "You'd rather wait to see if my father will accept the deal Vali's going to offer him?"

The boy hesitates. "Well…Dad seemed happy with how things are right now," he argues.

The girl shrugs, "I don't want to leave anything to chance," she says plainly as she starts to slide her
pants and skirt down.

"Astrid!" Hiccup barks in a firm whisper as she bares a couple of inches of flesh to him, stopping just above where Hiccup remembers her patch of hair starting. He can't help but stare at her ivory skin that just happens to be level with his eyes. She stops, huffing in frustration and glaring at him while he forces himself to look into her eyes and says, "My father is asleep down the hall! I don't think now is the time…"

The girl hesitates, then shrugs, "then we'll just have to be quiet."

Hiccup chortles at her answer, looking her in the eyes. "Seriously?" he asks her. "You? Be quiet?"

Astrid frowns, unhappy with his insinuation. "I can be plenty quiet," she says defensively.

Her boyfriend grins at her, causing her to deepen her scowl. "Astrid, uhm…I'm not sure how to tell you this, but…you're…a screamer," he says.

"What?" she asks as a blush rises on her cheeks at his words.


Astrid blushes brightly at his accusation, feeling very chagrined. "I did not," she says in a weak attempt to deny his words.

Hiccup chuckles, his grin deepening. "Oooh, yes you did," he replies smugly. Astrid hesitates, trying to glare at him, but finds herself unable to as he looks at her with that gloating expression. She feels like smacking the grin off his face, but instead she pulls her leggings and skirt back up, then sits on the bed in a huff. Crossing her arms, she looks down, deeply chagrined.

Hiccup smirks all the more, leaning in to whisper, "Did I mention that I loved every second of it…?" She glances at him, her frown fading at this, though her cheeks are still a bright red, perhaps even more so now. He leans in closer, putting his lips to her ear, "and I can't wait to do it to you again," he whispers all the more softly, sending a shiver down her spine as he kisses her ear wetly.

In spite of her embarassment, Astrid thrills inside. How did he suddenly get so sexy? Especially now, when he was denying her all the naughty things he could do to her…

Growling in frustration, Astrid's hand darts to Hiccup's leg to find the bottom of his nightshirt. The boy gasps in surprise as he feels her fingers upon his bare flesh, sucking in his breath as she quickly glides her touch up his bare thigh until she finds his penis, eagerly waiting for her in a stiff salute.

She pulls back just enough to look into his eyes as she wraps her fingers tightly around his shaft, smirking at him with a smug, wicked expression as she watches his face contort with pleasure. Her hand starts to slowly move up and down his length, her smile growing all the more devilish as she watches his face react. He moans huskily, his breath coming more heavily now.

"Astrid, we shouldn't…" he tries to protest as she pleasures him, his words drawing a throaty chuckle from the girl as she continues to stroke him.

"Who said I was going to let you do anything to me?" she asks with a sinful look in her eyes. Hiccup's eyes widen until she squeezes him tightly, causing him to close his eyes with a gasp of pleasure. With a silky, seductive voice, she explains, "I might be the screamer in this relationship, but I bet you can be quiet when you have to…"
Hiccup whimpers as she continues to stroke him. "Yeah, but…I'll…make a mess…again," he protests, feeling like he's running out of options to ward her off. In truth, he doesn't want her to stop, but he's terrified of getting caught.

She grins at him from ear to ear, "hmm, good point," she answers, her hand pausing, to his relief. Waiting a couple of moments to let him relax, she squeezes him tightly again, leaning in to whisper in his ear, "but I've had a thought about how to…contain…your mess…" Pulling back she looks into his gaze, smirking as he stares at her with wide eyes.

Astrid releases him, but then quickly pulls his nightshirt up above his waist. He opens his mouth to protest but she moves too fast, moving down the bed and leaning down to quickly wrap her lips around the head of his hard shaft.

Hiccup gasps loudly as he feels her warm, moist mouth envelop his tip. Grasping her head with his one hand, he supports himself with his other arm. The girl lingers there, sucking on him firmly, drawing a throaty moan from her boyfriend as he entwines his fingers in her hair. Astrid's heart pounds in her chest at the reality of what she's doing to him. She can't believe she just put him in her mouth.

Still, she loves how it feels and tastes, and she's happy beyond measure to know how much pleasure she's bringing to this boy that she loves.

Hiccup's head spins as Astrid sucks on his tip, his whole body feeling hot and excited. The warm wetness that envelops him is overwhelming, and when she starts to rub him with her tongue, he whimpers a little more loudly than he should.

Sucking on him firmly, the girl pulls her mouth off of him with a pop. She grasps his length in her hand again, slowly stroking him as she looks up at him, chiding him firmly in a hushed whisper, "Be quiet, Hiccup…" The boy wordlessly nods, his hand upon her head gently coaxing her back down again. She smiles at him from ear to ear, pleased beyond measure at his newfound enthusiasm for this as she moves down with the push of his hand, wrapping her lips around his stiffness again.

As she starts to suck on him, Hiccup falls back onto the mattress, unable to support himself anymore. He tries to hold in his moans of passion as her tongue again flicks over his head within her mouth, the sensation driving him insane. His heart pounds in his chest as he feels the strong need for more, his hand that's wrapped up in her hair tugs gently, trying to encourage her to move.

Astrid chuckles as she feels the pull of his hand, resisting for a moment before yielding to his silent plea, sliding her mouth down his length. Hiccup sucks in his breath as she takes more of him in, her tongue flicking over his underside as she then slides back up and down again, starting to fall into a more steady rhythm.

The boy breathes heavily as she bobs up and down on his length, his whole body starting to tense as he feels his peak quickly coming. In the back of his mind, he has no doubt he would have erupted instantly if she did this earlier. But with the two times she already made him come today, he has some endurance, though the deliciously warm and wet feel of her lips and tongue around his shaft brings him quickly to the precipice.

Hiccup's hips start to move with her as his breathing comes in heavy gulps, his hand gripping her head as she moves her lips and tongue over the top half of his length. She finds it difficult to take more of him in and quickly decides they'll need to practice this so she can rectify that.

Astrid swirls her tongue over his underside as she bobs up and down on his length, sucking hard as she slides her one hand up his torso, caressing him. With her other hand she grips the base of his
shaft, moving her hand over his length along with her lips, sometimes playing with his balls. Hiccup feels the tide coming as he starts to breathe in heavy gulps, his heart hammering in his chest. The girl moans as she slides his erection in and out of her mouth, the vibrations caressing his tender flesh as the silky wetness strokes against him.

Stifling a gasp, Hiccup tenses up as his penis starts to convulse in her mouth, his hand tightening in her hair as he suddenly sprays hot gobs of fluid inside her. Astrid gasps in shock at the force of it, struggling to take it in and quickly becoming overwhelmed at the surge, which seems worse than the first time when she saw it. Choking on the thick, sticky fluid, she pulls off of him, only for the torrent to now spray heavily on her face. She quickly shuts her eyes as gobs of the hot and sticky fluid cover her, hitting her lips, her cheeks, her eyes and getting a little in her bangs.

In spite of the mess, she grips his stiffness with her hand and pumps after she pulls off, intent on not ruining the moment for him. She hears him gasp heavily as his orgasm overwhelms him, grinning in spite of herself as she hears the suppressed moans from the boy as he struggles to be quiet.

She feels his penis stop convulsing in her hand as the spray slowly stops. She slows her strokes accordingly, though she still grips him firmly. His heavy breathing keeps a smile on her face as she cracks one eye, trying to see him through the mess she wears. As she watches, the exhausted boy lifts his head and opens his eyes to look at her.

He gasps when he sees the gobs of his white fluid covering her face, blushing profusely and huriedly sits up while whispering in a panicked voice,"Oh Gods! Astrid, I'm sorry, I'm sorry…!"

Scowling in frustration, she covers his mouth with her unoccupied hand, while squeezing his softening shaft with her other, instantly silencing him.

"Shut up, Hiccup," she says with a sigh. Sitting up next to him, she reaches down to the small belt pouch she wears and pulls out a small white cloth, which she uses to start cleaning up her face. "I came prepared this time," she says with a grin, looking at him with her one eye that she can partly open.

Sitting up with her, Hiccup takes the fabric from her hand and proceeds to start cleaning her face with soft, careful strokes. The girl smiles and sighs happily as he tends to her, and she's surprised when she finds herself blushing at his gentle touch. He looks at her with a deeply concerned face, blushing profusely as he slowly and hesitantly cleans up the mess he made. She watches him intently as he does, smiling from ear to ear at him. The boy can't meet her gaze, his attention focused on what he's doing, though he steals glances into her eyes once or twice.

"Astrid, I am so sorry," he whispers again as he wipes up the last of it, causing her grab his wrist firmly as she stares into his eyes.

"Would you shut up?" she asks forcefully, still careful to keep her voice down. "I loved doing that to you," she says with a smile. "I can't wait to do it again…"

Hiccup blushes all the more at her words, whispering nervously, "Yeah, but, I…made a mess all over you…"

She grins sheepishly, blushing profusely as she looks down. "Who…who said I didn't…enjoy that?" she asks, unable to look at him at first. She flicks an embarrased glance up at him to see his wide eyed reaction, but then she quickly looks down.

Hiccup chuckles, lifting her chin with his fingers to force her to look in his eyes. "So you liked it when I made a mess on your face?" he asks in a husky whisper, annoying her with his newfound
She should never have admitted it to him, but she couldn't let him go on berating himself over it.

"Maybe," she says, irritated with how red her cheeks must be. "But you owe me big for this one," she says, suddenly regaining her pride. She gets even more annoyed when his smile lilts into a smirk as he sees right through her. In a sharp whisper, she says, "Tomorrow night, when we meet at Toothless' cove? You're going to make me scream again…!"

Hiccup laughs softly, nodding at her words as he wraps his arms about her. She resists at first, but then leans into his embrace, holding him as she rests her head upon his shoulder.

"I will gladly do that to you," he whispers into her ear as he kisses her cheek tenderly. She sighs happily, lifting her head to meet his lips with hers, kissing him passionately. The two young lovers linger for a while in their contentment, holding each other tightly as they kiss intimately.

A soft knock at the door causes them to pull apart and look at the still closed portal in a fit of panic.

"Son?" they hear Stoic's voice outside. "Are you awake?"
Chapter 11

Hiccup and Astrid panic at the sound of Stoic's voice just outside, the two freezing for a moment, staring at the door in wide-eyed terror.

The girl then leans in to hurriedly whisper into Hiccup's ear. "Tomorrow night, Toothless' Cove!" He nods and she kisses him quickly on the lips, then leaps off the bed and silently sprints to the window in his low ceiling. Jumping up to grab the frame, Astrid hoists herself up and out, just as the door opens.

Pulling up his blankets to cover his naked lower half, Hiccup watches his girlfriend vanish in the nick of time, her shadow disappearing just as Stoic opens the door and peers inside, a candle in his grasp.

"Son?" the large man asks hesitantly, looking around the room with a furrowed brow, as if searching for something.

"Uuhh…what? What is it, Dad?" he asks, feigning a yawn as if he had just woken up. "Is everything okay?"

Stoic eyes his son sternly, then glances up at the window and back at him again. "I thought I heard voices," the large man answers, watching his son with a penetrating gaze.

"Uhh, nope!" Hiccup answers, struggling to keep the nervousness out of his voice. "Well, I mean…I might have been talking in my sleep, I was having some pretty vivid dreams there," he says with a nervous laugh and an anxious grin, eyeing his father worriedly.

The chief watches his son, falling silent for a moment.

"Why'd ye open yer window?" he asks. "Yer letting all the heat out."

Hiccup looks up at the open window, then back at his father. "Oh that?" he asks, smiling nervously. "That…I wanted some fresh air!" he says with a little too much enthusiasm. "I don't mind the cold, I am a viking, after all!" he answers with a forced smile, trying not to shiver as he realizes how cold it really is, now that Astrid isn't in bed with him to keep him warm.

Stoic narrows his gaze at the teen, then walks into the room. "Well, let's close th'window all the same," he says as he reaches the portal. The large man sticks his head out, looking around before ducking back down and pulling the shudders closed. "Ye'll probably sleep better if yer warm," he says.

"Yeah," Hiccup answers as the closing of the doors chokes out the moonlight, leaving the room dark save for the candle that Stoic carries. "You're probably right," the boy adds, thankful for the cover of darkness. Trying to keep the guilt off his face was becoming exhausting, the teen is glad for the respite.

"Well, sorry t'disturb ya, lad," Stoic says, walking back to the door. "I'll see you in th'morning," he says.


"You too," his father replies, starting to close the door, taking away the last source of light.
Hiccup breathes a quiet sigh of relief in the darkness, but then the candlelight spills back in as Stoic opens the door again.

"Oh, and Son?" Stoic asks as he peers back in at his boy.

"Yeah, Dad?" Hiccup asks, his anxiety returning as he meets his father's gaze in the dim light of the candle.

The large viking pauses for a moment. "Try and be a little more quiet next time Astrid sneaks over to have fun, hm? I'd like to get a proper night's sleep."

Hiccup's eyes grow wide as saucers as Stoic smirks at him and winks, the big man then closing the door firmly behind him as he leaves.

After pulling herself up and out of the window, Astrid moves quickly across the roof, trying desperately to be quiet as her heart pounds in her chest. Through the window behind her, she can hear Stoic and Hiccup talking. She makes it to the edge of the roof and manages to lower herself down, just in time to see Stoic's head peak out from the window and start to look about.

Her heart jumps into her throat as she quickly drops, hanging precariously by her fingers from the roof. She waits and listens as she struggles to keep her breathing quiet, the silence weighing upon her.

She hopes that she managed to duck down in time, but in truth, she has no idea if Stoic saw her or not.

A few moments later, she breathes a sigh of relief as she hears the squeak of the hinges and the thump of the shudders closing. The girl drops her head in relief for a moment, thinking a prayer of thanks before hoisting herself back up. Carefully, she climbs back down the corner of the house, jumping the last few feet to the ground and sprinting quietly back to her house.

She opens the shudders to her window again, slipping back in the way she came, listening carefully for any sign of wakefulness in her parents. Thankfully, blessedly, she's greeted by a dark and silent house. After closing the window back up, she proceeds to strip back down and don her nightgown again.

Slipping into bed, she can feel the panicked excitement from sneaking about start to fade, only to be replaced with a girlish giddiness as she realizes that she just managed to visit Hiccup in the dead of night without getting caught. A wide smile crosses her lips as she remembers what she did to him, and how it felt to have him in her mouth. She gets excited as she thinks about meeting him again tomorrow night, and what she'll make him do to her, when they have enough privacy for her to be as loud as he says she is when they...have fun together.

Astrid snuggles up happily under the blankets, thinking about how he renewed his promise to run away with her, if Stoic didn't manage to save them both from her father's machinations. Hugging herself, she remembers the joy of being with Hiccup. The happiness that floods over her easily drowns out the worry that had driven her from her bed in the first place.

The teen soon slips into a deep and contented sleep, a wide smile upon her lips as she dreams naughty dreams of the skinny young man who has changed her life so much in so short a time.

Hiccup wakes the next morning with the crow of the roosters outside. He stretches languidly in his bed, snug and warm beneath his covers. A wide smile spreads across his face as he remembers his
night with Astrid. The boy sighs contentedly, lingering for a few moments as he lets the memories wash over him. He feels amazing after such a good night's sleep.

After Stoic had left, the boy had sat in bed completely flabbergasted at his father's parting words. After a few moments, however, he realized that the man hadn't exactly shown any disapproval. Quite the opposite, in fact.

Once the boy had thought of that, going back to sleep was fairly easy, especially as he remembered what it felt like to be with Astrid again. That had led to some rather vivid dreams.

Now, Hiccup's smile grows even more as he considers what his father's reaction to discovering Astrid's visit meant to the bigger picture. There was now no doubt in the teen's mind that Stoic was trying to arrange matters for him and his girlfriend. Astrid had even given him a better insight as to how his father was attempting to manage it.

Sitting up in bed, Hiccup reaches for his crutch, using the dreaded aide to help him stand from his bed. Inwardly, he curses himself for wounding his leg, then pauses as something occurs to him.

Astrid will be pissed when she finds out what he did to himself. She'll be especially upset when he fesses up as to why.

Hanging his head with a heavy sigh, the boy thinks on the problem for a few moments before realizing there's nothing to be done for it. He'll take at least a week to heal, and he shouldn't put any weight on his stump until then, so his fake leg is off limits as Gobber had said. Hiccup wasn't about to go that long without seeing Astrid, and besides which, they had promised each other several times in the last half a day to meet tonight at Toothless' Cove tonight.

Toothless.

Hiccup frowns all the more deeply as he realizes the other price of his foolishness.

He can't fly until his leg is better.

Toothless is grounded along with him.

With a heavy heart, the teen goes about his morning routine, which now includes changing the bandages on the end of his stump. He finds moving around with the crutch to be awkward, frustrating, and limiting. The more he struggles, the more he feels like an idiot for not taking care of his leg in the first place. How easy would it have been to just remove his leg and just clean out the sand?

The boy makes his way downstairs, crawling backwards down the steep slope, and grabs some jerky to take with him to the forge. He then goes outside to see Toothless. The dragon is curled up in a tight ball, but pops its head up at the sound of the door opening. The night-black creature hops up at the sight of his best friend and bounds over to Hiccup, but then suddenly stops and sniffs at the crutch he leans on and the boy's stump and where his fake leg should be.

"Yeah, I can't wear my leg," he tells his dragon with a lamentful voice as the creature looks up at him. "Sorry, bud...that means we can't fly until I'm healed up." He heaves a heavy sigh as he rubs Toothless' neck, the guilt churning in his stomach.

The lizard warbles sympathetically and leans into the teen, nearly knocking him over. "Ooof! Hey there," he says as he struggles to keep his balance on his one leg and the crutch. The dragon continues to nuzzle against him, and Hiccup realizes that Toothless is trying to comfort him.
"Aw, thanks, bud," he says with a warm smile. "You're a good friend, you know that?" he asks. "I'll make it up to you, don't worry." The teen then turns his attention to the dragon's store of food, with the intent of feeding him. After a quick inspection, he realizes that his father must have already taken care of it, by virtue of a missing basket that the lad quickly sees has been dumped into its proper place in the yard.

Hiccup guesses that tonight he'll be getting a lecture about feeding Toothless next to the door.

"Well, I should get down to the forge," he tells his friend, still rubbing the dragon's neck as the large creature continues to lean against him affectionately. The dragon turns his head and licks Hiccup, covering his front and face with a slimy coating of drool, then trots over to the nearly empty basket and helps himself to some more fish.

"Ugh…yeah," Hiccup says as he reaches for a towel hanging on the laundry line just beside the door. "Love you too, bud…"

By the time Hiccup makes his way down to the forge, the sun is completely above the horizon and people have started to emerge from their homes to go about their daily routines. The boy found walking on the crutch instead of his fake leg to be a challenge, since he spent almost no time doing so after he awoke from his recovery. Half of the trip down, the lad found himself thinking about ways to improve upon the crutch, since it seemed he was going to be stuck with it for a little while, yet.

He opens the door to the shop, struggling with the heavy weight of the portal while trying to balance on his crutch. Inside he finds Gobber already at work with the forge lit, though its flames are not burning very brightly.

"Morning, Gobber," the teen greets his mentor and friend, trying to keep the sullenness out of his voice as he wonders what he can possibly do in the forge without use of his one leg.

"Good morning, Hiccup!" the burly viking enthusiastically greets him with a smile, briefly turning his attention away from the plow that he was fixing. "Good to see you here, so bright and early!"

"Yeah, well, I'm not sure how useful I'm going to be without my leg," he replies, only partly succeeding at not sounding bitter.

"Well, I could always use ya t'prop the door open if it gits too hot," the smith says with a grin. Hiccup glares at him, causing Gobber to smirk even more. "Or, you could start by pumping th'billows t'heat up the forge. Y'don' weigh that much less without yer new leg that you can't do that, I'll wager."

The boy sighs, making his way to the billows as the smith continues. "After that, you can man th'window and see to th'customers," Gobber tells him as the boy starts to work the heavy equipment, breathing life into the flames of the forge.

"Gobber," the boy says between gasping breaths as he works the heavy machinery, "I'm telling you, we need to retrofit this so you can have a dragon fire the forge." The smith gives his apprentice a sidelong, irritated glance as the boy pushes his idea yet again. "I mean, making fire kinda comes naturally to dragons, it'd be sooo much easier for them to light and heat the forge than little old me on this big, heavy pump…"

"Oh, aye," Gobber answers with his standard rebuttle, "and it'd be just as easy fer th'beast t'accidentally burn th'place down!"
Frustrated with the man's continued refusals, the teen answers for not the first time, "Gobber, I have a new forge design that would be as safe as possible. There's safety valves and emergency sprinklers. Besides, the dragon we'd pick wouldn't do that...it'd be trained to light the forge, and not set the shop on fire." He pauses, then adds, "it'd be a natural thing for your dragon to do, if you'd ever take one..."

"I have no problems with dragons anymore, Hiccup," the large viking answers as he brings a plow blade to the fire to start work on it, "but I jest don' see myself having one, is all."

Hiccup looks at the fire with satisfaction and nods at it before looking over at the smith with a knowing glance. The lad picks up his crutch and makes his way to the counter where a few vikings have already lined up, waiting to do business. "That's just because you haven't met the right dragon, yet," he tells Gobber before he starts to give his attention to the first in line.

"Well, when I meet th'right dragon, I'll be sure t'let you know," the smith answers, tired of the topic. Hiccup briefly glances back and smirks at the man's stubbornness, then faces forward again and listens to his customer. The two smiths stop talking for a while as Hiccup sees to their clients, collecting orders for things to be made from some and from others gathering various implements that require repair.

After the initial queue has been dealt with, the smith and his apprentice busy themselves with the various tasks in the shop. Around lunchtime, Gobber sends Hiccup to see the healer, for her to look at his leg. The woman changes the dressing on his stump, applying a strange paste to his wound in the process. When the boy returns, he tells Gobber that Gothi said what they both already knew. Hiccup's stump would be healed enough to use his leg in about a week or so, if he didn't stress it. He is also supposed to visit her daily to get a fresh application of the medicine to speed healing.

Throughout the rest of the day, Gobber finds no shortage of work for the young man to take on, even without the use of his one leg.

About the time the sun approaches the horizon again, Hiccup glances back at his mentor. The shop has been quiet for about an hour and the street is empty, as most of the folks in the village have found their way to the Great Hall for the evening meal. Today being Friday, everyone stopped work early, so it was still about late afternoon.

"So," Hiccup asks with a leading voice. Gobber glances over at the lad's tone, but promptly returns his attention to his work. "Uhm...I was wondering if...you could tell me what Dad's plan is?" he asks anxiously, nervous about broaching this topic.

"Well," Gobber answers as he eyes his work critically, "Stoic is always th'man with th'plan," he answers cryptically, grinning slightly.

"Come on, Gobber," the boy laments, "throw me a bone, here. After what we talked about last night-"

"You should know t'leave well enough alone," Gobber snaps, cutting the teen off as he looks over sternly while pointing his steel claw at him. Hiccup snaps his jaw shut, feeling frustrated by the situation. "You need t'trust Stoic," the smith tells him.

"I trust him," Hiccup pouts, looking wounded at the accusation, even though last night he hadn't felt that way at all. "But...I'd feel a lot better to know what was going on," he adds as he hobbles back to the shop window with a mind to sit on the stool there. His good leg bothers him after standing most of the day, and since things were quiet, he thought he'd avail himself of a seat.
Gobber chuckles at the boy's answer as he watches the skinny lad seat himself at the window and rest his crutch against its counter. "Aye, wouldn't we all?" the large smith answers with a sardonic tone. "Jest you be sure not to do anything foolish to cause trouble," he warns. "Yer father's got everything under control, there's no need fer you to try an' fix things yerself."

The boy frowns in irritation at the large viking, asking bitterly, "How am I supposed to know what could cause problems if I don't know what the plan is?"

Gobber narrows his gaze at his apprentice. "You know what I'm talkin' about," he warns, staring intently at the lad. Hiccup looks back at the smith with a sour expression, causing the man to grin all the more.

"Aye, that's what I thought," he tells the boy, nodding and grinning in amusement. Hiccup just continues to glare at the smith.

Glancing behind the lad, Gobber smirks wryly and says, "Ya gots a customer, Hiccup…"

Sighing heavily, Hiccup turns around on the stool to look out the window. He nearly jumps out of his skin as he sees Astrid. The girl is leaning on the shop counter, watching him with a wide smile and adoring eyes. He immediately swings his arm out to knock his crutch to the floor with a wooden clatter. The girl blinks in surprise, then giggles at his reaction.

"Astrid!" he says in shock as he tries to wrap his head around seeing her here, now, in clear daylight. He feels terrified that she might have seen him with his leg off, and hopes that she didn't notice his crutch before he sent it to the ground. "What're…what're you doing here?!" he asks in concern, looking around into the street behind her. The only person he sees is a blonde woman in a plain dress, watching the two with a beatific smile upon her face.

"I couldn't wait to see you," she says eagerly with a wide smile. Hiccup half smiles at her, but looks about again nervously. Impulsively, the girl grabs him by his shirt and pulls him half out of the window to press her lips to his in a sweet kiss. He moans against her lips as his eyes slowly close and he kisses her back happily, but then he remembers their audience.

Pulling back, he flicks his gaze behind her and whispers against her cheek, "Astrid, we're not alone…!"

As she releases Hiccup in a panic, the girl glances over her shoulder. The woman waves at them as Astrid looks back at Hiccup. "That's my Mom, dummy," she says. "We're out doing errands. I talked her into letting me come here to see you, since everyone is over at the Great Hall eating dinner right now…"

"Oh…” he answers, looking relived and relaxing a little bit. He then smirks at the girl standing on the other side of the window and grabs her arms, pulling her to him as he leans in to kiss once more. Astrid yelps in surprise, but sighs happily against his lips as they linger for another few moments, kissing deeply before parting.

"A girl could get used to that," she tells him in a coy voice, looking dreamily into his eyes as they part. He smiles at her from ear to ear.

"I intend to make you very used to it…” he says with a wicked grin, causing the girl to blush, even as she beams at him.

"Astrid…!" the woman calls with a sense of urgency in her voice, causing the girl to look back at her briefly.
"Okay, Mom…!" she answers before turning back to Hiccup, who frowns with concern.

"We can't stay, of course," she says with a sigh. Hiccup frowns, but nods in understanding. "Besides just wanting to see you, I also wanted to let you know that Vali stopped by our house this afternoon. He and Dad had a brief conversation, which got pretty heated." Hiccup raises an eyebrow at her, and she smirks conspiratorily at him. "That's when my Dad kicked Mom and me out so he could talk with Vali alone."

The teens both grin as she adds, "you could hear my Dad shouting at him from the end of the street."

Hiccup smiles widely, feeling a swell of excitement at the news. "Let's hope it's enough," he says as he looks into her eyes.

"I've been praying for it," she says. "I'm sure I'll find out when we get home, and I'll tell you all about it tonight," she adds, her voice dropping to a whisper at the last part.

Hiccup nods eagerly. "I can't wait until then," he whispers back with a wicked grin as he meets her gaze, the look in his eyes causing Astrid to blush furiously.

"Me neither," she answers with a devilish smile of her own, as she thinks about what she'll make Hiccup do to her.

"Astrid!" her mother calls in a more demanding tone.

"Gotta go," the blonde teen says urgently, leaning in to kiss him one last time, cupping his face in her hands. Her lips passionately press against his as she impatiently invades his mouth with her tongue. The boy moans weakly while responding in kind, hugging her as best as he can through the shop window while kissing her thoroughly.

She pulls away quickly to look into his eyes, whispering, "Love you. See you tonight!"

He nods, grabbing her hand and squeezing it while smiling widely at her. "Love you too. See you there!" he answers, to which she nods with a happy sigh and a sappy smile, resting his elbow on the counter and his chin in his hand.

Gobber looks on, smirking wryly at the sight of his love struck apprentice. "Careful there, Hiccup," he says, causing the boy to turn to glance at him with a hesitant gaze. The smith grins for a moment before adding, "Don't go and swoon on me, ya might fall an' hurt yerself on all those sharp and dangerous objects laying all around ya on yer way down."

The boy's cheeks quickly turn scarlet as he fidgets. What Gobber says next only adds to his embarrassment. "Will you be wantin' t'write some love sonnets, then?" the big man asks with a playful grin, adding, "Perhaps go an' gather a bouquet of flowers fer th'girl?"

The boy clears his throat as he tries to stop blushing, but finds it an impossible task. He opens his mouth to fire back a reply, but then hears a voice shout from behind him, "There you are!"

Turning in surprise to look out the window again, he sees Snoutlout, Fishlegs, Tuffnut and Ruffnut all walking towards the shop.
"Oh, heya guys," he answers with a half smile. He'd much rather be sharing in Astrid's company, of course, but he also has found happiness in the new friendships he'd made with the other teens from his Dragon Training class.

"What's going on?" he asks them.

"We were looking all over for you yesterday," Tuffnut answers as he and the other teens come to stand around the shop window. "Where were you?" he asks in a confused and perhaps even hurt voice. Hiccup smirks at the apparent concern, wondering idly why they were curious.

He shrugs, "I took Toothless out for the day," he says, intent on staying as close to the truth as possible. He really didn't like lying, especially to his friends and family. "I didn't get back until after dark," he says further with a shrug, trying to act nonchalant while watching their reactions.

"Ya know, Astrid said the same thing when we asked her where she was yesterday," Fishlegs observes innocently, causing the other three teens to exchange glances at his words. Hiccup sits up a little as he starts to get nervous, while the large teen amends his own statement with, "except, she said she was flying on Stormfly, not Toothless."

"Huh! Ya don't say," Hiccup says, doing his best to stay cool, though he fears he's not doing a very good job of it. "Sooo, what's up guys? Need something for your dragons or something?" Snoutlout, Tuffnut, and Ruffnut all glance at him with suspicious gazes, their brows furrowed. The young apprentice forces a nervous smile as they study him silently.

Hiccup is sure that they've figured it out, when suddenly Gobber calls out from behind, "I think they're here to have you settle who's dragon is the smartest. That's why they were looking for you yesterday." The teens all look over at the smith as he adds with a grin, "I couldn't help them with it yesterday, though having thought about it overnight, I'd have to say Hookfang is the smartest."

"There, see?" he asks, "I told you!" he says to the twins who both bristle at the judgement from Gobber, staring daggers at the barrel chested teen.

Hiccup watches, then turns to look back at the smith, who's looking on with a mischievous, knowing grin. His apprentice conspiratorially shares in the smile, answering, "I dunno, Gobber," he pauses to glance out the window at the other teens to make sure he's got their attention. "I'm not sure we can just discount the Ziffleback…I mean, two heads are better than one…"

Snoutlout fumes at this while the twins high-five one another, then start to make taunting noises at the burly teen.

The large smith smirks, answering, "Hm, you make a good point Hiccup, but those Monsterous Nightmares were always the most dangerous of dragons, back in th'day…" His apprentice looks at him thoughtfully, as if he were considering the merits of his argument.

"That's true too," he says, while Snoutlout crosses his arms smugly and sneers at the twins. Fishlegs watches on like a spectator at a tennis game, gleefully watching the change in fortunes of each side.

"This is a pretty hard problem," Hiccup adds, "I'm really not sure how to decide," he says further, looking like he's deep in thought.

"Well," Gobber answers, "I think there may be only one way to solve this," he says as he and Hiccup share a knowing gaze.

Hiccup lifts an eyebrow, "You mean a contest?" he asks his teacher, who nods. The teen looks back
at the others standing outside the window. "Well," he says with a grin. "If you guys want an answer, it looks like you'll have to help us figure it out…"

"A contest?" Snoutlout asks with a grin.

"What kind of contest?" Tuffnut wonders, looking at Hiccup with a devious smile, thinking he might already have the advantage, given the initial favor the scrawny teen had shown his dragon.

Hiccup looks at the teens outside his window with a thoughtful gaze, before he says, "I'm not sure just yet." The others look disappointed. "But I'll come up with something…” The four look at each other with eager, knowing grins. They had all learned to respect what Hiccup's creativity could produce.

"But for now, I'm going to dinner," he proclaims and then hops down off of the stool. Dropping to the floor, he picks up his crutch and hefts himself up again, trying to ignore the four sets of eyes that watch him silently.

"What happened to your leg, Hiccup?" Fishlegs blurts out, earning him an elbow in the ribs from Snoutlout, the other three teens glaring at the tall boy. Since the battle at the Dragons' Nest, the four had become rather protective of Hiccup, quickly bringing him into the fold.

The young smith's apprentice sighs before turning back to his friends. He smiles sheepishly. "It's… kind of an adjustment, learning how to live with a fake leg," he explains, hoping a vague answer will be enough. "I…kinda hurt myself because I wasn't taking care of it the way I should have been…"

"Are you…gonna be okay?" Snoutlout hesitantly asks. Hiccup isn't sure if the burly teen is nervous about broaching the topic of his missing leg, or is just unfamiliar with showing concern for someone else. He smiles at his friends reassuringly.

"Yeah, I'll be fine," he says. "I just need to heal a little bit before I can wear my leg again," he answers with a shrug, turning again to the door.

"Hey, uh…can we…join you for dinner?" Tuffnut asks, causing Hiccup to look back again. He lifts and eyebrow as he sees his four new friends watching eagerly for his answer. After the way things had been for so many years, he's still not used to the other teens looking up to him the way they do now.

"Yeah, sure," he says with a genuine smile, which only grows when he sees them all light up at his answer.

"Let's go," he adds as he exits the shop with a nod to Gobber. The smith smiles at him as he starts to close up the shop. Hiccup hobbles out the door and makes his way towards his friends, who all circle around him, the five of them making their way to the dining hall.
Chapter 12

As the five teens make their way from the forge to the Mead Hall, Tuffnut suddenly pipes up, "Hey, we should go find Astrid!"

Hiccup's eyes grow wide in surprise before the boy quickly tries to put on a nonchalant face. Tuffnut, Ruffnut, and Snoutlout were watching him like a flight of hawks, however, and so catch his initial reaction. The three teens smirk to one another while Hiccup stays completely silent.

"Yeah," Ruffnut answers, "let's see if she wants to join us!" The three teens smirk at each other as they watch Hiccup struggle to keep the anxiety off of his face.

"Hey, that's a great idea!" Fishlegs says obliviously with a wide smile, totally unaware of the unspoken drama unfolding in front of him. The large teen then furrows his brow. "Wait…wouldn't that get her in trouble with her father?" he asks, remembering what Ruffnut had told the group yesterday.

Seizing upon the opportunity, Hiccup stops walking. The rest of the group stops with him as he feigns confusion and asks, "What do you mean?" The scrawny lad glances at Fishlegs, trying his best to appear genuinely confused, "Why would her father be upset if she ate with us?" The other three teens glance at each other thoughtfully, trying to gauge whether or not his reaction is genuine.

Ruffnut jumps in before the larger teen can answer. "Yeah, uhm…" she pauses as Hiccup looks at her with a furrowed brow. She glances at her brother and Snoutlout, who hesitate and glance at each other before then nodding at her.

Ruffnut looks back at Hiccup. "Her father…told her she can't see you." She says cautiously, watching the boy intently for his reaction, also with a measure of concern for him.

Putting on his best act, Hiccup drops his jaw and looks at Ruffnut in 'stunned' silence. "You're kidding!" he gasps, looking at the other teens, as if he needed their affirmation of this Midguard-shattering news. Although unbeknownst to Hiccup their source of this news was Ruffnut, the boys nonetheless nod sagely to confirm this tragic turn of events, their faces mirrored portraits of sympathy.

"I can't believe it…!" the smith's apprentice adds, looking away from the others as if in shock.

"Yeah," Ruffnut answers sympathetically, "that's why she hasn't gone near you since you woke up."

Hiccup furrows his brow, trying his best to look downcast while saying, "Well that…does explain a lot…" He hopes the topic might change soon, as he doesn't feel very convincing in his act.

"Yeah, sorry about that, buddy," Snoutlout says as sympathetically as he can manage, clapping the smaller teen on the back, nearly knocking him over. The burly boy really was having a hard time being compassionate, but he was trying his best. "But, don't worry, we've got a plan!" he says enthusiastically.

Hiccup's eyebrows shoot up into his hairline as he suddenly finds feigning his surprise to be unnecessary, it now comes quite naturally. "Oh…!" he exclaims, not yet sure if this is good or bad news. "You, uh…you do, huh?" Snoutlout and the twins smile and nod enthusiastically, followed shortly after by Fishlegs. By the look on the large teen's face, it took him a moment to remember what the strapping young lad was talking about.
"You have a plan to…uh," Hiccup starts to answer, hesitating before finishing, "to do what, exactly…?"

"We're going to help you and Astrid get together!" Tuffnut answers enthusiastically, drawing Hiccup's gaze to him. The twins, Snoutlout, and Fishlegs all beam excitedly at the look of genuine surprise on his face.

The smaller teen starts to slowly smile at his friends as the significance of what they told him sets in. Since their battle with the Green Death, Hiccup had been somewhat unsure of how genuine their friendship was. Part of him worried it was merely a case of hero worship, or perhaps just sucking up to the chief's son. This gesture puts things in a whole new light, however. The four other teens grin back at him, clearly proud of his reaction.

"Wow," he says with a wide smile, looking at each of them in turn. "Thanks, guys," he says. "That's really great of you." The four look at each other with congratulatory nods.

"So, what's the plan?" Hiccup asks, causing the others' expressions to fall and look suddenly apprehensive and unsure.

"Uh," Tuffnut starts to answer, "We're still…" he looks at the others, who shrug at him. He looks at Hiccup with an apologetic half-smile, "we're still kinda…working out the details…"

The scrawny lad grins affectionately at his friends. "That's okay," he says as he starts to hobble again towards the Great Hall. "I'm sure you'll come up with something." The others walk with him, looking a little crestfallen now, even as Hiccup considers it's probably best they don't get involved.

"We've talked a lot about it," Fishlegs explains as the five make their way, "but we can't figure out how to convince her Dad to let her see you." Hiccup smiles sublimely, truly flattered by their concern for him and Astrid.

Tuffnut chimes in with a low, conspiratorial whisper. "But we did decide we could at least help you two see each other without getting caught…" The twin looks around the empty street as if to ensure no eavesdroppers were about. Hiccup smiles in slightly at this, although he's a little unsure about it. He and Astrid had decided that only his father, her mother, and Gobber should know about them being a couple, and he isn't certain how much he can trust his new friends to keep something like this quiet. They tend to be a little careless.

"Really?" Hiccup asks, failing to keep the trepidation out of his voice. "So how, uh…how will you…do that?" he asks, with a hint of anxiety. Given his experiences with the others thus far, he didn't have much confidence in their ability to achieve something this subtle.

Tuffnut smirks at Hiccup's reaction, sharing a look with his sister, who then looks to Hiccup and observes, "Something wrong, Hiccup?" she asks with a grin to mirror Tuffnut's. "You don't seem so sure in our ability to keep it a secret…"

"What?" he asks nervously. "Why, uhm…why would you say that?" Hiccup glances anxiously at the twins, worried about offending them, especially since they want to do something nice for him and Astrid.

Tuffnut moves to the other side of Hiccup so he and his sister flank the shorter teen and then puts his arm around his shoulders, smirking at him. His sister does the same as her brother says quietly, "You've got to understand, my friend, if there's one thing Ruffnut and I are good at, it's not getting caught…" Hiccup blinks in surprise at the other boy, lifting an eyebrow before glancing over at Ruffnut, who smirks in the same way, nodding knowingly.
The five of them reach the Mead Hall. The noise and bustle within spills out of the large building into the street, as does the delicious smells of roasted meats and mulled mead.

Ruffnut adds, "but we'll talk about that later." She exchanges a glance at Tuffnut, who nods knowingly. Both twins step away from Hiccup, watching him with amused smirks.

The smith's apprentice blinks in confusion a few times as the other four teens trade conspiratorial looks with one another, grinning in eager anticipation. The smaller teen hesitates, watching the other four walk up the stairs.

"You coming, Hiccup?" Fishlegs asks, looking back upon realizing he isn't with them anymore. The others stop and look back expectantly.

"Yeah," Hiccup says with a sigh as he looks down at the stairs with dread, the simple device suddenly presenting him with such a difficult obstacle. "I'm coming…" He's not about to crawl up the stairs in front of his friends, but he isn't very confident in his ability to move up them with one leg off and a crutch.

Gritting his teeth, he sets his crutch on the first step, braces himself and tries to hop up. He doesn't make it and nearly looses his balance, quickly planting the crutch into the ground next to him to stay up right. With a heavy sigh, he resigns himself to having to crawl up the stairs, but only after he's alone.

He lifts his head to tell his friends to go on in without him, but before he can open his mouth, he yelps as he suddenly finds himself being lifted up off of the ground. Snoutlout and Fishlegs are on either side of him, each having grabbed one of his arms and one of his legs to lift him up. The two carry him effortlessly up the short flight of stairs.

The scrawny teen looks over at Snoutlout in surprise, the barrel-chested lad grinning back at him before speaking.

"Don't worry. We've got ya, Hiccup."

The smith's apprentice face slowly blooms into a smile as he looks at the lad, who continues to grin confidently. Hiccup then glances over at Fishlegs, who also smiles happily at his friend.

"Thanks guys," Hiccup says with a wide smile, finding his balance once he's set down upon the top of the stairs.

The five teens make their way into the noisy Mead Hall, smiling together as they set about finding their dinner.

Astrid and her mother walk away from the blacksmith's shop, the girl sighing lamentfully as they turn the corner and she can no longer see her boyfriend. Her mother watches her with a knowing look and a sweet smile, happy beyond words at the joy she had just seen written across her daughter's face.

"I don't think I remember ever seeing you this happy before," the woman comments, her gaze lingering upon the girl as they walk along.

Surprised at her words, Astrid looks up at her mother with wide eyes and a blush on her cheeks. Meeting the woman's gaze, her lips slowly bloom into a shy smile. She hesitates for a few moments before she speaks. "He's amazing, Mom," the girl finally tells her, sighing whistfully. "Just being with him makes the world brighter."
Her mother chuckles and gives her a knowing smile. "I never thought I'd see you like this," she says fondly. Astrid blushes all the more, looking away.

"So you're in love with him, then," the woman gently asserts, watching her daughter's face intently. The girl hesitates, the directness of her mother's words surprising her as always.

Quickly enough, though, she nods with certainty. "I am," she answers with finality. "I've never felt this way before, about anyone." Her mother smiles sweetly, watching her daughter while the two make their way through the streets. "He's the one, Mom, I just know it…"

The girl hesitates, her smile falling. "I only hope we can be together," she adds, her voice choked with worry.

The woman walking along side her likewise stops smiling. Wrapping her arm around Astrid's shoulders, she hugs her daughter to her as they walk. "Have faith, child," she tells her with a reassuring voice. Astrid smiles slightly at the tone her mother used, leaning in against her. "The Gods are just," the woman adds, pausing before she continues with an amused voice, "besides, I doubt Stoic will let your father keep you away from his son for very long…" Astrid smiles at her words, thinking about what Hiccup told her last night.

As they approach their house, the two women slow their pace, both looking apprehensively at the door.

"Mom," Astrid begins, "there's something you need to know, before we go in there…"

Stopping altogether, the woman looks down at her daughter, concerned by her tone of voice. "What is it, Astrid?" she asks with a worried voice.

Looking down at her feet, the girl hesitates before saying in a small voice, "When I went to see Hiccup yesterday…" she pauses to gather her courage, her cheeks flushed a bright red. "We were… intimate…"

Her mother draws in a deep breath, frowning while asking in a hushed whisper, "Astrid, did you have sex with him…?"

Astrid hurriedly looks up, shaking her head. "No, Mom," she says emphatically, then drops her voice to a whisper. "We didn't do…that, but…" she pauses, looking down and closing her eyes as she blushes all the more. "We did do…other stuff…"

Her mother sighs, a little in relief and a little in exhasperation, looking at her daughter with a lifted eyebrow. "Well, I see somebody thinks they're all grown up, now…"

"I'm glad you told me this," the woman says, watching her daughter intently. "But why now? You said I needed to know before we went inside…?"

Astrid clears her throat, nodding. "Yeah," she says, pausing before she forces herself to look up at her mother. "It's not exactly…a secret…Vali found out…" Her mother's eyebrows raise up into the long, golden tresses that fall from her head as she immediately guesses what's to follow.

"That's why Dad was yelling at him when he came to talk about the contract," Astrid goes on to confirm her mother's suspicions. "He was using it to justify offering a low bride price."

The woman sighs heavily, nodding at Astrid's words. "I see," she says, pursing her lips. She looks at the door to their household, staring silently at the building they call home, though it hasn't felt like
one to her for a very long time.

Looking back at her daughter, she says, "You know what we'll be walking into, then…"

Astrid looks up at her mother, nearly in tears. "I know, Mom," she says, hesitating before she adds, "I'm sorry…"

The woman tsks and smiles at her daughter with understanding, pulling her into an embrace. "There, there, child," she says. "You have nothing to be sorry for." Astrid holds her mother tightly as the woman kisses her on top of her head. "It's not your fault that your father has become such a monster. You didn't do anything wrong," she says. Astrid looks up at her in confusion.

Her mother smiles, brushing some of the errant locks of hair from her daughter's face. "Does Hiccup love you, as much as you love him?" she asks tenderly. Astrid nods slowly, watching the woman intently. Her mother smiles. "Then you were both very responsible in what you did," she says. "You shared your love with one another, but you didn't do anything that you both might regret in, oh I don't know…about nine months or so…” She grins wryly at her daughter, her voice somewhat playful at the end.

Astrid giggles in spite of herself at her mother's words, smiling now at the woman who always seems to know how to make her feel better. The girl then blushes. "Actually," she begins, "it was Hiccup that said no," she admits guiltily. "I was ready…” she pauses, then sighs before forcing herself to say, "no, I was…pushing him…to have sex with me."

Her mother's eyes again grow wide, but she grins at her daughter in wry amusement. "Truly?" she asks, watching her daughter intently as the girl looks up at her and nods, swallowing heavily. "You were insisting on it, and he said no?"

Astrid sighs, nodding. "Not just once, either," she admits guiltily, struggling to keep looking up at her mother, who stares at her, shocked. The woman then smirks wryly at her daughter, chuckling to herself. Astrid blushes all the more, looking down again.

"Well then," the woman says, "it seems you really have found the best catch on the island." Astrid glances back up at her through her bangs. "There's probably no other man in Berk or beyond who would have refused you, when all he wanted to do was say yes…”

The girl's smile slowly blooms at the woman's words. Though she had known that truth in the back of her mind, it made a huge difference to hear it spoken aloud.

"Yeah," she says happily. "You're right…”

Smiling back at her daughter, she leans in to kiss the girl upon her forehead. "So don't worry about the two of you being kept apart by your father," the woman tells her with a beatific smile. "I won't let that happen."

Astrid overflows with joy at her mother's words, her heart surging with the first true feeling of hope that she's felt since her father first forbade her from seeing Hiccup. "Really? How?" she asks her mother in a small but eager voice.

The woman shakes her head, smiling still as she caresses her daughter's face. "That's not for you to worry about, child," she says gently. beaming at her daughter, the one thing she has left in this life to love. "Leave it to me."

Looking back at their house, she says, "It won't happen right away, but I know now what I must do." Her daughter looks at her with a confused expression. The woman glances back at Astrid,
taking the girl's hand in hers. "For today, we must go and face your father's wrath."

Astrid swallows heavily, fear setting in her heart. She squeezes her mother's hand tightly, nodding as resolutely as she can.

The two women turned as one and walked into their home, shutting the door behind them.

"I'm telling you, we need to have a race," Snoutlout says emphatically to Hiccup before taking a huge bite out of his roasted chicken. Two cleaned caracasses sit piled high on the plate before him as he starts on the third.

Sighing, Hiccup puts his finished turkey leg down. His plate is otherwise empty. "Yes, that sounds like it could be fun, but that's not going to measure which dragon is the smartest!" he replies in an frustrated voice, for not the first time this afternoon.

The five teens have been eating their dinner together in the Mead Hall, brainstorming about what kind of dragon contest they could have. Hiccup had started off by suggesting various tests to see which dragon had the better reasoning skills, such as teaching them to sort different sized rocks or playing memory games. However, the other teens had quickly dismissed his ideas as boring and started talking about contests that involved speed, stamina, and strength.

Hiccup found himself annoyed to no end that these contests didn't answer the original question, even though he really didn't care who's dragon was the most intelligent.

Besides, he already knew it was Toothless.

It just would have been nice to show everyone that.

"I think a race would be perfect!" Tuffnut says with a grin. "Cuz I know we will totally win that one!" he says with a nod to his sister, whose wicked smile mirrors her brother's, the two bumping fists.

"Yeah, but we should make it more than just a race," Fishlegs adds. "We need to add something that makes it harder."

Exasperated, Hiccup throws up his hands. "Well, why don't you just toss a sheep up into the air with a catapult?" he asks, his voice is dripping with sarcasm. "We'll see which racer can catch it and fly it across the finish line without losing it to another player!" he adds hastily, trying to put forward an idea so ludicrous that it will make the other teens realize how ridiculous this entire conversation is.

Hiccup waits for the response that his idea is stupid and lame, but is surprised by the silence. Looking around the table, he sees his friends watching him with wide eyes and huge smiles. He slumps in his seat as he realizes they completely love his idea.

"Hiccup - that…is…PERFECT!" Snoutlout exclaims excitedly, half jumping out of his seat.

"Yeah!" Ruffnut answers, adding, "We could do more than one, too! Whoever gets the most sheep wins!"

"Oh! OH!" Fishlegs waves his hands excitedly to get everyone's attention. "What if the different sheep were worth different point values?" he asks enthusiastically.

"That is awesome!" Tuffnut answers, grinning as he adds with exuberance, "We could paint the sheep different colors to show how much their worth! And stuff them into baskets after crossing the
"Oh, and we could make it an obstacle course, too!" Snoutlout proclaims eagerly. "Like, you have to weave around buildings and rocks and stuff!

Hiccup looks on with his mouth half hanging open, dumbfounded as the other teens build fervently upon his entirely satirical suggestion. He slaps his forehead in frustration, dragging his hand over his face.

"Hiccup, you are AWESOME!" Tuffnut exclaims, drawing the smaller teen's gaze as his hand drops back to the table. Hiccup lifts his eyebrows at him in disbelief.

"Yeah, like…we knew you'd come up with the best idea, EVER!" Ruffnut answers, the teens watching him with an admiring gaze. Hiccup glances over at her, the hint of a smile forming at the corners of his mouth.

"How do you think of such cool things?" Fishlegs asks excitedly. Hiccup grins a little as he looks over at the large boy.

"I cannot wait to try this," Snoutlout says, bursting with enthusiasm, clenching his fists in front of him. "Hiccup, you've totally outdone yourself this time!" The smith's apprentice smiles widely at last, looking at Snoutlout. His lips lilt into an amused smirk as he thinks on the irony of the situation, though he feels heartfelt gratitude at his friends' enthusiastic appreciation for his contribution. Even if he had meant it all as a joke.

"Wow," he says, looking at each in turn. "Thanks, guys." The other four teens smile back at him, then nod at each other.

Just then the door to the Mead Hall opens as a couple of vikings leave the building. Glancing over, Hiccup sees how the sun is now getting close to the horizon. He thinks about the long walk to Toothless' Cove and realizes that he doesn't want to have to do that in the dark with just one leg.

"Well," he says, turning around on the bench and grabbing his crutch, pushing himself up with its aide. "This has been fun, and as much as I love hanging out with you guys, it's late. I…really should get going." He says with an apologetic smile as he situates his crutch under his arm and gains his balance.

The other four teens look at him with confused expressions, peering back at the door as it opens again. They see the sun is yet above the horizon, and glance back at the smith's apprentice.

"Uh, like, the sun is still up, Hiccup," Ruffnut says in answer.

"Yeah, I mean, it's not even night time." Snoutlout says irritably, going on to ask, "Why do you need to go?"

Hiccup's mind races furiously as he looks at his friends, hurriedly trying to come up with a plausible story in the face of their upset and glaring stares. "I, uh, I need to go feed Toothless," he answers quickly, "plus I've, uh…got a lot of chores that my Dad wants me to do," he adds with a nervous smile, trying his best to sound convincing.

From the looks he's getting, it's not working.

"On a Friday night?" Tuffnut asks dubiously, lifting an eyebrow as he watches Hiccup critically.
"Who's parent gives them chores on a Friday?" Snoutlout asks, looking sideways at the scrawny lad. Hiccup shrugs, still forcing his nervous smile. "What can I say?" he asks, "It's the life of a chieftan's son, ya know? Lots of responsibility and…stuff…"

The other teens exchange skeptical glances with each other as he starts to edge himself away from the group. "So, uh…I'll see you guys tomorrow, okay?" he asks, still smiling anxiously at them.

"Yeah, sure," Fishlegs says, a measure of disappointment and irritation in his voice. Hiccup's smile falls, feeling bad as he sees same sentiment written upon the faces of all his friends.

Hiccup waves half-heartedly, and turns to go, gritting his teeth. In doing so, he completely misses the conspiratorial look the four share as he starts to hobble away.

"Hey, Hiccup…” Tuffnut calls out with an impish tone, causing the lad to stop and look back at them over his shoulder. The smaller teen furrows his brow with concern as the lot of them all grin at him mischeviously. They say nothing for a moment or two, leaving Hiccup to squirm under their collective gaze.

Ruffnut breaks the silence.

"Tell Astrid we said hi."

Astrid walks follows behind as her mother as the older woman resolutely opens the door to their house and walks confidently inside. Although she seems ready to handle what will follow, the girl that follows behind is downright afraid.

She hates feeling this way, but her father is such a hard and dangerous man that she can only imagine what he will do to her because of the news that Vali had brought. Her father would have been furious enough in the first place with just the news of her behavior, but for those same actions to have directly damaged or even destroyed his plans, it leaves the the young teen in dread fear for her safety.

It wouldn't be the first time that her father had struck her or her mother. It wasn't often that he hit them, and he usually only managed to get in one blow before Astrid's mother would threaten him with divorce, which always put a stop to his brutality. Most of the time he only hit them when he had been drinking.

But still, the threat of violence always hung in the air like a foul stentch.

This time, though, Astrid worries it might go well beyond the usual mild abuse. She wonders if her mother would be able to stop him once more with words alone.

Astrid wouldn't go down without a fight, of course. But still, her father is such a bear of a man that she knows there is little chance she could prevail.

As the two enter into the dimly lit household, they look around for Thorsten. The firepit is not burning as brightly as it typically does, and the windows are closed, in spite of the sun still being up. Astrid closes the door behind them as her mother stays in front, ready to protect her daughter if they face the worst. The girl feels like she should be the first to face him since this is all her fault. Besides, her mother is not a fighter, though sometimes the teen finds herself forgetting that, given how her mother stands up to the brute they have to live with.

"So the young harlot and the shrew return."
The two stiffen at the sound of his bitter voice, coming immediately from their left. By the slurring of his words, they can tell that he's drunk again. They can't see him yet, as their eyes are still adjusting to the dim light, but they can tell that he's very close.

Astrid's mother reaches back to grab her daughter's arm protectively. "We had a very fruitful trip to the market," the woman says, completely ignoring the man's scornful remark. She answers in a casual tone, though Astrid can hear the undercurrent of tension in her voice. "We were able to buy the materials for Astrid's wedding dress quite inexpensively."

The two stand in silence, waiting anxiously for him to reply.

"There won't be a wedding," the man finally answers in a sour tone. Astrid feels a surge of excitement at his words, even as the hostile way he spits them out make her all the more afraid of what's to come. "Your daughter put an end to that with her wanton behavior."

"Oh, so the deal with Vali fell through?" her mother asks guardedly, clearly sharing Astrid's concern about his mood. With their eyes more adjusted to the low lighting, the two can now see Thorsten sitting in a chair that faces the door, about ten feet from where they stand. The woman moves slightly to put herself more between Astrid and her father.

"Vali's offer price was…pathetic," he says with a spiteful growl before taking a long pull from the bottle he holds in his hand. "When I asked him why he would offer such paltry sum, he told me that Astrid was no longer pure…"

Astrid's gut churns as she hears her father spit out the words. The fear in her grows, even as she feels a measure of shame. She forces herself to remember her mother's words, affirming that there was nothing wrong with what she did with Hiccup. Nonetheless, the girl feels her guilt start to rise as her father's words eat at her inside. She clenches her fists in frustration.

"Well, it's a shame Vali couldn't offer you the price you wanted," her mother says, sounding indifferent. "Perhaps you need to seek a contract elsewhere…"

"Did you hear what I said about Astrid?" the man growls. "She's a Gods forsaken whore!" he bellows, throwing his bottle into the fire. The glass explodes as it smashes into the wood, a small ball of flame belching up as the remaining alcohol is ignited.

The girl flinches at the fiery display while wincing at the words, her heart clenching in her chest as she absorbs his slander. She tries to ignore the disgust she feels. She can't tell if it's how she feels about him or herself.

"You're drunk, Thorsten," Astrid's mother replies flatly. "It's probably time you go and sleep it off…"

The man jumps out of his chair at her words, barelling across the room to quickly close the distance between them. Astrid's heart jumps into her throat and she jumps back, glancing around for a weapon. Her mother raises her one arm defensively, which the man grabs at the wrist, holding her tightly. He presses his body against hers, staring heatedly into her eyes.

"I said," he snarls slowly, his words dripping with venom, "our daughter is a Gods-forsaken, fucking whore…"

"Stop it, Dad!" Astrid calls out, on the verge of tears at the sight of him assaulting her mother. "Leave Mom alone!" The burly man turns his head to look at the girl at her words.

"Astrid, no!" her mother protests, only for Thorsten to push her down and charge Astrid.
The girl starts to dodge but he catches her with his arm and throws her back against the wall. Astrid hits hard, clipping the corner of a table with her side, crying out in pain. Her father charges forward and grabs her by the neck, lifting her off of her feet to pin her to the wall.

"You fucking whore," he snarls at her as the girl struggles, gasping for breath. "You just couldn't keep your legs closed for the Haddock boy, could you?"

Astrid starts to see stars as she scratches at his hand, trying to pull his fingers apart, but the man's grip is like iron. She chokes as he pins her and she wonders if she's going to die when suddenly a bottle smashes over the back of his head, the liquid splashing over him, some of the mead splattering over Astrid.

The man instantly crumples, releasing his daughter, who drops to the floor while coughing and gasping. The girl pants heavily, sucking in as much air as she can with each gulp of breath.

Quickly regaining her senses, Astrid grabs the nearest thing on the table that she when she was knocked into the wall. She finds herself wielding a large cast-iron pan, but doesn't stop to dwell on it. Looking down at the man's body piled in a heap before her, she nudges him cautiously with her foot. He doesn't move.

Astrid looks up at her mother in a panic. "Is he dead?" she asks fearfully.

Her mother glances at her as she drops the broken off neck of the bottle that she had shattered over her husband's head. "We should only be so lucky," she says with a sigh, kneeling down without hesitation. She holds her hand in front of the mans mouth, then smirks wryly.

"The Gods have spared him," she says as she stands up. "He'll probably sleep until morning now," she adds as she looks at Astrid, who is putting the pan back on the table. "Are you alright?" she asks with deep concern, quickly stepping over the her husband's body to have a close look at her daughter. She takes Astrid's face in her one hand, turning her face this way and that.

"I'm fine, Mom," the girl tells her with as steady a voice as she can manage, trying to ignore the stinging pain she feels on her side where she caught the table. There will be a bruise there, she can tell already. Her throat is sore now, too. She's still trembling and her heart races as she looks back down at the crumpled form.

As her mother releases her and lowers her hand, the girl asks, "but what about when he wakes up? He'll probably want to kill us both for that…"

Her mother smiles knowingly at her daughter, chuckling slightly. "Oh, dont you worry about that," she says. "Your father is so drunk, he won't remember a thing in the morning." Sighing, she adds, "he never does…"

The girl nods, looking back up at her mother. "Mom," she says hesitantly, her voice shaking, "those things he said about me…"

Astrid's mother shakes her head vehemently, putting her fingers over the girl's lips. "Shush," she tells her firmly. "What did I tell you about that?" she asks quietly.

Looking down at the ground as her mother lowers her hand away from her mouth, the girl says quietly, "that Hiccup and I did nothing wrong…"

"That's right," the woman tells her daughter firmly. "Don't you ever forget it, and don't let his words or anybody else's convince you otherwise."
"Yes, Mom," Astrid answers, nodding resolutely. Her mother wraps the girl up in her arms, squeezing her tightly. The teen hugs her back, the two women taking comfort in each other.

"Now, help me drag him to bed," her mother says as they pull apart. "Then I'll make us some dinner and we can talk some more."

Astrid nods and is about to move to do so, when her mother adds, "afterwards, you can go to the meeting you've planned with Hiccup…"

The girl looks up at her mother with surprise at her words, her mouth hanging half open. The woman only grins smugly. "I was young and in love once too, you know," she tells her daughter with an amused tone.

Astrid starts to smile when her mother adds, "besides, I heard everything you said to the boy when we visted him at the forge." The girl looks at her with a shocked expression. The woman only smirks all the more. "You really do need to learn to be a little more quiet, Astrid," she adds, then furrows her brow in surprise when her daughter's cheeks color such a bright red.

Deciding it's best not to probe as to why, she directs Astrid to help her move Thorsten's body to his bed. The two then go about preparing their dinner, relaxing as they start to enjoy a quiet evening together.
Chapter 13

Hiccup sits on a rock by the large pool in Toothless' Cove, shivering in the dark as he waits for Astrid. He has been waiting for her for a while, watching the moon rise above the high rock walls, passing the time by reviewing his notebook in its pale light, sometimes making a few notes here and there.

Sighing as he looks at the moonbeams glinting across the gently rippling water, the boy wonders if Astrid won't be able to join him tonight. While the thought leaves him somewhat unsettled and insecure, he's now confident that if she doesn't show up, it's not of her own choosing.

With a heavy sigh he looks back at his book, deciding he'll wait a while longer yet. He ponders staying the whole night, just in case. The idea of waiting all night for her has another appeal as well. He doesn't want to walk home through the forest in the dark, with just his one leg. He had figured that she would accompany him home at the end of their visit, so he wasn't worried about the return trip.

But if she doesn't show up, it may be safer for him to wait until daylight to venture back through the forest to go home. That was why he brought the blanket and bedroll with him, both retrieved from his house before he made his way here.

Well, it was one reason he brought them, anyway.

If Astrid does show up, Hiccup has no doubt that they'll put the bedroll to good use. He starts to smile as his mind wanders in that direction, then squirms as he suddenly finds the need to adjust his pants.

Grunting in frustration as he gets himself getting excited at the thought of being with his girlfriend, he tries to distract himself again with his book. He frowns at one of his sketches as he gives it a critical eye, wondering what he was thinking when he applied that level of torque to the drive mechanism. He starts to scratch furiously at the page, crossing out the old value and writing in a more reasonable figure when he hears a familiar, feminine voice call out from behind him.

"Careful there, Hiccup, you'll ruin your book…"

The boy turns to see Astrid walking up behind him with a wide smile upon her lips. His face lights up at the sight of her.

"Hi, Astrid," he greets her, sighing happily as she sits next to him on the opposite side of the rock and cups his face in her hands. He barely gets the words out before she presses her lips against his, kissing him deeply. Hiccup's arms immediately wrap around her slender waist, pulling her against him as he answers her kiss passionately, moaning softly into her mouth while their tongues wrestle fiercely. His hands roam over her back and he feels her suck in her breath, a shiver running through her body. He smiles as her hands likewise move, reaching around to play with the hair at the back of his head, her arms wrapping tightly about his neck to hold him to her.

The two kiss with wild abandon, finding warmth and comfort in one another. Hiccup forgets about the chill night air as this goddess in his arms presses her body pressed against his.

They lose all sense of time as they kiss, now finally alone and once more free from the risk of discovery. Astrid's hands start to wander over his body, sending his pulse racing. He takes the same liberty, his one hand moving around to her front. He reaches for one of her breasts, cupping her
curved flesh with his hand and squeezing. His touch draws a surprised, throaty moan from the girl as his other hand moves down her back and towards her bottom.

She smiles against his lips as she slides her one hand down his torso and below, rubbing over his stiff erection, making him groan huskily into their kiss. She applies more pressure, gripping his length firmly as he whimpers against her lips, his kisses becoming all the more needy.

Losing herself in the moment, Astrid climbs over the rock to get closer to the boy, lifting her leg over his lap to straddle him. As she does, her knee hits his crutch that had been resting on the rock next to him, sending it to the ground with a wooden clatter.

Settling into his lap, Astrid breaks the kiss to glance with a furrowed brow at what she hit that made the noise. Hiccup's heart jumps into his throat at the sound that draws his girlfriend's attention. He quickly leans in to kiss her neck passionately, desperately hoping to distract her.

"Hiccup," she asks breathlessly, clearly affected by his lips and tongue caressing her alabaster skin. "Why..." she pauses as he flicks his tongue over where her pulse beats. Drawing in a deep breath, she tries again. "Why'd you bring..." Hiccup sucks on her neck there, swirling his tongue around, causing Astrid to stop talking again, her voice slipping into a throaty moan. Thoughtlessly, she runs her fingers through his hair.

After another moment, she forces out quickly, "Why'd you bring your crutch?"

"Mmmph?" he answers, continuing to press his lips against her flesh while stroking her with his tongue. He starts nibbling her with his teeth while running his hands down her back to grasp her behind. Grabbing her curves tightly, he pulls her to him and presses her crotch against his hard erection, grinding himself against her with slow motions of his hips.

The girl moans loudly, clearly distracted, her hands moving to his shoulders, gripping him tightly. She even spreads her legs wider and starts moving her hips along with his as the feelings overwhelm her.

The lad continues with a smile, thinking he's done it, sighing happily as he kisses her neck with a passionate intensity.

"Hiccup," she says more firmly, using her hands upon his shoulders to gently push him back enough to look at him. "What's with the crutch?" she asks as she looks into his eyes. Faced with her inquisitive stare, the boy quickly falters and glances back at her with an anxious look on his face, unsure of what to say.

Astrid's brows furrow with a mix of concern and anger at his reaction. She half moves off of him to turn and have a look at his lower half.

Hiccup closes his eyes and braces himself.

"Hiccup," she says with worry and an edge to her voice that lets him know she is now very serious, "Why aren't you wearing your leg?"

The boy hesitates for a moment, trying to find the right words. As he does, Astrid straddles him again, but there's no longer anything sexual about it.

Now he feels like he's been pinned after a fight. A very short fight that he immediately lost, one he probably never had a chance of winning. Her hands that still rest upon his shoulders now tighten, making him feel all the more trapped.
"What happened?" she growls with a growing anger at his continued silence, though her voice carries a thick strain of worry. Her eyes burrow into his as she waits for his answer.

Fear wells up in him as he tries again to find his words, only partly succeeding. "I, uhm…well…that is, I…"

Astrid's eyes narrow and glint dangerously in the moonlight as she loses what little patience she had left. Gripping his shoulders all the more tightly, her fingers bite into his flesh. She utters a single word.

"Talk."

Closing his eyes and sighing, he forces himself to just spit it out.

"Yesterday, on the island when we first laid together, sand got into my leg," he explains. "It was really sharp, and so whenever I put my weight on it, I cut my stump." His cheeks flush deeply as he forces the words. He pauses, getting ready to continue when Astrid interrupts him.

"Is that why you were limping yesterday?" she asks, her voice a blend of concern and barely controlled anger. He opens his eyes to look at her, swallowing heavily at the sight of her expression which shows the same mix of emotions.

"Partly," he tells her. "Sand is just hard for me to walk on now, but I had hurt myself when I tried to get up that first time."

Astrid frowns, her face dark as she thinks back to the memory of it.

"So what happened?" she finally asks, her voice softening as her hands fall from his shoulders to rest upon her legs.

Sighing, Hiccup relates the rest of the story. "When I got home, Gobber made me take off my leg. I was…" he hesitates, but when she lifts an eyebrow in warning at him, he forces himself to continue. "My stump was all torn up and bloodied." He falters as he sees Astrid's hard countenance crack with deep concern for him.

"But I'm fine now," he says hurriedly, trying to sound reassuring, his arms around her tightening slightly. "Gobber fixed me up! I went to see the healer today, she gave me some medicine, and I'm totally on the mend," he tells her, smiling comfortably. "It's not bleeding anymore," he adds, then quickly amends when she furrows her eyebrows, "well…not…really." He had forgotten Astrid has more experience than him with wounds and she knows well enough that an injury as severe as he described wouldn't heal that quickly.

"So you can't wear your leg again until your stump finishes healing?" she asks, somewhat rhetorically. Hiccup nods with a sigh. She looks at him with a considering gaze, staring deeply into his eyes. Hiccup squirms under the intensity of it, worried about what she might ask next.

"Why didn't you just take your leg off and clean out the sand in the first place?" she asks pointedly. The lad cringes at the question he didn't want to have to answer. He blushes as he hesitates, then swallows while forcing himself to tell her.

"I…I didn't want you to see me without my leg," he says forlornly, feeling ashamed now. Astrid furrows her brow in confusion, sitting back a little on his lap.

"Why not?" she asks gently, the sharp edge that she had been wielding in her voice slipping away,
though not completely.

Hiccup clenches his teeth, hesitating. He looks down. "I...I can't say," he tells her, pausing before he looks back up into her confused and now more angry gaze. "Not without breaking the promise I made to you, yesterday..."

Perplexed, she stares at him, trying to make sense of his words. He watches her, swallowing heavily as he waits for her to put it together. Then she frowns and then he knows she understands.

"Dammit, Hiccup!" she shouts angrily, punching his arm. "You are not a cripple!"

"Astrid," he says, rubbing where she struck him, the emotions weighing heavily upon him, "it's all well and good for you to say that, but I am! If going through today without my fake leg showed me anything, it's that I am a cripple!" She scowls at his words and opens her mouth to answer, but he bulls on before she can interrupt. "I can't walk without my crutch! I can't do some things I used to. I fell several times today, just trying to do simple tasks!" He sighs, "I walk slower with my crutch. I can't even climb stairs without help. If there isn't any help, then I have to crawl up them like a dog!"

The girl in his lap watches him intently, still scowling, though in her eyes he can see the deep concern she has for him.

"So why couldn't you let me see you without your leg?" she asks in such a tender voice that he blinks in surprise. He swallows bitterly, looking away, unable to keep staring into those caring eyes of hers.

"Because..." he starts to say, his voice already faltering, "because I was worried about what you would think." He pauses, waiting for her outburst. When she says nothing, he glances back up at her, surprised to see a deep look of compassion and worry.

He sighs heavily, glancing down again as he explains, "you're...you're an amazing warrior and athlete...you did such fantastic physical feats during training..." gritting his teeth, he hesitates again. Taken aback by her continued silence, he looks up at her, his breath catching as he sees the heavy emotion upon her face. "Even before it happened, I could never compare," he says, forcing himself to keep looking into her eyes. "But, now that I'm missing half a leg..." his voice falls off as he can find no more words and can only stare into her eyes.

Astrid moves quickly, cupping his face in her hands as she leans in to press her lips to his. Hiccup moans softly in surprise, hesitating before he kisses back. The girl in his lap leans in against him, caressing his face tenderly as she lingers in the kiss. She glides her tongue lovingly over his lips. Sighing happily, he opens up for her, moaning softly into her mouth as she sweetly and gently kisses him. Her hands glide back and she entangles her fingers into his hair while her tongue entwines with his, stroking him softly.

She kisses him for a while before pulling back, her hands still gently cupping his face. "Come on, Hiccup," she says in a tender whisper, staring into his eyes. "I didn't fall in love with you because of your physical prowess," she says, then playfully adds with a grin, "though I have to say your sexual prowess definitely makes you a keeper..." Hiccup looks at her with wide eyes, astounded by her words. She giggles at his reaction, drawing a genuine smile from him.

Beaming at the sight of his happiness, she slides her hands down his neck until she reaches the edge of his shirt, her gaze drifting down with her fingers. "You know why I fell in love with you," she says in a coy voice, her cheeks coloring slightly as she plays with the leather cord that pulls together his tunic's neckline. She glances bashfully up at him through her bangs, a demure smile on her lips.
Hiccup smiles at her, wrapping his arms tightly about her waist, pulling her closer to him. Astrid watches him intently, waiting.

"I know," he admits, leaning in to brush his lips against hers. She smiles at his touch, kissing back and then looking into his eyes again as he pulls away. He shrugs, "but, you had asked me why I didn't want to take off my leg in front of you, back on the island…"

She lifts an eyebrow at him asking, "So…you don't feel that way anymore?"

The boy hesitates, looking away and furrowing his brow as he thinks about it. "I dunno," he tells her. "Maybe…"

Astrid waits quietly as he ponders the question. Her fingers still idly play with the leather string in his shirt. "It's," he starts to say, drawing her gaze to his face as he pauses again, still collecting his thoughts.

"It's not easy, going from the village screw up to the hero who got the girl," he says, struggling with the words. "I mean, I'm used to everyone always hating everything I do, calling it ridiculous and useless. I'm used to being laughed at, yelled at, being considered a nuisance. My whole life, I never measured up because I couldn't swing an axe or lift a hammer, let alone fight."

He hesitates, then adds. "I…I keep feeling like I need to measure up to those things, I keep expecting things to go back to the way they were," he says in a small voice before then falling silent.

Astrid watches him with growing emotion. She had never been comfortable with how everyone treated Hiccup before, even though she was just as frustrated as anyone with his accidents and how different he was.

She hesitates, then asks, "are you…are you worried that you and I will go back to how it was before?"

Hiccup glances up at her with a half smirk. "Nah," he tells her. "Not anymore," he adds with a mischievous glint in his eye, the sight of which makes Astrid smile. "If you've done anything in the last couple of days, it's shown me quite clearly how much you love me…"

Astrid smiles all the more, blushing slightly. "But," he continues, "I mean…we've only been a couple for a day and a half…I can't…I can't promise I won't worry sometimes…"

Again she cups his face in her hands and leans in to kiss him, this time with a hungry fury that catches Hiccup off guard. Her tongue pushes into his mouth and she leans against him, pressing her soft curves against his body. He cries out against her mouth in surprise but meets her kiss eagerly, his one arm wrapping tightly about her waist while he braces himself against the rock with the other to keep upright against her assault. The girl grinds her crotch against his, smiling against his lips as she feels him immediately respond, his erection quickly returning as he moves his own hips along with hers.

She kisses him with a fiery passion for a while, rubbing her body eagerly against him as she runs her fingers all through his hair, caressing him before she finally pulls back to stare into his eyes. Out of breath, he looks up at her with a sense of wonder as he searches her gaze. Smirking at the sight of his hair very much askew, the girl looks deeply into his eyes and smiles widely, then whispers, "Just promise to let me know whenever you're feeling insecure or worried about us," she says, stroking and caressing his cheeks with her fingers, "and I promise I'll never hesitate to show you each time just how much I love you, Hiccup…"
The boy smiles from ear to ear at her, holding her tightly in his arms, pressing her against him. "I promise, Astrid," he says solemnly, overflowing with joy.

"I love you," he tells her, his voice thick with emotion.

"I love you too," she tells him, kissing him again, then pulling back to look into his eyes, "and I'll never stop loving you. I'm yours, forever."

Hiccup closes his eyes happily at her words, drawing in a deep breath and letting it out with a smile upon his lips. He looks into her eyes again to see her smiling from ear to ear. His one hand slides up her back to grasp the back of her head, pulling her down into another kiss. This time, he's as forceful as she was, making her shiver in his arms as their tongues wrestle fiercely. His hips eagerly thrust up against hers as his other hand slides down to grasp her bottom and press her against him, drawing a soft whimper from the girl as he embraces her tightly in his arms. She grinds against his erection, both of them moving their hips together as they kiss passionately, frantically.

Hiccup breaks the kiss, both of them panting while he whispers against her mouth, "If…if you still want to," he hesitates, his hot breath spilling over her face, "to…have sex with me…I…I'd be willing to, now…" Astrid pulls back to look into his eyes with a stunned expression, her loins growing warm and her heart surging at his offer, even as she becomes extremely nervous.

"Why…" she starts to answer, her voice thick with anxiety and her gut twisting in anticipation, "why'd you change your mind?" she asks.

He looks down, blushing. "Because…" he glances back up at her, "because I want to show you how much I love you…"

Astrid smiles widely at him, her heart leaping at his answer, even as she dreads now having to be the one to make the mature decision. Every fiber in her body is crying out to just give in and let him take her, but what her mother said sticks in her head, compelling her to make the right choice. Her heart pounds in her chest as her breath comes quickly. She feels the heat rising between her legs as her desire burns intensely in her core.

Gripping his shoulders tightly, she closes her eyes in frustration and sighs raggedly, touching her forehead to his. "Gods, Hiccup," she complains in a whisper, "you really know how to torment me…"

The boy furrows his brow in confusion at her words, causing her to smirk when she opens her eyes and sees his reaction. Sitting up a little, she smiles warmly and strokes his cheek, saying, "all I want to do is say yes and let you have your way with me…" she closes her eyes and draws in a deep breath, sighing.

"But you were right, before. We should wait until we're married…" the words pain her, but she knows they're right. Opening her eyes, she looks at her boyfriend again.

Hiccup looks at her with such a disappointed gaze that Astrid nearly changes her mind on the spot. Gritting her teeth, she sighs and decides to hold firm.

"We don't want to get pregnant," she reminds him in a whisper, her one hand stroking over his cheek, caressing him lovingly.

The boy sighs, nodding sullenly as he looks down. Smirking, she adds, "at least…not yet…" He glances up at her again, a smile peaking at the corners of his mouth.

Grinning, Astrid says quietly, "but that doesn't mean you…that you can't do…other things…to show
me how much you love me…"

The lad's eyes grow wide and excited, a smile upon his face. His hand starts to move towards her crotch, but she grasps his wrist and slowly shakes her head. He furrows his brow, making the girl smirk excitedly at him as she starts to feel butterflies in her stomach. He looks at her with even greater confusion, half opening his mouth as he tries to form a question. Her breath comes heavily again as the anticipation builds in her, now that the moment she's been waiting for since last night is here.

Smiling sublimely, Astrid leans in to bring her lips to his ear, whispering, "I…" she hesitates, trying to build up the courage. "I want you to kiss me," she begins, faltering before quickly she quickly adds, "…down there."

She feels his whole body stiffen at her words. Emboldened by his reaction, she grins from ear to ear and says further, "I want you to lick me…between my legs…" his arms tighten around her waist, pulling her closer. The girl shivers in excitement as she wraps her arms tightly about his neck, pressing her lips against his ear and says breathily, "I want you to make me cum…with your mouth…against my pussy."

She feels his body shiver against her and she impulsively sucks on his ear, flicking her tongue over him. The boy moans as he holds her tightly, grasping at her behind and grinding his hardness against her. Astrid whimpers as she holds him tightly, pushing back with her hips. Hiccup turns his head to look at her with an eager gaze and a wide smile. As she stares back into his eyes, she feels her cheeks burning as her heart races. Part of her wishes she'd never said anything, but the rest of her is bursting with excitement.

Hiccup's smile grows a he sees her anxiety, his heart pounding in his chest. He can't believe what Astrid just asked him to do, but he's not about to let this opportunity pass him by. "How about you spread out the bedroll I brought?" he asks her quietly, staring intently into her eyes. He smirks as her eyebrows lift in surprise at his words, her lips starting to lilt into an amused grin.

"Bedroll? Aren't you getting a little presumptuous?" she asks with a slightly lifted eyebrow.

He chuckles, answer, "This from the girl who's been trying to jump me since I admitted I love her?"

Astrid narrows her eyes and grins all the more, playfully reminding him, "Hey, I was the one that just told you no."

His smirk lilts as he leans in to press his lips to her ear and whisper huskily, "You're also the girl who just asked me to make her cum with my tongue on her pussy…" Astrid sucks in her breath at his words, an excited shiver running through her body as he grips her behind with both hands and grinds his hardness against her. She closes her eyes as her heart races again, her breath growing heated as she unthinkingly rubs her hips along with his motion, whimpering softly as he holds her tightly. Hiccup starts to nibble and suck on her ear, as she had done to him, causing her to grip his back tightly and press her hips more firmly against him, rubbing her crotch against his all the harder.

"Why don't you lay out the bedroll?" he asks breathily in her ear. Astrid nods quickly and wordlessly, getting up and looking around for it. Hiccup taps the roll with his foot, smiling as she eagerly grabs it and then hastily unties the strings that fasten it. She kneels on the ground and unrolls the bedding.

She then stands and grips the waist of her skirt and leggings to push them down, but Hiccup impulsively grabs her by the wrists. She looks at him with a confused expression, furrowing her brow slightly as he shakes his head and smirks at her.
"I'll do that," he tells her while staring intently into her eyes. He nervously watches her, waiting for her reaction. The girl's pulse races at his words, and she quietly nods, swallowing heavily.

Feeling more nervous than ever, Hiccup slides off the rock to kneel before her and puts her hands to her sides. Gripping the waist of her skirt, he hooks his thumbs inside it, rubbing against her flesh. He looks up into her eyes as he slowly starts to pull her skirt and leggings down. Astrid's breath comes more quickly as she watches him intently, staring back into his intense gaze as her gut twists in nervous anticipation.

Steadily he peels her clothing down, his gaze falling away from hers as he slowly pulls the top of her clothes over her hips and bottom, revealing her blonde triangle to him. The lad smiles widely and stares at the sight, thrilled to see it up close. Astrid's heart races as she watches him lean in, his face hovering so close she can feel his breath tickling her hair. He pauses for a moment until she's about to say something, when suddenly she feels his tongue press against her, pushing between her lips and probing between them.

Astrid gasps loudly, her hands going to his head as he presses his lips against hers. He continues to push her leggings and skirt down past her knees as he rubs her crotch with his lips and tongue. The girl quickly spreads her legs as much as she can to give him better access, awkward as it is while she stands. His heart racing, Hiccup drags his tongue down as she opens herself up to him, stroking over her folds, causing the girl to moan throatily at the feeling.

Once more, he's amazed by the velvety softness of her skin down here, but he's even more stunned by how wet she is. For the first time, he tastes her nectar, smelling it as he breathes in deeply, the sweetness of it driving him wild.

He finds her opening with his tongue, which he starts to lick with slow movements, slowly working his tongue inside of her. Astrid grips his hair tightly, her knees weakening as he drags his tongue back up and finds that raised spot, rubbing over it.

"I..." she starts to say, pausing to moan louder as he rubs over that spot. "I need to lie down," she says, whimpering as he continues to linger there. She sucks in her breath as he grabs her ass tightly with both hands, his fingers gripping her cheeks firmly as his tongue rubs against her hardened nub, causing her knees to buckle.

"Please?" she pleads, causing Hiccup to pull away and look up at her, grinning like the cat that got the cream. In the back of her mind, Astrid is annoyed at how smug he looks, but she's too eager for him to continue to care about that right now.

"Go ahead," he says, but then reaches up to caress her slit with his finger, very gently rubbing from her clit to her opening, quickly darting his digit inside of her. Astrid gasps and grabs his shoulder for support. She glares at him as he pulls his hand away and smiles at her.

Moving quickly so he doesn't have another chance to tease her, she lays back on the bedroll. Hiccup crawls to her, first stopping to remove her one boot so he can pull that leg out of her leggings and skirt. Freed from that constraint, Astrid spreads her legs widely for him, suddenly feeling very scared and self conscious as she exposes herself to him so completely.

She watches him anxiously to see his reaction.

"Gods, but you're beautiful," he whispers, looking at her naked lower half with wide eyes, his gaze roaming excitedly. He then starts to crawl towards her as he looks up into her eyes. Astrid's breath comes more quickly as he approaches, gasping as he leans in and starts to kiss her inner thighs, slowly making his way to her sex. The closer he gets, the slower he goes, making Astrid start to
squirm with anticipation.

Closing her eyes and whimpering in frustration, the girl makes a mental note to torture him just like this, the next time she sucks on him.

She’s about to bark at him to get on with it, when suddenly she feels the flat of his tongue press against her lips, parting them and sliding up from her opening to the raised nub. She cries out, her one hand quickly moving to grab his hair. Hiccup then lingers at her clit, rubbing it with gentle strokes, his tongue swirling around her.

The cove echoes with Astrid's loud moans as she starts to breathe heavily at his touch, her hand tightening in his hair as he lingers deliciously upon that spot. Hiccup smiles from ear to ear as he glories in pleasuring his girlfriend like this, excited beyond all reason. He stares up at her from his vantage point, lingering lazily against her raised nub while savoring the taste of her. The longer he does, the more she starts to move, which only broadens his smile.

Astrid quickly loses herself in the passion her boyfriend pours into her with the movement of his lips and tongue upon her sex. She tightens her fingers in his hair, pressing his face all the more against her crotch as he laps at her swollen nub. Rocking her hips with his every motion, she finds her body heats up quickly, her blood racing as she feels the growing pleasure from his touch. The girl whimpers a little bit in frustration as he drags his tongue down to her opening, but then cries out as he licks her inside, rubbing her with fast strokes of his tongue. In the back of her mind, she wonders if she’ll ever be able to pleasure herself again, as nothing will compare with this, but with another flick of his tongue, she forgets her train of thought as the ecstasy once more overwhelms her.

Hiccup laps hungrily at her vagina, darting his tongue inside, savoring the taste of her juices. He rubs his hands over her thighs as he lingers there, thoroughly enjoying himself before moving up to her clit again, his tongue swirling around it. As the girl's very vocal cries and moans fill the Cove, Hiccup is very glad that they're out in the middle of nowhere. He loves hearing her like this, and is happy beyond reason to be the cause of such pleasure for her.

Astrid starts to writhe on the ground at his touch, making him smile wickedly against her flesh as he again starts to rub her nub quickly. The girl arches her back and gasps loudly at the new motion, starting to rock her hips again with his movements.

"That…" she gasps raggedly between loud moans, forcing out, "Don't stop…that…"

Her boyfriend diligently follows her instructions and continues to lap at her clit in exactly the same way. She moves her hips more wildly with his tongue's motions, again arching her back as the heat in her sex builds quickly. The girl's cries get sharper and louder with every stroke of his tongue against her, driving Hiccup to moan along with her. The sound and feel of his vocalizations against her flesh is too much and she peaks, her vision going white as her whole body tenses up. She screams a primal cry while she feels the burning heat in her core, her hips bucking wildly against Hiccup's face.

The lad laps hungrily at her clit as his girlfriend screams at the top of her lungs, grabbing his head with both hands and pressing him against her sex. He moans happily as he keeps stroking her, grabbing her ass and squeezing as she lifts her trembling hips up. Her legs shake as she thrusts against him. Astrid keeps screaming loudly, rubbing her crotch against his face as he laps at her pulsating clit, waves of pleasure crashing through her body.

Suddenly it's all too much and the touch of his tongue there overwhelms her.

"S-Stop!" she cries out desperately, relieved when Hiccup instantly obeys.
Astrid lays exhausted upon the bedroll, her breath coming in heavy gulps as she feels her heart pounding in her ears. Her body shakes as the passion she felt slowly recedes. For a moment, she stares up into the starry night sky and wonders where Hiccup went, as she doesn't feel him touching her anymore.

Then suddenly the boy is laying down beside her, pulling a warm, woolen blanket over them both. Smiling from ear to ear, Astrid quickly rolls over to push herself half on top of him, before he even has a chance to fully situate himself on the bedroll. Hiccup makes a surprised noise as he tries to get settled with her clutching at him, the two clumsily shifting and adjusting until they're both comfortable.

Sighing happily, she hugs him and finds herself exceedingly glad for the blanket. She hadn't even realized how cold she was quickly getting as the flames of her passion ever so slowly started to cool.

Hiccup smiles from ear to ear as he squeezes her to him in his arms, kissing the top of her head. "Soooo…I guess you liked that, huh?" he asks playfully.

Astrid squeezes him tightly in answer, pressing her face against his chest as she listens to his heart beating. "Oh, Gods, Hiccup," she answers breathlessly tilting her head to look up at him, still trying to calm down. "I've never felt anything that good…"

Her boyfriend smirks as he looks into her eyes and starts to rub her back again, "so did I make your toes curl?" he asks her with an amused lilt to his voice.

The girl rolls her eyes at his question. "Yes, Hiccup," she assures him, "You made my toes curl. You also made my back arch, my whole body shake, and I think anyone within a couple of leagues knows what we just did…"

He chuckles at her answer, his hands roaming more freely over her back as he answers, "Well I knew about the rest of it, I just wanted to make sure that I also got your toes to curl…"

The girl smiles again, feeling sated and happy as she snuggles up to Hiccup beneath the covers, her troubles from earlier that night long forgotten.

Forgotten, that is, until Hiccup's hand happens to rub firmly over the spot where she caught the table when her father threw her back against the wall.

The girl gasps as her face contorts in pain when he presses the bruise on her side, her whole body flinching as she holds him more tightly.

"Astrid?" Hiccup asks with a very concerned, almost panicked tone of voice.

"What's wrong?"
"Astrid, what's the matter?"

Hiccup's voice is more urgent as he asks for the second time, the panic in his voice growing as his girlfriend remains silent.

The last thing Astrid had wanted to do tonight was to explain to her boyfriend that her father hits her. It wasn't something people outside of her family knew about, and her mother had put a great deal of effort into keeping it a secret. The girl didn't want to have to answer all of the questions that would follow, or deal with the guilt that she feels because of her father's abuse.

"Astrid…?" Hiccup asks more insistently, sitting up and gently pushing her away from him, just far enough so he can look at her face more easily. "What's wrong?" He asks with concern, holding her by her arms.

The girl shakes her head. "Nothing," she answers quickly, frowning slightly as she struggles to make eye contact with him. "I just…I hurt myself when I was practicing with my axe," she quickly says, struggling to come up with a plausible story.

Hiccup furrows his brow as he clearly doubts her words. "How did you hurt your side while practicing with your axe?" he challenges.

She hesitates for a moment, then answers, "Well, I was…practicing in the woods, trying to do a back summersault while I threw my axe. I didn't watch where I was going. There was…a fallen tree in my way and I hit that on my way down."

Hiccup frowns, eyeing her with a very skeptical gaze. The girl starts to panic inside. She hates lying to this boy that she loves, but she just can't bring herself to share her shame with him.

Suddenly Hiccup looks at her all the more intently, his eyes leaving hers to study her neck. She's about to say something when he leans in and looks closely at her throat in the moonlight. Astrid closes her eyes, sighing in resigned frustration as she realizes what he must have noticed. Swallowing heavily, she fights back the tears as she waits for his inevitable question.

"Astrid, why are there bruises on your neck?" he asks with grave concern. He hadn't noticed them at first because they are very faint, but now that he has a good view in the bright moonlight, he can very clearly see the discolored marks that encircle her throat.

Her heart sinks at his words. She hadn't thought to cover up her neck after her father had choked her, having quickly put the whole business out of her mind as soon as her mother knocked out the brute and they dragged his stinking, unconscious body to his bed.

Of course there were marks. What had she been thinking to ignore that?

The girl keeps her eyes closed as she feels her boyfriend pull back enough to look at her again. She doesn't dare open her eyes. If she were to look at him, she has no doubt she'd break down into a fit of tears.

That alone annoys her as much as the whole Gods-damned situation.

"Astrid," he says in a whisper. "Look at me."
She shakes her head firmly.

"It's nothing, Hiccup," she tells him, struggling to keep her voice level.

Silence.

She feels his hand upon her face and gasps, shivering at his gentle touch.

"Astrid, please," he whispers tenderly. She can feel his breath spill over her face, he's so close.

She shakes her head again even as her resolve falters, pulling away from his hand and forcing herself to open her eyes. Her heart contracts at the sympathetic look of concern on his face, at the love she sees in his eyes.

Setting her jaw, she says firmly, "It's nothing." She flinches at the hurt she sees upon his face at her words.

"Astrid, you didn't get those bruises on your neck by practicing with your axe. Someone was choking you," He asserts with a stern yet caring voice, frowning and furrowing his brow.

The girl panics inside. She has no idea how to cover this one up.

"Look, it doesn't concern you," she blurts out unthinkingly. She just wants this whole thing to go away. She wants to curl back up in Hiccup's arms again and forget the whole business.

Hiccup's face grows cold at her words, though. He stares at her with a mixture of anger and pain that makes her cry inside.

"Is this how you show me how much you love me?" he asks coldly, the hurt laced deep in his voice, "by shutting me out when all I want to know is how you got hurt?!" She flinches as he throws her words back at her, swallowing heavily as he adds, "I'm worried about you, Astrid!"

The girl's heart surges as fear grips it. The air feels colder as Hiccup regards her with that icy stare. Her stomach turns as she wrestles with pushing him away further, or sharing her humiliation with him.

"Please, Hiccup," she pleads with him. "Please, just... just let it go, it's not important..."

He narrows his gaze at her, staring intently into her eyes. "Not important?!" he asks incredulously. "You're being hurt by someone!" he nearly shouts, then watches her intently for a few moments. She says nothing.

Hiccup looks at her in disbelief. "After everything I've shared with you, after all the trust I've given you... you can't do the same for me?" She swallows bitterly, his words stinging as they hit home. Shaking his head, he says, "Astrid, if you don't trust me that much, then..." he stops talking as he choked on his words, fighting back his own tears. He tosses back the blanket and moves to reach for his crutch.

Astrid panics as he moves to go, crying out, "No!" She lunges, grabbing his arm to keep it from his crutch, pulling him back towards her. Angrily trying to tug away, the boy turns back to look at her with a hurt stare as she clutches at him. Then his brow furrows in surprise as he looks at her.

The girl realizes suddenly that tears are streaming down her face.

She grips his arm like an iron vice as he tries to pull away from her. Her chest clenches in terror as
she realizes that she's about to lose him. Of course, there's no way he can overpower her, but he still pulls, trying to free himself from her grip. Hiccup says nothing, he merely watches her intently, his expression a mixture of frustration, anger, and pain.

Unable to look at him anymore, she closes her eyes and drops her head, finally realizing that she can't keep this from him and keep him at the same time.

It's one or the other.

"Hiccup," she starts to say, her voice immediately cracking. She stops talking, clearing her throat and swallowing heavily. "I'll...I'll tell you," she says in a broken voice.

At her words, Hiccup stops trying to pull away. After a moment, the girl's hands slowly fall to her sides.

"My..." she begins again but then stops, finding the words stuck in her throat. Drawing in a deep breath, she sighs in resignation and forces herself to look at him, staring intently into his eyes as the tears stream down her cheeks.

"My father hits me," she says resolutely, suddenly determined to just take whatever judgement he might have for her.

The lad's expression turns to one of shock at her words, looking at her now with compassion and concern.

"He hits you?" Hiccup asks in disbelief, his voice a hushed whisper. Domestic abuse is almost unheard of in Viking communities, given the rights that women have to divorce their husbands for such mistreatment. The boy can't remember ever hearing of such a case in Berk.

The tears continue to roll down Astrid's cheeks as she nods mutely at her boyfriend's question. The girl watches him, feeling humiliated. She can't find any more words, now that her secret is out.

Furrowing his brow in disbelief, Hiccup asks, "Does...does your mother know?"

Closing her eyes, Astrid nods again. She hesitates, then adds in a faltering voice, "sometimes he hits her, too..."

Shifting closer to her on the bedroll, the boy asks in a perplexed voice, "Why doesn't...why doesn't she just divorce him and take you away from that?"

Shrugging, Astrid looks down, unable to keep looking into his eyes. "She...she wants to, but...she...can't..." the girl says weakly, trying desperately to hold back the floodgate of tears. She feels sick inside, dirty. The girl has never shared this shameful fact with anyone, and it feels terrible to do so now.

If it were anyone but Hiccup, she realizes, she would have never said a word.

Furrowing his brow, the boy asks in disbelief, "Why can't she?"

"She just can't okay?!" Astrid snaps at him, her head whipping up to stare daggers at him as the anger roils up in her. Hiccup leans back in shock and she lashes out further, "if she could have, it would have been done years ago, when this all started! But..." She snaps her mouth shut, looking down again as her shoulders slump. "It's complicated, okay?"

His mind whirling, Hiccup asks, "Astrid, how much does he hit you? Is this every day?"
The girl sighs in exasperation as she looks into his eyes with a weary gaze, "Hiccup, enough, okay? You wanted to know, well…now you know…just," she hesitates, feeling exhausted. "Just…stop with the questions, will you?" The two look at each other in silence for the space of a few breaths before Astrid lowers her gaze, unable to keep looking at the sympathy and concern written across her face.

The boy looks at her with amazement. He never expected this, and isn't sure what to do or say to make it better for her. His heart aches at the knowledge he now possesses, and he feels powerless to help her.

Then it occurs to him.

Maybe his father can help her.

"Astrid," he says cautiously, reaching out to touch her arm. She doesn't even look at him. "Maybe my Dad can-"

"NO!" Astrid cries, her head snapping up as she looks at him with a terrified and furious gaze. The boy again jumps, once more shocked by her reaction. Swallowing, she draws a deep breath and says passionately, "Hiccup, nobody else can know."

Hiccup furrows his brow in shock and disbelief at her words, slowly shaking his head. She grabs his arm with both hands as she sits up and leans towards him.

"Hiccup, please! I only told you because I don't want to lose you!" she says, the emotion swelling up in her voice again as she remembers the terror she felt at him pulling away from her. The boy furrows his brow, watching her with a confounded expression. "You can't tell another soul! Not our friends, not Gobber, not your father, not anyone!" She stares at him with an intense gaze while she clutches at his arm so tightly that it hurts him.

"Promise me, Hiccup, please!" she begs, her eyes filling with tears again. "Not a word, to anyone!"

The boy furrows his brow, his own tears starting to form. "Astrid," he says. "You're the woman I love, and you're asking me to do nothing when you're being hurt…?!"

"I'm okay, Hiccup," she insists, loosening her grip yet still clutching at his arm. "I love you, and it's so sweet that you're worried for me, but I'm fine, it's nothing…"

Hiccup looks at her with shocked disbelief. "Astrid, you are not fine! Do I need to show you the bruises on your neck?!" The girl looks down at his words. "How bad is that bruise on your side?!" he asks pointedly, reaching forward with his other hand to caress her cheek, trying to pull her gaze back up to his.

The girl resists, tugging away from his hand, yet still gripping his one arm with her hands. "Hiccup, you wanted to know why I have these bruises, well now you know," she spits at him bitterly, lifting her head to look back up at him with a hard and determined gaze. "But I'm begging you now, don't share this with anyone."

He sighs, pleading with her, "Astrid, I just want to help you. I…I need to help you. Please, just let me tell only my father…"

She grips his arm all the more firmly, shaking her head resolutely. "NO," she says harshly, staring intently into his eyes. He furrows his brow, watching her guardedly. "What if I do…?" He asks.
The girl sets her jaw. Her heart clenches as she steels herself for what she says next.

"Then you and I are through," she says plainly.

Hiccup's eyes grow wide at her words, his jaw hanging slack. "Astrid," he says, his voice pleading as his face twists with fear and sadness.

"I mean it, Hiccup," she says. "Promise me you'll never tell another soul. You take this with you to your grave, or we're done."

The boy's eyes fill with tears as he says weakly, "but I…just want to help you…"

The sight of it breaks her heart, and she feels her eyes burning yet again. "I know," she says tenderly, reaching up to caress his cheek, "and I love you for it, I really do. But I'm fine, Hiccup," she assures him. "You can't do anything here…" The boy closes his eyes as she strokes his cheek, tears streaming down his cheeks as the battle rages within him.

Terrified at the choice he might make, Astrid leans in and brushes her lips against his. He looks at her with surprise as she pulls back just enough to look into his eyes, her hand sliding down to stroke over his neck, holding him where his neck joins his shoulder.

"Hiccup," she begins, staring into his eyes as she speaks to him with a tender, passionate voice. "Hiccup, you spoke of trust, before. Well, now I've put my trust in you by sharing this secret. Nobody else knows except me, my mother, and my father. Not one more soul can find out." He looks back at her, his own gaze wet with tears. The girl can still see the uncertainty in his eyes. With her free hand, she takes one of his hands, entwining her fingers with his and holding him tightly.

She doesn't want to risk losing him, so she adds in a loving whisper, "The only way you can help me is to marry me, or run off with me." She smiles at him weakly as she strokes her hand upon his neck up to caress the side of his head, running her fingers into his hair. "Take me away from him, and he'll never lay another hand on me again."

The boy closes his eyes tightly, struggling with his decision to the last.

Astrid's heart twists in agony, the terror clutching at her as she's sure that he's made the choice that would take him away from her.

"Please…" she begs, her voice choking as she holds back tears. She squeezes his hand in hers, while gripping the side of his head firmly.

The boy swallows heavily, breathing a ragged sigh.

Astrid holds her breath as she waits for him to speak.

"I promise," he says, and she cries out with a ragged sigh of relief, throwing her arms around his neck, squeezing him to her. To her surprise, the boy grabs her arms and pulls her off of him, pushing her back to stare into her eyes.

"I promise not to tell another soul," he says resolutely, his gaze burning into hers, "unless I think your life is in danger." Astrid looks back at him with wide eyes, swallowing heavily at his amendment to the oath she wanted him to take, suddenly feeling unsettled.

She shakes her head and opens her mouth to protest, but he cuts her off.

"Astrid, there's nothing I love in this world more than you," he explains sternly. "I can't bear the
thought of anyone hurting you, especially your own father." He grips her arms tightly as he barrels on, his voice becoming ragged the more he speaks. "It burns me inside to make this promise to you at all, but if he were to kill you, or do you real harm while I kept your secret…" He stops, his voice choking on his emotion. Closing his eyes, he lowers his head, trying to get control of himself.

Astrid winces, hurting inside at the pain she sees on his face. She wants to hold him, but he grips her arms with surprising strength.

He looks back up at her, tears falling from his eyes, "I could never live with myself if that happened, Astrid," he says with such intensity that she knows he speaks the literal truth. She swallows heavily, tears coming to her own eyes.

"So I'll keep your secret because you begged me to, but if I think for one moment that your life hangs in the balance, then I'll tell anyone and everyone that I think can help save you," he says with a ragged voice. "I don't care if you break up with me and never want to see me again afterwards…at least then you'll be safe, you'll be alive…" his voice crumbles as he starts to break down in tears.

His hands fall from her arms, releasing her as he slumps. Astrid immediately crawls into his arms, wrapping hers about his waist as she starts to sob along with him. She presses her lips to his as they weep together. The girl feels his arms wrap tightly about her as he kisses her back firmly. Against his lips she breathes a ragged sigh of relief as all her emotions come pouring out of her.

She breaks the kiss to bury her face in his shoulder, clinging to him as she sobs against him. Hiccup clutches her to him, squeezing her in his arms as tightly as she holds him, weeping along with her.

Toothless' Cove echoes with the sounds of the two young lovers crying together for some time into the night, the moon moving a fair distance before the place is silent once more.
Hiccup and Astrid sit together on the bedroll, wrapped up in a fierce embrace, burying their faces in each others' necks. The two of them had been crying for a while, though now they hold each other tightly in complete silence, save for the occasional half sob from one or the other as they both slowly settle down.

Astrid is the first to move, gently pulling away from him, but only enough to look at his face. The boy does likewise, and the two stare at each other wordlessly with red-rimmed eyes.

After a few moments, the girl leans in hesitantly. She pauses, waiting to see if Hiccup pulls away. He doesn't move, except that his arms tighten about her a little.

Leaning in the rest of the way, Astrid touches her lips hesitantly against his. She's nervous beyond reason that he'll reject her, but to her relief, he leans in and kisses her lovingly.

The girl had thought that she was done with crying, but tears start to roll down her cheeks as his lips press against hers. She whimpers against him, squeezing him tightly in her arms again as her kisses quickly become more urgent, more demanding.

Hiccup answers in kind, running his hands over her back, though he's careful to avoid that spot on her side that started everything. Their kiss quickly becomes more intimate as the two young lovers desperately cling to one another, their tongues entwining while they start to moan softly together.

Astrid's heart sing with joy as she feels the passion in Hiccup's kisses.

She's relieved beyond measure. She had been worried that he would reject her, in spite of the words that he had spoken to her when he made his promise. What he said had amazed her, and again reminded her of how much he loves her.

But still she had felt uncertain.

Unknown to everyone, her confidence has its limits, and it crumbles altogether where her father's abuse was concerned. She was absolutely terrified that when she told Hiccup about how her father hit her that he wouldn't want anything more to do with her. The shame she feels from her father's abuse made her certain that he would be disgusted by the whole business.

So, as she thinks on Hiccup’s words again, she decides that she'd never actually leave him if he did tell anyone her secret, for any reason.

But she'll never tell him that.

As their kisses become more passionate, more hungry, Astrid lays back and gently pulls Hiccup down with her to lay upon the bedroll. The boy readily moves with her, pulling the blanket back over both of them as he rests half atop of her, partly leaning his weight upon her body. She sighs contentedly, happy to feel the weight of his body press down upon her once more. Her hands move up his back to stroke over the back his neck and head, then she entwines her fingers into his hair as she kisses him eagerly.

"I love you, Hiccup," she whispers huskily between kisses. Her words make him shiver as he snuggles against her all the more, pressing his lips against hers passionately, his tongue wrestling with hers.
"I love you too, Astrid," he answers with an emotional voice against her lips then kisses her once more, lingering for a while before pulling back just enough to look into her eyes. He smiles at her, stroking her face tenderly. Both of them stare intently at each other, neither sure of what to say next.

Afraid that Hiccup will start asking about her secret again, Astrid breaks the silence. "So, I…I found out what happened between Vali and my father," she says with a leading voice, watching him intently for his reaction with a slight smile.

As she had hoped, Hiccup looks at her with wide eyes, surprised by her sudden topic change and excited by her tantalizing tone.

"You did?" he asks eagerly, which brings a smile to her lips. "Well…what happened?" he asks, sounding frustrated at her silence as she watches him mutely with a growing smile.

She pauses for a moment, sitting up again while watching him get flustered as he waits for her answer. He sits up with her, furrowing his brow as she continues to hold her tongue.

After a moment more, she grins widely and relents.

"My father said the wedding is off…Vali's price was too low…!" she says excitedly. Hiccup's jaw drops in excitement as he smiles from ear to ear. He laughs in excited jubilation and throws his arms around Astrid, leaning back as he hugs her, half lifting her off of her behind. The girl squeals excitedly in his embrace as she squeezes him in her arms tightly, happy beyond words.

Setting Astrid back down on the bedroll, Hiccup looks at her with a wide grin. "Oh Gods, Astrid, this is great!" he says enthusiastically.

His girlfriend nods eagerly, smiling at him from ear to ear. "I know!" she says, her voice bursting with joy. "Now your father can write up a contract for us to marry!"

All of her excitement fades as she watches Hiccup's expression fall and his shoulders slump at her words.

"Your father will make an offer to my Dad for us to be married, won't he?" she asks with a worried voice.

Hiccup hesitates as he furrows his brow, causing Astrid's gut to start twisting anxiously.

"Hiccup?" she asks urgently, furrowing her brow at his uncertainty.

"I…I don't think so," he says anxiously, watching her with a worried expression.

"What do you mean you don't think so?!" she asks loudly, stunned.

Hiccup sighs in frustration, "Last night when we were talking, Dad said he couldn't just offer your Dad a contract because he'd never sign it." Astrid furrows her brow as she watches Hiccup with an increasingly angry gaze. The boy goes on, "Your Dad forbade you to see me. He doesn't want us together, and Vali's lowball offer doesn't change that…"

Hiccup pauses for a moment as he feels like he just said something his father would. The corner of his mouth flicks in a slight grin, but Astrid's next outburst quickly brings him back to the here and now.

"Well what in the Gods' names was this all for, then?!" she cries out in angry frustration. "What's the point of all this if we don't get married at the end of it?!"
Hiccup winces at her words. He feels the same frustration she does, but he has the benefit of his father’s speech to give him confidence. The boy realizes that Astrid has no such benefit.

"Astrid," he says in a cautious tone, "My Dad told me…"

"He told you that he knows what you want, and what will make you happy," she finishes for him, her voice bitter and full of frustration. "I know, you told me that last night," she spits furiously, staring at Hiccup with a sharp glare as she crosses her arms.

The boy sighs in helpless frustration. "Astrid, I know it's frustrating, I'm upset too," he insists, leaning in a little as he puts his hand on her thigh, the blanket still covering her naked lower half. "I'm sure my Dad is going to make sure that you and I will get married, we just need to be patient and let him fix things for us…"

Huffing irritably, Astrid barks back, "Fine," she says. "How's he going to do it?"

Her boyfriend hesitates at her question, feeling helpless at his inability to give her the answer.

"I…I don't know," he confesses.

"Well that's just great!" she snarls, tossing her hands up in frustration. "What makes you so sure that he's going to be able to pull this off, Hiccup!?" she asks sharply while staring at him with a penetrating gaze.

Sighing, Hiccup answers wearily, "because he told me he knows how to play these games…"

"Games?!" Astrid exclaims, looking at him with wide eyes, "What, are you and I just chess pieces to him?!" she asks loudly, gesturing to them both as she talks.

Scowling in frustration, Hiccup answers sharply, "No, Astrid. Dammit, you know what I meant," he says insistently.

"No, really, I don't," she answers quickly, crossing her arms again.

"Astrid, my Dad's been chief for a long time," he says insistently, trying his best to be patient as he starts to get frustrated at her hostile responses. "He knows how to arrange matters in the tribe so that the right thing happens," he says. "A lot of being a chief is being able to delicately handle people and situations to avoid quarrels and fights, while still getting to the right end," he explains.

The boy sits back and blinks in surprise as he again hears his father's words in his own mouth.

Once more, however, Astrid's scathing reply swiftly disrupts his retrospection.

"How do you know your father even wants us to be married?" she challenges him. "Did he tell you that's what he's trying to do?"

Hiccup shakes his head. "No," he says, "he told me…"

"I know what he told you," she says, "you keep reminding me," she rebukes him sharply. Hiccup frowns bitterly at her interruption.

"Well let me tell you what my father told me," she says with a scowl as Hiccup furrows his brow in concern. "He told me this morning that Stoic gave his word that he would forbid you from seeing me!" Her voice rises to a shout as she stares daggers at him.

Frowning as he crosses his arms, Hiccup answers sharply, "Yes, he did," he admits indigantly. "But
I'm here anyway, aren't I?" he asks.

Rolling her eyes, Astrid snaps back, "Hiccup, I'm not doubting your commitment to me! I'm saying that maybe your father isn't even interested in us getting married!"

"Astrid, that's exactly what he wants," the boy insists as he raises his own voice in frustration.

Uncrossing her arms and waving her hands in front of her, she barks back, "Hiccup, he forbade you to see me, just like my father forbade me to see you!"

Exasperated, Hiccup throws up his own hands and looks up, "Gods! Astrid, that's WHY he told me not to see you! Because your father told you not to, and then asked my Dad to do the same!"

"Maybe, maybe not," she answers with a frustrated voice, "but it sure doesn't look to me like your Dad wants to see us together anymore than mine does!"

Sighing heavily, Hiccup pinches the bridge of his nose as he again insists, "Yes, he does, Astrid. He very much likes the idea of us being together. He's told me that more than once."

Narrowing her gaze at him, she asks pointedly, "Was that before or after he told you not to see me again?"

"Before," Hiccup answers as he rubs his hand over his eyes, then over his face.

"Well, maybe he changed his mind, then!" she answers sharply, frowning bitterly.

"No, he didn't," Hiccup says with certainty, rubbing his hand over the back of his neck. The boy feels like one great big knot of tension. He isn't used to this kind of arguing. Inwardly, he wonders if this will always be a part of life with Astrid.

"Prove it," Astrid demands, staring sharply at him.

"Fine," Hiccup says, dropping his hand to his side and staring back at Astrid with a frustrated gaze. "Last night? After Dad almost caught you in my bedroom?" he starts, almost smirking when the girl's expression changes to one of surprise at his words and her cheeks flush a slight pink at the mention of the near disaster.

"I thought everything was fine, that we had gotten away with it…" He pauses for a moment, watching as Astrid's brow furrows with worry at his phrasing, and he's unable now to hold back a slight smirk. He savors the moment, then goes on to say, "But just as he was closing the door, he ducked back in and said to me, and I quote, 'son, the next time Astrid sneaks over to have fun, try to be a bit more quiet. I'd like to get a proper night's sleep.' Then he winked at me and closed the door behind him."

Astrid's face and neck goes a deep scarlet, all the way down to her shirt at his words as she stares at him with wide eyes, her jaw dropping. She quickly closes her eyes and covers her face with her hands, whimpering with a shaking voice, "Oh Gods…"

"Yeah," he says, also blushing. "So, I don't think we need to worry about my Dad not being in favor of you and me." With those words, he pauses to wait for his girlfriend to recover from the revelation that Stoic not only knew that she had snuck over, but that he also knew well enough what the two of them had been doing.

"Oh, Gods," Astrid again laments. "I don't think I've ever been so embarrassed in my life," she says with a heavy sigh.
Chuckling, Hiccup tells her sardonically, "Yeah, well, just you wait...I'm sure you and I are in for plenty of more of that in the days ahead..." She looks at him with a horrified expression. He grins and shrugs while holding up his hands defensively. "I don't know of anything specific coming, but how much have we had to be embarrassed about in just the last two days?"

With that, she hesitates, then chuckles once as she smirks while nodding in agreement.

"Good point," she admits, sighing. She watches him quietly with a sardonic grin for a moment or two.

"Well, Hiccup, you are lucky I am so very much in love with you," she tells him, smirking as he lifts an eyebrow. "Because I wouldn't put up with all this crap for anyone else..."

The boy grins at her explanation, chuckling slightly. "Yeah, well...it's all worth it to me," he says with a shrug.

"Me too," she sighs heavily, looking down at his hands resting upon the bedroll. Reaching over, she takes one in her hand, saying, "So...what do we do now?"

"I guess we wait," he says, moving to entwine his fingers with hers as he holds his hand tightly. "Dad said to trust him..."

Astrid hesitates, then nods and glances at him. "Okay, I can do that," she says with a sigh. "I just wish there was something we could do to help make it happen..."

Shaking his head as he meets her gaze, he tells her, "Dad warned me not to interfere or do anything to get in the way. He was very clear about that."

Sighing again, Astrid nods. "I wish we knew what his plan is..."

"I wish we knew what his plan is..."

Squeezing her hand firmly, Hiccup answers with a sigh, "so do I." He pauses, then tells her, "I tried to get it out of Gobber today, but that salty old dog wasn't budging an inch..." Both teens smirk at the mention of the wizened smith. "He just repeated Dad's warning to stay out of the way..."

Nodding sullenly, she replies, "I get it...but...it'd be easier to be sure we're right, that Stoic's trying to make it happen..." She glances down, adding unthinkingly, "Mom and I paid the price tonight, for Vali's news to my Dad about what you and I did back on the island, yesterday..."

Hiccup's eyes grow wide at her words, his face going pale as his jaw falls slack. "Oh Gods," he says weakly, his grip on her hand slackening, "that's why you have those bruises..."

Looking up at Hiccup, Astrid shakes her head. "Hiccup, it's fine," she says softly. He furrows his brow at her words, shocked. She sighs and explains, "If he didn't have that to hit me for, it would have been something else," she explains with a shrug. Hiccup looks at her with a pained expression, his eyes filled with worry and care for her.

The girl shrugs again. "That's just how my life is," she says in a resigned fashion. "You wanted to know," she adds, unable to keep the bitterness out of his voice, then winces at the guiltily look on his face.

"Astrid," the boy starts to say, hesitating as she watches him intently. "Astrid, I'm sorry I didn't respect your wishes, I shouldn't have pried..."

The girl cuts him off by throwing her arm around his neck and pulling him to her, pressing her lips
firmly against his to kiss him passionately. Hiccup lets out a muffled yelp in surprise. He tries to pull away so he can continue speaking, but Astrid wraps her arm more tightly about his neck to keep him pressed against her lips.

She finally loosens her grip and he immediately pulls back and starts to talk again, but Astrid shushes him, quickly placing her finger over his lips. "Stop that," she whispers, staring into his eyes for a moment before adding, "It's...it's okay. You were worried about me."

She hesitates, then says further, "I'm...I'm glad you know..."

He looks at her with a concerned gaze, staring deeply into her eyes. After a few moments, he asks quietly, "are you sure?"

Without hesitation, she nods at him. "I'm sure, Hiccup," she says in a hushed whisper, feeling the emotion build up again. In truth, she's sick of this topic and wants to be done with it already. She's shed far too many tears for her liking. In the last two days she's wept more than she can remember for years before that.

She had long ago stopped crying when her father hit her. But where Hiccup was concerned, it seemed the floodgates were ready to open at any moment.

The boy looks at her apprehensively, worried by the uncertainty in her reaction and the aggravation he reads on her face. He says nothing more, and an awkward silence grows between them. She watches him intently as his worry grows with each passing moment while a measure of guilt gnaws more and more inside of her for being standoffish.

Hiccup opens his mouth again, then pauses, considering his words carefully.

"Asrid," he says hesitantly, "If...if you ever want to...talk...about what you're going through, I'd...be happy to just...listen..."

The girl draws a deep and somewhat ragged sigh, closing her eyes. "Hiccup, I am so done talking about it," she says, a little more firmly than she intended. Gritting her teeth as she hears her own words, she looks at him again and feels even more guilt hit her at the sight of his hurt expression.

She leans in and kisses him. The boy breathes out a sigh of relief at the touch of her lips, and when she pushes him gently onto his back, he willingly yields.

The girl kisses him for a while before she finally pulls back just enough to look at him. Caressing his face, she whispers quietly, "But...thank you, Hiccup."

The boy nods at her words, smiling faintly as he closes his eyes and leans into her hand.

Her heart clenches as she thinks about how harshly she just answered his offer of help, the memory of it compelling her to say, "Maybe...maybe someday I'll be ready to...to talk about it..."

Hiccup opens his eyes to look up at her eagerly, his lips blooming into a smile.

"Someday," Astrid quickly emphasizes again with a measure of firmness to her voice. This time, her tone doesn't phase the boy, rather he smiles at her all the more.

"I'll wait for as long as you need, Astrid," he says in a resolute whisper that she can't help but smile at, as they look into each others' eyes. She leans in to kiss him once more, then puts her head upon his chest, sighing happily as he starts to rub her back again while caressing her cheek with his other hand. She hugs him as she finally starts to relax after such a painful, emotional ride.
"I love you, Hiccup," she says quietly, happy to just listen to the beating of his heart. He squeezes her tightly in his arms and she feels like there's no other place in the world where she belongs.

"I love you too, Astrid," he tells her in a tender voice, his hand slowly moving over her back. The girl smiles widely at his words, relieved beyond measure that they've gotten past the sharing of her secret.

She sighs in contentment as she enjoys the feel of his arms wrapped tightly about her. The longer she lays there in the warmth of his nearness, snuggled up under the blanket with him, the harder she finds keeping her eyes open. She realizes they should get up soon and go home, but she doesn't want to part from him yet. Not after what they just went through.

She needs to savor his closeness just a little while longer. She needs to feel how he loves her by the way he holds her to him. Squeezing him happily, she sighs contentedly as he embraces her all the more tightly.

After several moments, her eyes drift close as she lingers in his arms, breathing in his scent that mingles with the smell of iron and ashes, which always clings to him after a day at the forge.

The rhythmic beating of his heart slowly lulls her into a deep sleep. Hiccup's eyes also flutter closed as he embraces the love of his life, a contented smile upon his lips.

The cove is silent save for the soft burble of the stream that runs through the pond. The two lovers both sleep soundly in each others' arms, cozy together in their embrace, the blanket that covers them keeping them warm together in the chill night air.
Chapter 16

A loud pounding on the door to his house jars Stoic out of a peaceful sleep. The large man grumbles to himself as he starts forcing himself to wake up. He wonders how early it is. The chief usually is up before dawn, but this seems too early for even his own overly energetic start to the day.

He sits up in bed, shaking his head to clear the sleep from his mind. By no means was this the first time he had been woken up so, but since the tribe had befriended the dragons that used to raid them regularly, Stoic hadn't been woken up like this once.

The pounding comes again, louder this time, causing Stoic to shout with a snarl, "I'm comin', knock it off already!"

He sighs as he stands up, pausing before he pulls on his pants, drawing the strings and tying them. Grabbing his tunic, he pulls it over his head, then tugs on his boots and strides into the hallway.

"Someone had better be dead or dying," Stoic booms as he stomps down the stairs. After countless years of being woken up for the raids, this last month of peace with the dragons has made him quite used to sleeping through the night without interruption, so this disturbance leaves him particularly annoyed and angry.

Storming over to the door, he unbolts it and yanks it open, furrowing his brow in surprise when he sees Thorsten standing on his step. The other man holds a torch in his hand, its yellow light flicking over the two men.

"What're you doin' here?" Stoic asks dangerously, glaring at the man with a thinly concealed hatred. The chief winces as he smells strong scent of alcohol on the man. Vikings typically drink a great deal, but Thorsten was one of the few who took it far beyond the pale.

"I've come for my daughter," Astrid's Father answers clearly and angrily, staring daggers at the other, larger man. Clearly he wasn't drunk now, but he was probably hungover by the look of his bloodshot eyes.

Stoic's eyes flare at the accusation and he snaps back, "She's not here, Thorsten." He narrows his gaze at the man, "I told you that I'd forbid Hiccup to see her, an' so I did!"

"Since when have you ever kept your word?" the man barks back, even though Stoic was well known among the tribe for being true and honest. Of course, that's not how Thorsten saw it, but he and his supporters were in the minority with that view.

"She's not here," the chief repeats, deciding not to take the bait. "If she's run off on ye, I can't say I'd blame her." The other man bristles, causing Stoic to grin slightly. "But either way, she's not here."

Staring daggers at the larger man, Thorsten snaps back, "Then you won't mind if I come in and look for her…"

Stoic barks a laugh, tossing back his head. "There is no way you are setting foot inside o'my house," he says in a hostile tone.

The two glare at each other in silence, the tension building.

"Thorsten," comes a woman's voice from behind him. The man turns to glance back while Stoic looks on in surprise, not having realized that there was anyone else at his door. As Astrid's Father
steps slightly to the side, the chief can see Freja, Astrid's Mother.

"Thorsten," she says, stepping forward a little, "perhaps we can just ask Stoic to please go and look around his house for her, just to be sure she's not here when perhaps he doesn't know it," she says gently, looking pleadingly from her husband to the chief as she speaks, her voice courteous and diplomatic.

Her husband frowns at her words, but then glances at the chief with a raised eyebrow. "Well?" he asks. "Will you?"

Heaving a heavy sigh, Stoic nods. "Very well," he says. "Wait here."

With that he closes the door and bolts it, then moves inside to a table where the candles are. He fumbles with the flint and steel in the dark, but quickly manages to light the short, fat stick of wax. Picking it up, he looks around the living area and quickly sees that, as he expects, that there's nobody here save for Toothless, who is curled up on his bed in the corner. The dragon peaks at him with one eye then slowly shuts it again, making a soft grumbling sound as he curls up more tightly, covering his face with his one tail fin.

Muttering under his breath in his jealousy of the dragon being able to still sleep while he can't, the large man climbs the stairs, then pauses at his son's door.

Knocking gently, he says, "Son, wake up, I need to talk to ya…"

He waits in silence for a moment. Frowning slightly, he raps solidly on the door while calling out more loudly, "Hiccup?"

After another few moments of silence, the large man frowns deeply as he opens the door and looks inside.

"Son…?" he asks quietly, expecting a repeat of last night, possibly even catching Astrid here with his son.

The man is stunned when he sees Hiccup's empty, still made bed. His jaw hangs half open as he looks about the small room frantically, searching for some sign of an occupant. He furrows his brow as he realizes that the boy is not here.

Closing the door slowly, the large man thinks upon this discovery, frowning at the implications. His son and Astrid are both missing. Inside, he fumes at the boy's brash actions, quickly considering the possibilities.

Furrowing his brow, he quickly walks into Hiccup's room to open the plain chest at the foot of his bed. The chief is relieved when he sees the expected stack of clothing.

At least he knows Hiccup hasn't run off.

As he considers what this means and what to do about it, there's another loud knock on his door. "Stoic?" comes Thorsten's muffled voice from the other side of the door. "Is Astrid there or not?!"

The chief hesitates for a moment more before walking back down the stairs. He strides up to the door, undoing the bolt and opening the portal again.

He looks at Thorsten and Freja for a moment, finalizing his decision before he tells them, "Hiccup's gone too."
The two look at him with surprise, though Freja less than Thorsten, who hesitates for only a moment before he bellow, "Gods be damned, Stoic, this is all your fault!"

"Well it seems you don't have much control over your son!" Thorsten snaps back.

"Well it seems you don't have much control over your son!" Thorsten snaps back.

Laughing heartily, Stoic answers, "Where have you been fer the last fifteen years?" he asks. "Th' boy has a mind of his own," he points out, then pauses before adding with a grin, "as does yer daughter, it seems..." The other man bristles at this, staring daggers at his chief.

"Stoic has a point dear," Freja chimes in, her voice measured and delicate. "We're trying to keep apart a young man and a young woman who are very much in love," she gently points out as the two men look at her. "We shouldn't be surprised when they defy us to see each other."

Stoic nods, briefly meeting Freja's gaze, the two sharing a knowing look. "Aye," Stoic answers, dropping all of the hostility from his voice. "We'd have an easier time of holdin' back th'tide than keeping these two from each other," he says, meeting Thorsten's gaze when he looks back at him.

Pausing for a moment, Stoic goes on to say, "Thorsten, I know yer considering an offer right now," the other man slightly lifts an eyebrow, listening as his chief goes on, "but perhaps you might entertain another bid..."

As Stoic finishes making his case, he watches Astrid's father intently for his reaction. Freja also looks on, holding her breath as the two wait in anticipation for his answer.

"Astrid and Hiccup are in love, as Freja points out," Stoic reiterates, "it'd be easier fer everybody if we didn' try t'fight that," he points out. "If th'two were t'get married, it'd end our feud, bring our families together. Berk could finally have a true peace, maybe fer the first time since our forefathers first sailed here..."

Thorsten narrows his gaze and Stoic continues, "Besides which, I'm sure I could do far better than whatever Vali's offered ya fer th'bride price," he says with a grin. "That man always was a little on th'cheap side..."

As Stoic finishes making his case, he watches Astrid's father intently for his reaction. Freja also looks on, holding her breath as the two wait in anticipation for his answer.

The man stands silently as the torchlight flickers, casting shadows that leap and jump across the faces of the three adults. Thorsten looks from Stoic to Freja and back again, considering the two quietly.

"Your price would have be very high indeed, Stoic," Thorsten cautions him, watching for the other man's reaction.

"Oh, I think I could give you a very fair price," he says with a warm smile, though his expression drops as he sees Thorsten's smirk.

"I'm not so sure," he says to Stoic, going on, "You know what I want, and it's neither gold nor silver..."

The chief narrows his gaze at the man's answer, staring intently at him. "You would make the bride price fer Astrid to be leadership of th'Hooligan tribe?" he asks in a quiet, wary voice.

Thorsten nods. "I'd say it's a fair trade," he says with a bitter smirk. "Your son's happiness for yours."
Stoic's brows knot together as he challenges him, "What about yer daughter's happiness?" he asks.

"Well," Thorsten answers with a chuckle, "you'll be buying that too."

Shaking his head slowly, Stoic mutters, "You are unbelievable, Thorsten." Furrowing his brow, he asks in bitter disbelief, "You would hold yer daughter's future an'happiness hostage fer yer own ambition?"

Thorsten glares at Stoic. "I'm merely guaranteeing my family's future by realizing the value of what I hold and insisting on fair trade," he says flatly, adding, "You would do the same."

Shaking his head again, Stoic answers, "No. Yer wrong," he says plainly. "I don't view Hiccup as chattel to be bartered with like property."

Thorsten barks a laugh. "That's exactly what you're doing!" he proclaims, smirking again, "you just made me an offer for Astrid!"

Sighing, Stoic shakes his head. "I made an offer t'see our children wed because I know it'd make them both more happy than anything else we could possibly do," he tells the man firmly. "That's all."

"Well, either way, you know my price," he says sharply, glaring up at the larger man.

"And you know my answer," Stoic replies with finality. "It's the same as it's e'er been."

"Then we have nothing more to discuss here," Astrid's father answers with a scowl, his gaze full of hostility and bitterness. "If you'll excuse me, I'm going to go look for my daughter." With that he turns and starts walking away.

Stoic glances over at the horizon to see the pre-dawn light just start to brighten the night sky. "Aye," he says. "We should find where they've gone," he answers.

Looking back over his shoulder, Thorsten glares, "I'll take no help from you," he says, then pauses before adding with a measure of hostility, "but you'd better pray you find them before I do..." Stoic's gaze narrows as the man goes on, "because nothing in Midgard or Asgard will be able to protect your son if I catch him with my daughter..."

"Thorsten, if you lay a hand on my son, I will cut you down where you stand," Stoic says evenly, though his voice roils with barely contained fury.

The man chuckles as he turns. "I'd like to see you try," he answers as he walks away.

"Freja!" he calls sharply, not even looking back.

The woman, who had been watching helplessly, casts a glance at Stoic. "Thanks for trying," she says quietly.

He nods briefly in answer. "Thanks fer yer help," he answers quickly while meeting her gaze, then adding with a sharp whisper, "you and Astrid have a way out, you know..." The woman looks back at him intently, the two sharing a knowing look as she sets her jaw anxiously.

"Freja!" Thorsten booms, having paused to look back at his wife as she talks with Stoic.

The woman purses her lips, telling him with a frown, "I have to go..."

Stoic merely nods, watching her quickly turn and start to walk quickly to her husband's side. The chief frowns as he sees the woman limping. Thorsten watches her come and join him, then casts a
scathing glance at Stoic before turning around and walking down the hill from the chief's house.

Stoic watches them intently until they reach the bottom of the hill, then he immediately goes back into his house, closing and bolting the door before walking hastily over to Toothless.

Kneeling down by the dragon, he puts his hand on the creature's shoulder and gently shakes him. "Toothless," he says quietly, watching the tail pull slowly away as the green eyes opening reluctantly. "Toothless, I need yer help t'find Hiccup," he says. The dragon's head jerks up at the mention of his boy's name, his eyes wide as he cocks his head at Stoic.

"Hiccup is missing. He's in danger," Stoic says with a worried voice, watching the dragon intently. The large creature glances upstairs, then back at Stoic.

"Hiccup isn't here," he answers, shaking his head. "Can you find him?" The dragon jumps up and flaps up to the rafters, bounding over to the second story hallway and into the boy's empty room.

As the dragon goes to see for himself, Stoic stands up and walks over to where his armor hangs. Picking it up he pulls it over his broad shoulders and buckles the belt, grimacing as he hears Toothless cry out upon finding the room empty. The large man tosses his cloak over his shoulders and fastens it. As Toothless comes flying out of the second floor to land with a thump on the first, snarling while he does. The chief picks up his hammer and his helmet, putting the cold metal upon his head. Toothless look as him with concern.

"Hiccup is in trouble, we need t'find him," Stoic says firmly as he strides over to the back door, opening it and stepping outside. He shoulders his hammer and looks back at the dragon, who cocks his head at the large man.

"Let's go," he says firmly, waiting on the dragon. Toothless hesitates for a moment more before launching forward, barreling past Stoic into the early morning darkness. Stoic quickly closes the door behind the dragon and dashes after the midnight black creature, gripping the handle of his hammer tightly.

Astrid smiles happily as she slowly wakes from what could only be called the most satisfying sleep of her life.

She lays draped over Hiccup, her head resting upon his chest, her arm stretched across his body, and her one leg spread over both of his. Snuggling up beneath the blanket, she squeezes him in her embrace and sighs contentedly as she feels his arms tighten about her. Slowly she opens her eyes, lifting her head slightly to look up at the boy's face. He still sleeps peacefully, though she can tell by the way he stirs that he's starting to wake up too.

Her lips curl into a sweet smile at the sight, her gaze lingering.

As the sleep clears from her head, she starts to realize something is wrong. Looking around to take in their surroundings, she blinks a few times and quickly realizes what happened. She looks up into the brightening sky with a horror filled face and slips into a complete and absolute panic as she sees that it's now dawn.

"Hiccup!" she cries anxiously, half sitting up and shaking him by his shoulders. "Hiccup, wake up!" she says urgently, fear welling up in her gut.

The boy groans sleepily up at Astrid's insistent jostling, his eyes fluttering open as her fearful words pierce the contented blanket of sleep that covered his mind.
"What?" he asks anxiously, yet groggily as he looks at her while trying to wake up completely. "Wh-what's wrong?!" he asks while sitting up along with her.

"Hiccup, we fell asleep!" she says in a terrified voice. The boy stares blankly at her for a moment as he tries to comprehend her meaning, then his eyes grow wide as his head clears enough for him to realize the importance of her words.

"Oh Gods," he says in a strained voice, meeting her gaze.

"Hiccup, my father is going to kill me!" she cries as fear grips her heart. She clutches his arms, staring at him with a crazed look.

"Astrid, settle down," he tells her, grabbing hold of her shoulders tightly, though his own heart races as he feels a swell of panic. He pushes down his own worries, however, realizing that he needs to be strong for his girlfriend, now of all times.

"Hiccup, what're we going to do?!" she asks in a hysterical voice, her eyes wide with a frantic terror as she looks to him for answers.

Reaching up to put his hand upon her cheek, Hiccup grips her head firmly, looking deeply into her eyes. "Astrid, just calm down," he commands her firmly in a voice that expects no argument.

"Calm down?!" she asks with a shrill voice, looking at him incredulously. "Hiccup, do you realize how bad this is?!" she shrieks as her heart pounds frantically in her chest, the girl finding herself more overwhelmed by fear than she can ever remember.

"Astrid!" Hiccup nearly shouts as he grips her face more firmly, still holding onto her arm tightly. "Astrid, just relax!" he says, staring into her eyes intently. "What's done is done, we can't change anything by panicking!" She stares at him wildly as he goes on to say, "we have to calm down and think this through!"

She furrows her brow and says, "Hiccup, are you insane?! My father will kill us both for this!" her voice rises to a scream.

Grasping her face in both of his hands, Hiccup barks loudly back at her, "ASTRID, STOP!" he stares deeply into her eyes as he pauses, letting his words sink in. She swallows as she stares back at him, trembling. He tells her in a stern voice, "I am not going to let that happen! My father will protect us! Toothless and Stormfly will protect us! I will protect you!" he says with finality, gripping her firmly. "I will not let your father hurt you!" he says with such a fervent passion that Astrid hesitates, staring intently back into his gaze for the space of several heartbeats.

The girl collapses into his arms, hugging him tightly as she breathes raggedly. Hiccup wraps his arms about her tightly, squeezing her to him as she struggles to keep back the tears.

"What're we going to do?" she asks weakly, pressing her head against his chest.

"Well, first thing's first," he says. "We need to get out of here. Our parents might be looking for us already," the boy goes on as the possibility occurs to him.

Astrid nods quickly at his words, the logic helping to drive away the sheer panic that had overwhelmed her so completely. She tosses back the blanket and starts pulling on her leggings and skirt again while Hiccup grabs the blanket and starts rolling it up.

"Then what?" she asks anxiously looking over to him as she lifts her butt up to pull her clothing all the way up.
"I don't know," Hiccup admits, briefly meeting Astrid's gaze as he ties up the blanket while she pulls on her boots. "But we'll figure it out," he adds in a pensive tone. She nods nervously at him as she crawls off of the bedroll.

He readily moves when Astrid pushes him gently off of the bedding and the girl then sets about rolling it up. He crawls over to his crutch with a slight frown at the sight of the hated device, then notices his vest laying upon the rock he had been sitting on. Realizing that Astrid must have brought it with her last night and tossed it there when she arrived, he picks it up and puts it own, then with a sigh he then picks up the wooden pole that he now depends on. With considerable difficulty, he starts to push himself up.

For some reason he's surprised when Astrid grabs him under his shoulders and hefts him up onto his one foot. He feels awkward at needing her help, but says nothing as he looks hesitantly at her, trying to read her mood. The girl looks back into his eyes with a concerned and apologetic gaze.

"I'm sorry I freaked out, Hiccup," she says, keeping her arms wrapped around him. Smiling sublimely at her, Hiccup doesn't bother with the crutch, instead he puts his hands upon her hips to balance himself as he rests the wooden pole against his elbow.

"Hey, it's okay," he says with a warm smile that she can't help but return. "Truth be told I'm kinda panicking, too," he admits with a wry grin, looking deeply into her eyes. Astrid smirks slightly at his words as he continues, "but we'll figure this out. I won't let your father hurt you," he says again with a resolute voice, even though he has no idea how he'll protect her from such a brute of a man. Her father is nearly as large as Stoic.

Sighing in contentment at his words, Astrid leans in and presses her lips to his, kissing him gently. Hiccup pulls her into his embrace, responding in kind. Their kiss quickly becomes more passionate and they linger for a while until Astrid reluctantly ends it, resting her chin on his shoulder as he does the same.

"Hey," he whispers into her ear. "Look at it this way…at least we got to sleep together for the first time…"

Smiling from ear to ear at his words, she squeezes him tightly. Astrid can't help but feel giddy in girlish excitement at his words, allowing herself a moment to enjoy that realization. "I know," she answers with a jubilant voice, all the more happy as she feels him hold her tightly. "It was wonderful," she whispers, kissing his ear tenderly.

Sighing happily, he rubs her back with his hands. "Someday, that'll be how we'll spend every night together," he whispers before kissing her neck, and so sends a shiver through his girlfriend's body. He then whispers more softly into her ear, "and I'll cherish each and every time."

Astrid sighs happily, hugging him all the more tightly.

"I love you, Hiccup," she whispers into his ear.

Smiling from ear to ear, the boy hugs her tightly in his arms, whispering back, "I love you too, Astrid."

They hold each other tightly for a few more moments before Astrid starts to pull away, looking down with a worried expression and sighing as she says, "We should really get moving…"

Hiccup nods at her words, seating his crutch and finding his balance as he reluctantly lets go of her. "Definitely," he answers. "If we're going to get caught, I don't want it to be here," he says, drawing
Astrid's gaze back to him, the girl looking at him quizzically through her bangs.

He grins at her, explaining, "this is our special place. I don't want anyone else to ever find out about it."

Astrid's smile returns at his words as she looks happily into his eyes. Impulsively, she cups his face in her hands and kisses him passionately. The boy whimpers, his lips and tongue meeting hers eagerly, lingering as long as possible before she pulls away again to stare deeply into his eyes once more. He stares back at her dreamily, sighing happily.

"Hiccup, you really are the sweetest boyfriend I could have ever asked for," she breathes as she stares into his eyes, her hands cupping his face tenderly. He smiles at her sappily, looking back into her gaze with a contented stare.

"You have no idea how happy you make me, Astrid," he says. The girl sighs joyously at his words, the two leaning in to kiss intimately once more, their arms wrapping about each other tightly. They moan happily as they kiss with increasing urgency.

Suddenly a tree branch shakes as they hear a bird fly off, chirping noisily. The two lovers break the kiss to look in the direction of the noise, their hearts jumping in panic, though they stay half wrapped together in each other's arms. Neither move, listening intently for any other sound.

The cove is silent, save for the burbling of the water and their own breathing.

"We should go," Astrid says resolutely as she reluctantly slips out of Hiccup's embrace, her gaze still scanning the area around them. The boy nods wordlessly, letting her slip away, but grabs her hand at the last. Astrid looks back over at him, lifting an eyebrow. He smiles at her, squeezing her hand. She smiles back, gripping his hand just as tightly.

Bending down, Astrid picks up the bedroll and blanket and slings them over her shoulder. Still holding his hand tightly, she then leads him towards the entrance to the cove. Remembering his frustrated explanation last night that he's not as fast on his crutch, she slows her walk to match the pace he sets. Her gut twists nervously at their sluggish progress, though she says nothing. Glancing back, she smiles feebly at him as he meets her gaze and she grips his hand tightly, her smile growing as he squeezes back.

Reading the anxiety on Astrid's face, Hiccup smiles apologetically. "Sorry I'm slowing us down," he says, "Maybe you should go on ahead and get home…"

Frowning, she shakes her head vehemently. "No way," she says firmly, "I am not going to leave you to get back on your own."

Hiccup smiles at her as they make their way. "Astrid, that's nice of you, but we really don't want to get caught together," he points out. "We can come up with some story to explain both of us happening to be gone all night, as long as nobody sees us together before we get back…" The girl frowns at his very logical point, annoyed that he's right.

"Well," she says, "we can worry about that later. It's a long way home, Hiccup, and I'm not about to make you do the journey alone."

Hiccup smiles as they reach the entrance to the cove. "Astrid, I got here on my own just fine," he points out. "Now that it's daylight, I'll be alright…"

The girl releases his hand and crosses her arms. "Not a chance, Hiccup," she says indignantly.
He opens his mouth to protest, but Astrid cuts him off before he can get a word out. "We're wasting time by arguing," she points out impatiently, lifting an eyebrow at him.

With a sigh, the boy drops down to crawl under the shield that he had accidentally wedged into the opening of the cove so many weeks ago. After he crosses under the wooden barrier, he starts to make his way through the narrow rock corridor. Glancing back, he sees Astrid following right behind him. She smirks at him as their eyes meet, and he can't help but grin in return before he looks forward to continue through. The closeness of the stones make his way easier, allowing him to exit the cove without use of his crutch.

When he emerges on the other side, he hefts himself up on his crutch again, hobbling out a few feet to make room for Astrid. Once his girlfriend emerges and stands up straight, looking over at him, he opens his mouth to protest again. "Hiccup," Astrid says as she strides over to him, again cutting him off before he can get a word out. "Shut up and hop on."

"Uh, What?" he asks, bewildered while he tries to make sense of her words. The girl stands directly in front of him with her fists on her hips and he stares up into her eyes, his brow furrowed. "You're right," she answers. "We need to move more quickly, but I'm not about to leave you on your own," she tells him firmly. "We'll make better time if I carry you." She looks sharply in his eyes, saying, "So, you need to climb on my back."

Blushing at her words, Hiccup shakes his head. "Astrid, you don't need to-"

"Hiccup," she interrupts him abruptly with a smirk as she goes on to explain, "you have two choices. Either you hop onto my back, or I toss you over my shoulder like a sack of potatoes." He furrows his brow, looking at her incredulously. She only grins all the more, adding indifferently with a shrug, "either way, I'm carrying you out of here."

The boy narrows his gaze in frustration as he looks up into her eyes for a moment, quickly seeing that she's very serious. He sighs heavily, his shoulders dropping as he looks down at the ground. "Turn around," He says in a defeated tone, taking his weight off of his crutch and gripping onto her shoulder for support. The girl smirks and hands him the bedroll and blanket. Hiccup ties his crutch to the one and slings both onto his back with the crutch.

Astrid then cups his chin in her free hand, lifting his gaze up to hers. He looks at her reluctantly, though his lips twitch when he sees the adoring smile upon her lips and the tender care for him in her eyes. She quickly leans in to press her lips to his in a fleeting kiss, lingering just long enough to draw a soft moan from the boy. Hiccup can't help but smile as she pulls away to look into his eyes again. The two share a wordless exchange as they gaze at each other. Astrid's eyes are adoring yet triumphant while Hiccup's are appreciative, yet chagrined.

Without saying anything, Astrid turns around and bends at her knees, lowering her shoulders for her boyfriend. Sighing from the bottom of his toes, Hiccup hesitates for a moment before he jumps onto her back, wrapping his arms about her neck and his legs around her sides. The girl quickly grips under his thighs, hefting his weight. "Squeeze your legs around me," she tells him as she positions his legs above her hips. "It'll make carrying you easier."
The boy wordlessly complies, gripping her waist more firmly with his thighs as he grips her around her shoulders tightly. The two fidget for another few moments to get comfortable.

When they both seem settled, Astrid turns her head to look back at her boyfriend.

"Ready?" she asks.

"Yeah," he answers, then hangs on tightly as she starts to run through the forest, carrying him back towards Berk.
Chapter 17

Thorsten walks swiftly away from the hill where Stoic's mansion sits. Freja follows close behind him, managing to keep up, in spite of her limp. The man grits his teeth angrily as he strides forward, his jaw set as ponders where Astrid could have gone to with the Haddock boy. He briefly considers various places around the village where the teens were known to frequent, but quickly decides that his daughter wouldn't have picked anywhere so obvious.

He quickly decides that it is far more likely that she went inland, into the untamed part of the island. The man grunts to himself in satisfaction at his conclusion. As he and his wife near their house, he changes direction, turning to take them down a street that will lead to the edge of the village.

The woman turns with him, deeply worried for Astrid and Hiccup now. She has seen her husband rant and rave about many a thing over the years, often taking out his frustrations on her and her daughter, but never has she seen him so livid as he is right now. Now that he's heading for the woods, she's all the more concerned.

"Thorsten," she says in an anxious voice, "we should probably check down by the forge," she says. "If Hiccup and Astrid are anywhere together other than Stoic's house, that's probably where they are..." It's a flat out lie, but she hopes to buy the teens some time.

The large man looks back at his wife, giving her a fleeting glance. "Good idea," he says in a dismissive tone, "you should go and look for them there."

Freja frowns, growing all the more worried. "You should come with me," she says gently, "It'll be better if we find them together."

Thorsten shakes his head as he leads her to the edge of the village, stopping to turn and face her. "No," he says firmly, looking at her with thinly veiled contempt as the firelight from his torch dances across her face. He had already made clear earlier this morning that he holds her responsible for this. That was when he had given her the limp.

"If we split up, we'll be more likely to find them," he says evenly, staring intently into her gaze, looking for any sign that she knows anything. For once, she doesn't, save that her daughter is out with Hiccup in the woods, somewhere. However, she doesn't know the actual location.

She looks at him evenly, keeping her expression placid, unreadable.

The woman wonders what chance he has to find her out in the woods. The man is a very good tracker, but could he possibly pick up her trail to start with? Moreover, he taught Astrid everything he knows about tracking. Would their daughter have thought to cover her tracks?

"Do you really think they're out in the woods?" Freja asks skeptically, glancing behind him at the line of trees. The sky has started to brighten, casting a sharp contrast for the bare branches that sway in the wind, jutting up from the hard and frozen ground like so many skeletal hands.

Thorsten smirks at her question, watching her for a moment before following her gaze behind him to look back into the forest. He grins all the more, his certainty growing with her reaction.

"I'm sure of it," he answers, looking back at her.

Freja frowns, worrying she's tipped her hand.
"Go look for her in the forge, then go home," he instructs his wife with a tone that expects no argument. She looks at him with a furrowed brow, trying to read him, but then quickly and meekly nods. Turning, she walks away as fast as her limp will carry her. She disappears behind a house as the road bends away, leaving Thorsten alone as he silently watches the way she went for the space of several breaths.

Turning on his heel, he then strides confidently towards the tree line.

As he walks past the last houses of Berk towards the stretch of primeval forest, Freja looks out from the corner that she had disappeared behind. She quickly limps towards the last house and ducks behind it, peaking out around its corner to watch Thorsten as he walks along the edge of the trees, looking about. She waits anxiously, gritting her teeth as he slows his pace and kneels down to look at the ground and the surrounding foliage.

After a moment of studying the area, Thorsten stands and strides confidently into the woods.

The woman frowns as he does, cursing under her breath as she turns and runs down the street, her limp slowing her far more than she'd like. In spite of her frustration, it's only a minute or two before she arrives at their house. She quickly enters the front door, closing it behind her and then swiftly making her way to the back of the house, exiting the back door into their yard. Closing that door, she looks around for Stormfly, who she sees curled up under the tree behind their house, still sleeping peacefully.

She runs over to the dragon, kneeling beside it.

"Stormfly," she whispers, gently shaking the creature. While she doesn't have nearly as strong a bond with it as Astrid does, the two were friendly enough together.

"Stormfly, wake up," she says urgently. "I need your help…"

The cobalt dragon slowly wakes up, shaking its head and trilling as it looks at the woman with what she swears is a concerned eye.

"Astrid is in trouble," she says urgently, "Her father is going to hurt her…"

The dragon stands up suddenly, crying in concern at the mother's mention of Astrid and her fearful tone of voice.

"Can you help me find Astrid?" she asks in a pleading tone, stroking the creature on its neck.

The large blue lizard cries in answer, trotting over to where her saddle hangs, nudging it with her head and looking back at Freja with a trill.

"Gods be praised, thank you," the woman breathes in relief, dashing over to pick up the saddle.

Heaving the bulky leather equipment, she puts it on the dragon's back and then sets about doing up the straps, trying to remember how she's seen Astrid arrange them before. She tightens them, testing the firmness of the saddle on the dragon's back. It seems secure enough, but she wishes she paid better attention to her daughter's use of the thing.

Gritting her teeth, she nervously climbs atop of the dragon, her heart pounding in her chest as she secures herself, looping the rider's strap around her waist as tightly as she can.

Sighing, she says a quick prayer to Frigga and then pats the dragon on it's neck.

"Let's go, girl," she says urgently while gripping the saddle, "Find Astrid…!"
The woman cries out in shock as the dragon suddenly leaps up into the air with several strong flaps of its wings. The two quickly gain altitude until they're about a few hundred feet above the village. Stormfly then slowly and silently wheels out towards the forest. Freja hangs on for dear life as she looks out over the dark woods, looking out as the sun peaks above the horizon, illuminating the sky with its pale rays.

She prays that the dragon can find her daughter before her husband does, trying her best to look for them in the expansive forest below them.

Stoic charges through the dark woods, struggling to keep up with the Night Fury that dashes ahead of him. The large man huffs and puffs as he runs endlessly at full tilt, his face and arms constantly running afoul of branches. More than once, he's tripped on a root or a fallen tree, though he quickly jumps back up after each fall to continue barreling through the forest.

As the two run through the darkened woods, the sky above slowly starts to brighten with the light of the dawn. Stoic is glad for it, he's tired of stumbling around in the dark while chasing a shadow.

To his surprise, the ebony dragon stops running suddenly, allowing the large viking to finally catch up with the dark, sleek beast. The chief leans against a tree, his barrel chest heaving as he struggles to catch his breath while he sets the head of the warhammer down on the ground before him, resting on the lengthy pommel.

The man considers himself to be a the pinnacle of health, and indeed, there are none in Berk that can match his strength and endurance. Nonetheless, the lengthy and arduous sprint that Toothless set has completely exhausted him.

"What is it, boy?" the large man asks in a hushed whisper between gasps for air as he watches Toothless look around, sniff the air, and scan the sky above.

The dragon looks sharply into the sky above, then makes a repetative, strange sound in the back of his throat. Stoic looks on in amazement at the creature, then looks up to try and see what Toothless watches.

The chief blinks in surprise as he swears he sees through the trees the cobalt streak of a Nadder fly through the sky above them. He's about to shrug off the sighting as his imagination in the dawn hour, but then he hears its unmistakable trill.

Furrowing his brow at the sound, he tries to make sense of it when suddenly Toothless is off again like a shot. The viking's eyes grow wide in surprise as he quickly pushes off from the tree, hefting his hammer as he resumes charging after the lightning quick dragon, panting heavily again as he once more feels his lungs and legs catch on fire.

Astrid dashes through the forest, carrying Hiccup on her back, gritting her teeth as she pushes herself through the fatigue that has set in. Although Hiccup is fairly scrawny, his weight is not insubstantial and soon after they started, she found herself out of breath.

Hiccup has been holding on tightly during the whole ride, his legs gripping her waist as his arms wrap fiercely about her shoulders. With his head next to hers, he breathes in her scent as she quickly works herself into a lather by running with him on her back over the uneven terrain. He can't help but smile at the wonderful smell that is simply Astrid, although his smile soon fades as he becomes worried about how tired she's getting, carrying him like this.
"Astrid," he says in her ear with a quiet voice, "Why don't you stop and rest?"

Shaking her head, the girl stubbornly plows along. "No way," she says, panting, "got to get back… can't get caught," she points out with an exhausted voice, reminding him of the peril they're in.

"How do we do that if you get so tired you can't walk?" he challenges, his words a little choppy as he bounces heavily on her back. The girl doesn't answer, but rather sets her jaw and purses her lips in a way that tells Hiccup she sees his point, but doesn't want to admit it.

"Can you just slow down?" he asks. "You're going to pass out…" he adds, more concerned than ever at her exhausted breathing. He can feel how sweaty her skin is when her cheek sometimes brushes against his, and her body feels as hot as the sun as he clings to her, causing him to sweat along with her. With his arms wrapped around her, he can feel her heart pounding in her chest with the force of his hammer when he's working in the smithy, though her heart beats far faster.

After a few moments, Astrid slows down, gasping for air. Hiccup smiles with a measure of satisfaction at his partial victory, though he knows she needs to stop and recover.

"Astrid, pease…just stop and put me down for a little bit so you can rest?" he begs her, pressing his lips to her cheek. "I'm worried about you," he whispers into her ear before kissing her there tenderly. With a groan of frustration, the girl finally relents, her chest heaving heavily for gulps of air as she stops and relaxes her deathlike grip upon his legs, allowing him to slip off of her back and stand on his own foot.

As he dismounts, Hiccup quickly releases his grip on her shoulders, fully intending to let himself fall back so that his girlfriend can rest without having the burden of supporting him, but she grabs his wrists as he starts to let go.

"Uh-uh," she says breathlessly, shaking her head slightly. Hiccup hesitates as she seems to want to say more, but she has trouble getting the words out while she tries to recover.

"Astrid, it's okay," he says with a grin. "I'm short, it's not that far down for me…"

She chuckles at his words, but still holds onto his wrist with a vice-like grip. After another couple of heavy gasps for air, the girl turns around while still gripping him tightly, but then lets go as she puts her arms around his neck and rests her forehead upon his shoulder, leaning heavily upon him.

Hiccup grins as she uses him for a support, even as he depends upon her for the same. He wraps his arms loosely about her waist, kissing her cheek tenderly as he waits quietly for her breathing to settle a little bit. The girl's skin is red-hot to the touch of his lips.

"Why don't we sit down?" he asks gently against her cheek, nuzzling her.

The girl hesitates at first, but then nods in a slightly defeated manner.

Hiccup smiles, cupping her chin in his one hand, lifting her face up to gently press his lips to hers. He kisses her lovingly, lingering as she sighs contentedly. After he pulls back to look at her, he removes the bedroll that he tied his crutch to and retrieves his aide.

"Come on," he whispers against her ear, leaning upon his crutch while wrapping his other arm about her shoulder. The girl willingly follows his lead as he guides her to a tall, stout tree that stands proudly at the edge of a small clearing.

The boy pulls her gently to him, wrapping his free arm about her shoulders as he eases himself down, smiling as she leans against him. He hugs her as she still breathes heavily, though she's clearly
recooperating with every passing moment.

Astrid melts against him as they settle against the tree, nuzzling against his cheek while she finds his other hand after he releases his crutch, gripping him tightly.

"We'll go again...in just a bit," she protests between gulps of air. "Just... gotta catch my breath..."

Hiccup smirks at her words, wondering if she realizes how exhausted she sounds. "Sure," he tells her, doubting she'll actually be able to match her own expectations of herself.

The young lovers snuggle up tightly against each other as the girl takes deep breaths, trying to recover quickly so they can get on the way again.

Suddenly they hear the sound of something large crashing through the underbrush before them. The two young teens sit bolt upright and grip each other tightly as they fear the worst, looking at the bushes with wide eyes, expecting Thorsten to burst out of the foliage in any second.

Astrid quickly forces herself to stand in spite of her fatigue, taking a few steps forward, worried about protecting Hiccup from whatever may come. She desperately wishes she had her axe with her.

Frowning at her action, Hiccup quickly pushes himself up using the tree and his crutch, moving forward to stand beside her. His girlfriend turns to protest, but suddenly a large creature bursts out of the shrubbery before them in a blur of ebony scales.

"Toothless!" Hiccup cries out excitedly as he sees his best friend suddenly appear, the dragon charging them down and tackling them both. Astrid cries out in shock as the creature knocks her down along with the boy, the two tangled up together as they land in a heap. She's about to say something when the dragon thoroughly licks them both with one swipe of its tongue.

"Ugh!" she protests as Hiccup laughs in spite of himself, amused by her reaction and too glad to see his friend here now than to worry about the dragon slobber.

He rubs the dragon's neck while glancing over at his girlfriend, smirking as she wipes the slime off her face. Looking back at the smiling reptile as he likewise cleans his own face, he asks, "Why'd you come looking for us, bud?"

The two teens jump suddenly as they hear something else crashing through the foliage, from where Toothless had emerged. They both tense, worried that it's Thorsten. The reptile atop of them merely looks towards the sound without concern.

Brandishing his hammer, Stoic crashes through the same bunch of bushes that the dark dragon had just moments before, scaring the two youths nearly as much as the sight of Astrid's father would have.

"Dad!" Hiccup cries out in shock, his eyes wide as he looks fearfully upon the man's scowling face.

"Oh Gods," Astrid says with a look of dread at the sight of her boyfriend's angry father.

At the sound of their voices, Stoic immediately looks down at them with a furious gaze, gripping his hammer tightly as he scowls.

"Dad, I can explain," Hiccup starts to say quickly as Toothless sits back on his haunches, allowing the two teens to scramble as they try and get to their feet. Astrid glances over at Hiccup's words, furrowing her brow as she wonders what story he could possibly give to explain this. The large man glares at the two of them as they fumble to get up, neither having any success as they trip over each
other while watching him stride towards them. They back up against the tree together at his advance and stop trying to stand as the large man looms over them, fuming.

"Hiccup, what were you thinking?!" he asks his son with a furious voice, slamming down the top of his hammer upon the ground beside him with the pommel sticking up. He leaves it there, staring at the two with an intense gaze.

"Dad, it's not what it looks like," the boy pleads, even as he and Astrid are pressed up against each other with their backs to tree, cowering before the stern, towering man.

"Oh?" Stoic asks, lifting an eyebrow, "Well t'me it looks like you two snuck off into th'woods last night and slept together," he says. The two blush at his words, both looking down guiltily.

"Exactly what part o'that story did I get wrong?" he asks with a furrowed brow.

"Dad, we didn't mean to fall asleep together last night," Hiccup pleads as he looks back up, adding, "and we didn't have se-"

"Odin's beard, son!" Stoic cries out, cutting off his son's answer and looking up in exasperation at the heavens, then back down at the two chagrined teens. "D'ye think that really matters now?" He sighs in exasperation, adding, "What've I tol' you before about people's perceptions? It doesn't matter what reality is, only what people think that it is…” The boy looks down in shame at the man's words.

"Mr. Haddock," Astrid interjects, drawing the eyes of her boyfriend and his father, "it's not his fault, it's mine…"

"Oh, I blame th'both of ya," Stoic says sharply, cutting her off abruptly. Astrid shrinks a little at his intense stare, swallowing nervously. "But I did expect better from you, Astrid," he says with such a disappointed tone that she looks down, utterly ashamed.

"Dad," Hiccup starts to say while looking up, only for the man to cut him off.

"Hiccup," Stoic interrupts sternly, "d'you realize th'consequences o'what you two have done?" The two look up at him in concern. "Astrid's father is out looking fer you both right now…"

Astrid's head whips up with a look of such stark terror on her face as she grips Hiccup tightly that Stoic falls silent, looking at her with a furrowed brow. His gaze flicks over at his son who briefly glances back up at him, pursing his lips with a telling gaze before he turns his attention to Astrid, wrapping his arms around her tightly.

"Dad," Hiccup says, looking back up at his father, drawing Astrid's panicked gaze as she grips him all the more tightly with clutching fingers. He glances over at her, then looks back at his father. "Dad, we can't let Mr. Hofferson know what actually happened," he says.

"Oh?" Stoic asks, crossing his arms. "Why's that?" he asks with a leading tone. He watches as Astrid grips Hiccup, the girl staring at him with such an intensity that Stoic wouldn't be surprised if he keeled over dead from it. He considers her reaction pensively and then glances back at Hiccup when the boy answers.

"Dad," he says flatly, "It would be really bad if her father found out what we did." Astrid relaxes a little at his answer, then glances up anxiously at Stoic as he considers his son's words. The large viking is silent for a moment, watching them both intently.

"Her father has a right t'know what she's done, same as I had a right t'know what you've done," the large man answers quietly. He lifts an eyebrow, asking, "So why should I help you hide it from
Hiccup swallows nervously as Astrid reasserts her grip upon him. He glances over to give her a pleading look, but she shakes her head fervently with a deep frown. Sighing and nodding sullenly, he looks back up at his father and says, "I can't say, Dad." Stoic lifts an eyebrow at this as his son adds, "I...I need you to trust me on this, please. It's...it's important that her father doesn't find out."

Stoic looks from one teen to the other in silent thought as they both watch him with nervous gazes. Astrid still clings to Hiccup anxiously as they await his answer.

Just as the chief opens his mouth to reply, the trill of a Nadder comes from up above the trees. All of them look up, including Toothless, who opens his mouth to make the same strange cackle that Stoic had heard earlier. The teens glance at the dragon with a confused look as Stoic smirks, then looks over to the clearing to see Stormfly landing, carrying Freja on her back.

"Mom!" Astrid calls out at seeing the woman as her dragon lands. She lets go of her boyfriend and jumps up, running over as Hiccup and Stoic look on. The woman quickly hops down from the back of the dragon and limps a handful of steps to meet her daughter, throwing her arms about the girl as she leaps into her arms.

"Astrid! Oh, thank the Gods you're alright," she says with a relieved voice as the two embrace.

Stoic and Hiccup look on quietly. The boy starts to try and get up, using the tree and his crutch to help himself. Suddenly Stoic grabs him by his vest and hoists him up, setting his son on his foot, letting the boy get settled with his crutch before he releases him.

"Thanks Dad," he says, the two sharing a brief glance before Stoic picks up his hammer and starts to walk into the clearing, putting his hand on Hiccup's back to bring him along. The boy readily moves forward, stumbling as his father pushes him faster than he can comfortably move on his crutch.

Behind them, Toothless lazily wanders into the clearing and lays down, watching with a disinterested stare as the two men come to stand near Astrid and her mother.

"Mom, Dad's out looking for me and Hiccup," she says in a panicked voice as she pulls away to look up at the woman.

Freja looks at her daughter with a slight frown, nodding. "I know, child," she says, her gaze drawn to Stoic and his son as the two approach them. She meets the chief's gaze, telling him, "Thank you for going after them."

The big man nods once as he and Hiccup come to stand with Astrid and her mother. "Well, I couldn't let Thorsten find them together, now could I?" He asks as he looks at her with a pointed gaze, flicking a glance to her wounded leg and then looking back into her eyes. The woman blushes as she looks back at Stoic with a sheepish gaze, shifting uncomfortably.

"No, of course not," she answers with a slight shake of her head. Astrid and Hiccup share a thoughtful yet confused look at the exchange, then look back at Freja as she says further, "But now that we've found them, we need to find a way to cover this up and explain them both being missing this morning." Her tone is urgent and brooks no reply as she looks sternly at Stoic.

The large man furrows his brow at her assertion, glancing over to Hiccup. His son looks back at him with a determined look while Astrid likewise turns to watch the chief, her expression full of anxious anticipation.

The large man considers the three for a moment, then nods. "If ya think that's best, Freja," he tells
her, glancing back at the woman standing near him. "But what story could we concoct that'd answer this?" he asks.

The woman grins at him. "You've never had to hide anything, have you Stoic?" she asks with a slightly lifted eyebrow.

The burly man furrows his brow and chuckles a little bit, shaking his head. "Oh, that's not true," he says with a slight grin of his own. "Being chief often requires subtly, even…guile…" The woman chuckles at his words, smirking all the more.

He tilts his head slightly. "But I take it you have a plan, then?" he asks her. The woman nods. Astrid and Hiccup exchange glances again, looking at each other incredulously at the back and forth unfolding before them. Their gaze is drawn back to their parents when Freja speaks.

"Thorsten didn't check to see if Stormfly was also missing," she explains. "He never gives the dragon a second thought, save to curse its presence in our home." Stoic listens intently, along with the two teens. "Before he came into the forest to try and find the children, he sent me to the forge to look for them, even though he was certain they weren't there," she explains further. Stoic nods, his gaze narrowing as he starts to see where she's going with this.

"We say Astrid went out to fly before he woke up," she explains. Stoic nods again, then interjects, "and we can say that Hiccup went down to the forge early, before you and Thorsten woke me up this morning." Freja smiles as he states what she was about to say next. "I can get Gobber to corroborate Hiccup's story," he adds.

"That should about do it," Stoic answers, the two parents nodding in satisfaction at each other, then turn to their children with stern gazes.

Hiccup and Astrid shrink a little as they watch their parents nervously, the two teens looking from one to the other and back again.

"Dad, I am so sorry," Hiccup says quickly, talking over Astrid as she says, "Mom, I'm sorry, I didn't mean…"

"Enough!" Stoic barks, silencing the two children as he and Freja look at them with deep frowns. The teens cringe, shrinking under the withering stares of their respective parents.

The two adults share a glance before Stoic looks back at the teens to say, "I hope you appreciate what we're doin' for you." The teens nod fervently, both looking at Stoic with timid, apologetic gazes.

"Th'two of you better not do anything like this again," he warns them, glancing over at Freja before adding, "if you e'er want t'have any chance at getting married," he says, watching the woman's reaction.

Hiccup and Astrid both look at Stoic with wide, excited eyes at his words, glancing at each other before they follow his gaze to Astrid's mother, watching her intently. She smirks, nodding sagely.

"Indeed, Stoic," she says, nodding at him before she glances back to the two teens. "We'll be lucky if Thorsten believes our story. Another episode like this would greatly endanger your prospective
"Aye," the man nods, looking from her back to the teens.

"Dad," Hiccup says nervously as Astrid steps closer to him, taking his hand eagerly in hers. He glances at her, squeezing her hand as they share an eager smile before they both look back at his father. "Dad, do you...do you think there's any chance that we could...get married?"

"If it were up to us," Stoic starts to answer then hesitates, glancing at Freja with a raised eyebrow. The woman nods briefly, then the chief looks back at the children to say, "th'contract would'a been signed already." Astrid grabs Hiccup's arm excitedly, squealing in excitement as the lad covers her hand with his and the two look at each other to share a joyous gaze.

"But we're not th'problem," the boy's father says further, drawing their attention back to him, "an' you already knew that". The smiles slip off of the teens faces as he reminds them of the reality they face. "I made an offer ta Thorsten this morning," he goes on to say, pausing for a moment. The two look on with worry at his tone of voice.

"He said the only bride price he'd accept from me is leadership of th'tribe."

Astrid gasps as she grips Hiccup's arm all the more tightly, her expression falling at Stoic's words. The boy frowns while clenching her hand in his, entwining their fingers together as he looks at his Dad with deep concern.

"I can't pay that price, son, Astrid. I'm sorry," the large man admits softly, looking at the two teens with deep care and sympathy.

"Oh Gods...Hiccup..." Astrid laments, looking at her boyfriend with a desperate, worried face. He looks back at her, meeting her gaze as he squeezes her hand tightly, setting his jaw. Her brow furrows in wordless question as they look into each other's eyes, both realizing immediately what their only remaining option is. The young man solemnly nods once at her, his eyes fixed upon hers. Astrid smiles weakly at his affirmation, breathes a sigh of relief and then leans into him, resting her head against his.

Stoic and Freja look on at the wordless exchange with furrowed brows, both concerned by what just passed between the two young lovers and what it could mean. The chief glances over at Astrid's mother and lifts an eyebrow as she likewise turns to meet his gaze. She hesitates for only a moment, then nods.

"But," Stoic says, drawing the teens' attention back to him. "There's one more card we can yet play..." Hiccup and Astrid look at each other with a glimmer of hope in their eyes, then back at their parents, eagerly awaiting the news. The two adults are silent, glancing at each other once more, then back at the children.

"Well?" Astrid asks, the tension clear in her voice. "What is it?" she demands in a most insistent tone.

Shaking his head, Stoic tells them, "It's best if you don't know."

The two teens groan as they share a tortured glance with each other, then turn to glare at their parents. "Again, Dad? Really?" Hiccup asks as Astrid glares at her mother. "Does it need to be kept secret from us?!" he asks, exasperated.

"Aye, it does," the chief answers in a loud and firm tone, drawing himself up to his full height as he glares at the two petulant children before him. They both shrink a little before the stout man.
"What's more," he goes on to say, "th'two of you cannot see each other again before it's done." Once again, he glances at Freja, who meets his gaze and quickly nods in agreement, the two adults both looking sharply at the children once more.

"What?" they both ask simultaneously and loudly ask in a shocked tone.

"Astrid, Hiccup." Freja says before Stoic can reply, her voice tender and gentle, a sharp contrast with the coarse and unyielding talking to that the chief had just given them. The two look at her with the same shocked expression as she goes on, "it's only for a little while. What's more, after today, it's very important we don't antagonize Thorsten anymore." She looks sharply into her daughter's eyes as she speaks, the girl shrinking a little bit as she realizes what further provocation of her father could bring.

The girl nods meekly and looks down at the ground, leaning against Hiccup a little bit more. The boy wraps his one arm about her shoulders, holding her to him. He had watched the exchange between mother and daughter, realizing exactly what her mother meant, as he recalled Astrid's revelation from last night about what her father does to the two women when angered.

Sighing heavily, the boy asks, "How long will this take?" Astrid looks up at the question, the two of them looking expectantly at Stoic. To their surprise, the chief looks at Freja, lifting an eyebrow.

"When?" he asks simply, ignoring the two as they glance over at the woman.

Astrid's mother answers without hesitation, "two weeks, to the day."

Stoic tilts his head slightly at her answer, looking at her with a considering gaze. "The Harvest End Feast?" he asks, causing the two teens to look at each other, perplexed.

"Indeed," she answers simply, drawing the childrens' gaze back to her and Stoic.

The large man nods approvingly. "Well chosen," he says, to which she smiles. "The whole village will be there, plenty of witnesses."

Freja nods in answer, her smile growing. "Precisely why I picked it," she says. The two teens watch with increasing confusion at the cryptic conversation that their respective parents were having.

"Since e'eryone will be there, things could get out o'hand," Stoic comments. "Especially given what you'll need t'do to justify it." The teens both furrow their brow in concern at his words, looking quickly to Astrid's mother as she replies.

"Yes," she answers, "so I'll need you to make sure that doesn't happen…"

Stoic nods, answering plainly, "You can count on me."

Freja gives a tight-lipped smile, still clearly concerned, though apparently satisfied. She and Stoic look to the two teens again, who still watch their parents with very confused looks.

"What are you two scheming?" Hiccup asks incredulously, furrowing his brow while trying to figure out what the clues in their conversation mean. Astrid likewise studies their parents with a thoughtful gaze.

Astrid's mother smirks as she looks at the two, then glances back at Stoic, sharing a knowing look with the man. She glances back at the teens, meeting the gaze of Hiccup first, then Astrid as she asks them, "So…can we count on you two to do your part? Two weeks without seeing each other." The young lovers share an anxious glance at her words, clearly dreading the prospect of separating from
"If you can do that," she says, drawing their gazes back to her as she adds, "I can promise you that you will be betrothed by the end of the Harvest End Feast." The two teens look at her in shocked disbelief.

"How…?" Astrid asks, causing her mother to shake her head firmly. "Dad will never settle for less than the price of chief…"

"You don't worry about that," she tells her daughter. "You and Hiccup have to trust Stoic and I," she says, sharing a knowing smile with Hiccup's father. "But you can't do anything to jeopardize what we're trying to do…so you have to stay apart for two weeks."

Hiccup and Astrid look at each other, hesitantly sharing a heartfelt gaze. Neither speak for a moment.

"What'dya think, Astrid?" Hiccup asks hesitantly. "Two weeks seems like a fair trade for spending the rest of our lives together," he says with a slight grin.

Astrid's lips bloom into a sweet smile at the way he phrases it, staring happily into his eyes as she wraps her arms around him, stepping close.

"It'll be the longest two weeks of my life, but if I become your betrothed at the end, it'll be worth it," she says sincerely, reaching up to brush some of the hair from his face.

Hiccup lifts an eyebrow at her answer. "Longer than the past three weeks?" he asks, smirking playfully as he refers to the time she had completely ignored him before her visit to his house two nights ago, when she had asked him to fix her saddle.

It amazed him how long ago that evening visit felt. It was like weeks, not days.

Astrid smiles widely at his words shaking her head. "No, you're right," she says with a happy sigh. "That was far longer…" Her hand moves from his hair to caress his cheek. "At least this time I'll have the comfort of knowing that you love me…"

"More than you can imagine," he tells her, his arms tightening about her.

She smiles as he pulls her close, staring into his eyes. "Oh, I think I have a pretty good idea," she says. The two smile widely as their lips meet. They kiss tenderly, but the passion between them soon grows as they realize this will be their last kiss for two whole weeks.

Stoic and Freja glance at each other as they avert their gaze from the young couple's farewell, sharing a knowing smile, each of them remembering their own youthful love affairs. They wait a short while, trying to give the two all the time they can. Soon enough, though, both start to get antsy, sensing the risk of discovery growing with each moment that they wait.

Finally, Stoic clears his throat, glancing at the couple, only to see them kiss all the more frantically. He shares an amused gaze with Freja, the two smirking and blushing a little. Stoic clears his throat again, more loudly this time, calling out, "Son…it's time…"

Astrid and Hiccup reluctantly part, both of them starting to tear up at the prospect. "I love you, Astrid," he says with an urgent, needy voice as he strokes her cheek.

"I love you too, Hiccup," she answers, leaning into his hand while smiling as she forces back the tears, sniffling a little.
"It's only two weeks," he starts to tell her, when she interrupts.

"Then we have the rest of our lives together," she finishes for him, the two of them smiling widely, in spite of their glistening eyes.

"Time to go, Asrid," Freja says gently, reminding them yet again that they need to finish their goodbyes. The two steal one last, urgent kiss before Astrid reluctantly pulls away from Hiccup, the two staring intently at each other.

The girl finally looks away as she walks over to Stormfly. Mounting the dragon, she offers her hand to her mother, who accepts the help up. The girl secures herself to the saddle, looping her mother in with her in the rider's strap, then looks over at her boyfriend.

"I love you, Hiccup," she says resolutely, swallowing back the tears that threaten yet again.

"I love you too, Astrid," he answers, staring up at her with an intense gaze. "With all of my heart," he adds, bringing a smile to his girlfriend's lips. They linger in watching each other for a moment more before Astrid grits her teeth and spurs Stormfly to take off.

The blue dragon leaps up into the air at her mistress' urging, leaving the boy and his father to watch as the two soar quickly out of view.

Stoic walks up to his son, putting his hand on his shoulder comfortingly.

"Come on," he says as Toothless walks up on the other side of Hiccup, nudging the boy's free hand.

"Let's go home, son."
Thorsten walks along the forest trail, watching closely for further signs of his daughter having passed through. He had picked up her trail fairly easily at the edge of the forest by their home, but the farther he went into the woods, the harder it became to follow. The large man scowls as he realizes that the girl had covered her tracks, one of the many skills he had taught her over the years.

Now he finds himself regretting having shared this particular craft with her.

Not too long ago, he had nothing but pride in his daughter. She had been the apple of his eye, excelling at everything he had taught her. When Dragon Training had started, she was on her way to the top of the class, but then the Haddock boy had surpassed her.

Thorsten couldn't understand it until later, when the boy's guile had been exposed. Although that explained everything and vindicated Astrid for her failure in his eyes, he was horrified when his daughter kissed the boy in front of the entire village.

How she had fallen in love with Stoic's son was still beyond him. The boy was the opposite of everything he had taught his daughter to value, namely strength, power, and greatness. The man strongly suspected that it was the influence of Astrid's mother that had left her prone to caring for such weakness. He never had liked their relationship.

After he had told his daughter to stay away from the runt, Thorsten figured that was an end of it. Astrid had always obeyed him before.

So when she defied him to visit the boy a couple of days ago, he was more than stunned at her behavior.

But now she's gone far beyond mere insolence. The girl is putting everything in jeopardy, all of his careful planning to seize control of Berk is at risk.

The man would be livid beyond reason if it wasn't for the one silver lining to this whole situation. If he could catch Hiccup with his daughter now, then killing the boy would be well within his rights.

His daughter would be upset, of course, but it was about time she learned what life was all about.

Walking up the slope of a hill as he continues to follow the trail, Thorsten smiles at the prospect of ridding himself of Stoic's heir, which would only serve to better his claim to leadership of the Hooligan tribe. With Stoic's line broken, it would fracture the triumvirate he held with Spitelout and Gobber. Perhaps then, Snoutlout's father might see reason and make a more reasonable offer for Astrid's hand.

That would destroy the alliance, and give Thorsten and his supporters the opportunity they needed to force Stoic out.

The man's smile fades, however, as he crests the hill and sees that the trail leads to a swiftly running stream that's more than fifteen feet wide. He walks down to the waters edge, looking around for a sign.

Sure enough, he sees one of Astrid's boot prints in the mud, heading into the water.
He looks up and down the length of the stream that he can see, pondering silently how far she might have gone in either direction before she emerged.

With a scowl, Thorsten quietly considers his options, clenching his fists in frustration.

"Let's go, Son," Stoic says again as Hiccup lingers, his son watching the empty sky where he had just seen Astrid and her mother disappear on the back of Stormfly.

Sighing from the tips of his toes, Hiccup nods as he looks up at his father, smiling faintly at the stout man. His father returns the smile, both of them looking down as Toothless nudges Hiccup's arm again.

"You offering me a ride home, bud?" Hiccup asks with a grin. The dragon warbles in answer and the boy climbs onto his bare back. Stoic picks up his hammer and, walking alongside of Toothless as the dragon carries his son forward, starts the long walk back through the forest to their house, following the way that chief and dragon had come in the first place.

The three travel in silence for a while, before Hiccup breaks the silence.

"Dad, I just wanted to say thank you."

Stoic smiles as he glances down at his son. "What for?" he asks.

"For everything," his son answers, sharing a wry smile with his father. "You've been trying your darndest to fix things for me and Astrid, but we keep messing it up for you," he says with a sigh.

Chuckling at his sons answer, he claps Hiccup on the back. "Ah, t'is nothing, Son," he tells his boy with a good natured smile. "It's a father's job to look after his son, and it's his son's job to make things as difficult as possible fer th'father."

Hiccup smirks at his answer. "Yeah, well…maybe if I hadn't screwed things up so badly, we wouldn't have to resort to plan B, here…"

Furrowing his brow, Stoic asks, "Plan B?"

Glancing back up at his father in confusion, he says, 'Yeah…your plan with Vali's lowball bid didn't work out, so now you need Astrid's mother to do…whatever it is she's going to do in two weeks…"

Stoic chuckles as he listens to Hiccup explain his thinking. "Oh, is that what you think happened here?" he asks with a grin.

"Uhm," he hesitates, "Well,,I did, until you just asked me that…"

From the back of Toothless, Hiccup looks up at Stoic with an annoyed gaze as he watches his father smirk enigmatically.

"I'll explain everything to you when it's all done," He finally says, clearly enjoying the torment of his son.

"Well, that's some small comfort, I suppose," the teen says, irritated.

"Remember, son," Stoic replies. "I need you ta trust me on this one. Yer ol'man has this all well in hand…"

Frowning slightly, Hiccup asks indignantly, "are you telling me this is all part of some elaborate,
master plan of yours?"

Chucking, Stoic says nothing, but continues to smile widely.

Hiccup sighs, "Yeah, I kinda find that hard to believe…"

Shrugging, his father answers, "suit yourself…it'll just make this all the more worthwhile when I explain it all to you, after you and Astrid are betrothed."

Grinning, Hiccup answers, "Dad, if that's the price of my getting married to Astrid, I will happily pay it."

His father chuckles at his words, and the two settle into a comfortable silence as Stoic and Toothless continue to walk along through the woods.

After a little while longer, Hiccup's father clears his throat, "Son, we do need to talk about what you and Astrid did…"

Groaning, Hiccup asks, "Do we have to, Dad?" He glances up at his father with a blush on his cheeks. "I know I screwed up, and you already gave me and Astrid a good bit of yelling…"

"Son," Stoic interrupts him impatiently, "This isn't about punishing you. I don't think you understand how serious what you and Astrid did is."

Sighing, Hiccup says wearily with a flush on his cheeks, "Dad, I tried to tell you, we didn't actually have sex."

"That's not what I'm talkin' about," Stoic says quickly with an edge to his voice.

"Well…what'dya mean than, Dad?" Hiccup asks nervously, surprised by the serious tone his father now speaks with.

"How familiar are you with our law?" Stoic asks quietly.

Frowning slightly, Hiccup answers, "Pretty familiar, I guess…"

Shaking his head, Stoic sighs and tells him, "As th'son of th'chief and heir, that's not good enough. You need to know th'law by heart, son…"

Frowning at getting the same lecture he's been given before, Hiccup impatiently interrupts his father, "Yeah, Dad, I know. You've told me this before, but what does it have to do with what Astrid and me-"

"Did you realize, Son," Stoic cuts him off, "that if Thorsten had caught you with Astrid this morning, he would have been within his rights to kill you?"

In the silence that follows, Stoic glances down at Hiccup to see the stunned expression on his boy's face.

"I take it that's a no," Stoic says quietly.

Another few moments of silence pass before Hiccup starts to sputter in answer, "B-but…but Dad, that never actually…happens…" He hesitates, then quickly adds, "I mean, a couple of years ago when Halvar Grimmson married Finna, it was pretty clear they had been, uh…you know…" The whole village had talked for many months after the ceremony about how swollen the bride's belly was when the two young lovers exchanged their vows.
"Aye, that's true, Hiccup," Stoic tells him. "But that was her father's choice. Their families are very friendly to each other. Both sides wanted that match, and it helped that th'two o'them were in love…" As his voice trails off, the large viking glances down at his son to watch him, smiling as he sees the boy's brow furrow in thought.

"But Thorsten hates us and forbade Astrid from seeing me," he says to finish his father's thought.

"That's about it," his father answers, clapping Hiccup on his shoulder as the young man suddenly starts to look very nervous. "Truth be tol', I don't know the last time a father actually took advantage o'that law. It's certainly been many generations, I don' remember any such happening in my time, nor did I e'er hear o'it in my father's time…"

Hiccup nods anxiously as he looks up at the big man and adds with finality, "But the law is still there, if some father wants to use it…"

"Aye, that's about it, son," Stoic tells him in a soft voice.

The two are silent for a while after that as Stoic and Toothless walk leisurely through the woods back to their home, Hiccup holding onto the dragon's back as he thinks about what his father just told him.

"Thanks for looking out for me, Dad," he finally says.

"Any time, son," Stoic answers him. "That's what I'm here for."

Astrid grits her teeth as Stormfly leaps into the air at her urging, her mother gripping her around the waist tightly as they leave the ground. She's unable to bring herself to look at Hiccup again as her dragon carries her and her mother up above the tree line, the blue lizard turning towards their home. She knows if she does look at her boyfriend, she'll break down into a fit of tears. Again. How is it that he can make her weep so easily, she wonders.

Neither mother nor daughter say anything for the length of their fairly quick flight home. For her part, Astrid is deep in thought, dreading the upcoming two weeks without the boy she's fallen so completely in love with, while also reminding herself of the upcoming betrothal that Stoic and her mother had promised them at the end of those two weeks.

For her mother's part, Freja clings to her daughter for dear life as she looks down in terror at the ground so far below them. During the flight out, she had been too scared for her daughter's welfare to worry about her own safety, but now that Astrid was safe and sound, all she can think about is how unnatural it is for a person to be flying and how far they are above the ground.

It's not long before Astrid is guiding Stormfly down into their back yard, the pine tree by their house shaking in the wind from the dragon beating her wings faster to ease their descent.

After Stormfly touches down, Astrid unhooks the strap and helps her mother slide off of the dragon's back before she eases herself down. Once she's upon the ground, she blushes while looking up at her mother, swallowing heavily as she tries to meet the woman's gaze.

She starts to blurt out, "Mom, I'm sorry I-"

"Shush, Astrid," the woman interrupts her gently, smiling comfortably at her daughter, who looks down, thoroughly chagrined.

Cupping the girl's chin in her one hand Freja looks critically at her daughter, turning her head this
way and that, focusing more on her hair than anything else. The girl blushes and fidgets uncomfortably at the woman's silence. She's about to apologize again, when Freja suddenly says, "You never took out your braid last night."

Astrid blinks at her mother's words, looking up at her in surprise. She hesitates, not sure how to react, when her mother says further, "your hair will be an absolute mess. We really should brush it out immediately." She pauses for a moment, then smiles, saying, "let's go inside. I'll do it for you today."

The last thing the girl had been thinking about was her hair, but now that her mother mentions it, she hadn't been looking forward to taking care of it. After having been left in a braid all night, she had no doubt that dealing with it would be a lengthy, painful experience of stripping out countless knots and tangles.

However, Freja has such a knack for handling Astrid's hair so that the experience was almost pain free, no matter how much of a mess it is.

"Thanks, Mom," Astrid quickly says with a slight smile, relieved at her mother's offer of help.

The woman smiles at her daughter and then turns to leads her inside their home, limping along the way. Astrid stares as she realizes her mother is wounded, having overlooked it when she first saw the woman today. Her eyes grow wide in shock.

"Mom…he hurt you, again…didn't he?!" she asks, her voice faltering.

The woman stops in her tracks, turning quickly to face her daughter. She purses her lips at the sight of her daughter's face so twisted by guilt and shame.

"It's all my fault," Astrid goes on to say frantically, causing Freja to shake her head and walk quickly over, wrapping the girl up in a tight embrace.

"Stop that this instant!" the woman whispers sharply as she presses her lips to the top of her child's head. "What have I told you about his violence before?"

Hugging her mother tightly, Astrid takes a moment to collect herself. "The only one responsible for his actions is him," she repeats morosely, the guilt gnawing away at her anyway. Her mother kisses the top of her head, then pulls back to look down at her, lifting her daughter's chin so they look into each other's eyes.

"That's right, and don't you ever forget it," she says in a stern, yet loving voice. She pauses, waiting until Astrid finally nods with a sigh, glancing down again.

"Yes, Mom," she says quietly. Freja smiles gently.

"Now come on," she tells her daughter, "stop this nonsense and come inside so I can take care of your hair." Astrid nods sullenly as her mother takes her hand and leads her into the house.

The inside is still and dark and cold, with no fire to light it and with the shutters still closed from the night before. Freja leaves the back door open so that the daylight light streams in.

"Open up the shutters, will you, dear?" she asks her daughter as she sets about starting a fire in the central pit. "Let us have some light in here, to send the darkness away."

Astrid nods wordlessly and does as she's been requested. The daylight that streams in feels a world better to the girl. She finally starts to smile as she then opens the front door to let in yet more light.
Within a few minutes, Freja has a good sized fire going. The woman stands and brushes her hands off on her dress, looking over at her daughter and smiling warmly. "Now then, let's deal with that braid, shall we?" she asks pleasantly, as if nothing were wrong in the world.

Astrid nods hesitantly, still surprised and perplexed by her mother's happy attitude, given what she and Hiccup had done last night. As she walks over to her corner of the one room house to gather her brush and comb from the small table by the bed, she wonders if her mother will chew her out once she's seated in the chair that they use for those rare occasions when her mother does her hair for her.

It used to be something they did daily, but as Astrid got older and more independent, it was something she just started doing on her own.

But she still likes it when her mother does her hair.

The girl walks over to where her Freja has positioned the chair in the back of the house, near the door so that there's the most light. She hands her mother the brush and comb, smiling sheepishly. The woman takes the tools and smiles back with a kind look in her eyes, again confusing her daughter.

The girl nervously sits, ready to get an earful for what she did last night. The woman says nothing at first, but takes off Astrid's headband and sets about untying the braid in her daughter's hair. After a few moments, she finally speaks.

"I'm not upset that you spent the night with Hiccup," she says gently.

"You're not?" Astrid asks in complete and utter surprise, turning to look at her mother incredulously.

"Face forward, dear, I can't work on your hair when you do that," her mother chides, slightly frustrated. Astrid blushes and does as commanded while Freja grins, her fingers resuming the involved process of undoing her daughter's braid.

"No I'm not," the woman says, pausing before she adds, "not unless you did have sex with him this time…?" she asks with a wary tone as she finishes undoing the braid and starts to carefully brush out her daughter's hair.

"No, I didn't, Mom," she says, hesitating before she adds,"Actually…this time I'm the one that said no…"

"Oh, really?" her mother asks as she carefully works out a particularly bad knot.

Astrid blushes all the more, wincing at the tugging while answering, "Yeah…Hiccup surprised me with that too," she admits, then stops, not willing to explain more.

"Well, I'm glad you had the presence of mind to say no," Freja says, grinning wryly. "But don't get too confident, my dear," she warns her daughter as she imagines the pride on her girl's face. "I'll wager that before you two are wed, the shoe will be on the other foot again…let's hope Hiccup will have the willpower to say no, then…"

Astrid clears her throat as the blush that colors her cheeks darkens at her mother's words. The woman grins as her daughter fidgets, saying with an amused voice, "Mhmm, that's what I thought…"

The girl sighs, dropping her head down in embarrassment, "Sit up straight, dear, you're making this more difficult." Her daughter wordlessly complies, but Freja can feel the irritation in her.

Grinning further at her daughter's embarrassment, the woman continues to work on her hair,
brushing the considerable length of blonde locks and says, "well, once you're betrothed, I won't mind if you spend the night with Hiccup now and again."

In shock, her daughter turns again in the chair to look up at her with wide eyes that are filled with wonderment.

Chuckling again, Freja looks down at her with amusement and explains, "As long as you two act responsibly and I don't get any early grandchildren, I see no reason why you both can't enjoy such a pleasure now and again…" Astrid's cheeks blush a bright red at her mother's words, and she hesitates before speaking again.

"But…what about Dad?" Astrid asks, furrowing her brows, still not believing what she's hearing from her mother. "He'd never allow that…!"

Freja grins wryly. "Oh, don't you worry about him," she says, putting her hand firmly on the side of Astrid's head and gently pushing her in a prompt for her to face forward on the chair again. Her daughter wordlessly complies with a perplexed expression, still trying to absorb her mother's words and figure it all out.

"But on the topic of your father," her mother says, "that's the only reason I'm disappointed in you for what you did last night." Her daughter's shoulders slump slightly at her words. While continuing to brush out Astrid's hair, she says further, "I'm sure you didn't mean for this to happen, but it was still very careless of you…"

"I'm sorry, Mom," Astrid says once more, drawing a sight grin from her mother.

"What's done is done, child," she says while drawing the brush through the girl's hair with long strokes to find where the last few tangles are. "I'm just relieved that Stoic and I found you and Hiccup before your father did," she adds.

"He'll probably be out there for a while, trying to find us," Astrid conjectures as her mother switches to the comb. "I made sure to cover my tracks really well. I even set some false trails for him," she explains, closing her eyes and smiling as she feels the longer pulls that her mother makes through her hair now that most of the bad tangles are gone. This was always her favorite part, it feels so good and relaxing.

"Well, I'm glad you took precautions," Freja tells her, "but you can't take that kind of chance again," she says.

"I know Mom," Astrid says with a measure of irritation in her voice that grows as she adds, "But there really won't be a chance to, since I won't be seeing Hiccup again until the holiday feast…"

"It's for the best, child," the woman points out, her voice even and gentle. "Just remember what your reward will be…"

Her daughter sighs in defeat. "I know, I know," she answers ruefully. "It'll be so worth it, but after being with him so much for the last couple of days, the wait is going to be absolute torture," she laments.

Her mother chuckles as she draws the comb through several times, satisfied that there are no knots left. Switching back to the brush, she gives her daughter's hair a final, good brushing. "Yes, I know how that feels," she says. "I was young and in love once, too," she adds with a somewhat bitter smile, glad her daughter can't see her face.

"It's hard to imagine you and Dad like that," Astrid says.
Her mother's silence surprises her, leaving her feeling awkward and uncertain.

"There," Freja finally says as she finishes pulling the brush through the girl's honey blonde hair for the last time. "All done," she comments further, handing the brush and comb back to her daughter. "Don't put it up in a braid for today," she tells her, "you should let your hair relax until tomorrow morning." Her daughter nods as she stands and turns to face her mother. "You can wear a braid again, tomorrow."

"Okay, Mom," she says with a weak smile. "Thank you," she says hesitantly.

To Astrid's relief, her mother smiles from ear to ear at her. "It's nothing at all dear," she says, caressing her daughter's face. "That's what mothers are for." Stepping forward, she kisses her daughter on the forehead, and the two embrace tightly.

"Now, how about we make some breakfast, hm?" Freja asks as she steps away. "You must be famished. I know that I am," she comments further.

Astrid smiles, happy to have a morning alone with her mother. As she puts her brush and comb away and helps her mother fix breakfast, she hopes that her father spends the whole day trying to follow her trail.

The two women chat happily as they fix and eat their breakfast, laughing and smiling the whole time.

Stoic and Hiccup complete the journey home in silence, both lost in thought. For his part, the boy's mind whirls at everything that's happened in the last two days, though he finds himself dwelling the most on the knowledge that Astrid's father abuses her. The more he thinks about her revelation, the more unsettled it makes him and the more worried he is for his girlfriend.

The promise of silence that she had forced him into has already started to chafe. More than once during the trip home, he has to stop himself from just blurting out the news to his father.

Inside he burns with frustration at being bound from helping her.

Even as Hiccup wrestles with himself and the dark knowledge he now carries, Stoic is lost in his own thoughts, oblivious to the distress his son feels. The chief thinks heavily on the plan he and Freja had put together back in the clearing, his mind busily working on his part to play in the upcoming drama.

When they reach their house, Stoic walks straight over to the food baskets lined up along the back wall while Hiccup dismounts. Picking up one of the wicker vessels as easily as if it were empty, he walks over to the large lizard with a smile. Toothless watches excitedly, the sleek dragon licking its lips while stomping on the ground and wriggling in anticipation as the chief walks over with his breakfast.

"Here ya go, Toothless," Stoic says with a wide smile as he dumps the food on the ground between them. "Once more, you've done me a great service in protecting my son," he says with appreciation, leaning forward to rub the creature's neck. "Thank you," he says sincerely.

Toothless looks up excitedly at the man, leaning into his hand before then leaning down excitedly to start shoveling the raw fish into his mouth.

Hiccup watches the scene before him with a wide smile, happy beyond words at how his father has come to accept and appreciate the dragon and how well Toothless has bonded with the large man.
"Seems like you're becoming a natural with dragons, Dad," the boy compliments with a wry grin, watching as the large man glances at him with a slightly lifted eyebrow. "Maybe it's about time you found yourself one…"

The chief smirks at his son's words, answering, "Maybe someday, son…" He chuckles while walking to their house, opening the door and ducking inside. Hiccup starts to follow, limping forward with his crutch when Stoic suddenly steps back out with a couple of dried turkey legs in his grasp.

Grinning at the sight of Hiccup approaching the door, he asks, "an' where d'you think you're going?" Closing the door behind him, he hands one of the legs to Hiccup as he reminds him, "we need t'get you down t'he forge an'talk to Gobber, so Freja's story about finding you there will hold water."

Sighing regretfully, the teen takes the offered breakfast and nods sullenly at his father. "Right…I'd forgotten," he answers unenthusiastically, not at all happy about having to go down to the forge on what normally would be a day off for him.

Chuckling, Stoic claps him on the back and pushes him to walk away from his house. Hiccup stumbles a little, but manages to stay upright as the two start walking down the hill. The two walk in silence, eating their breakfast along the way. The streets of the village are empty. Being Saturday, most on Berk took the day off, and were still asleep in their beds.

When father and son arrive at the forge, however, they find the usual exception to the rule.

As expected, they find Gobber inside busily working. Presently, he's carving an axe handle, and the forge is unlit and cold. Years ago, he used to actually smith on Saturday, until the village nearly had an uprising. Gobber couldn't understand what the fuss was, Saturday was a perfectly good day for working as any other.

He didn't seem to grasp that everyone else on the island liked to sleep in on Saturdays.

To save Gobber from the mob, Stoic had forced the smith to promise that he would never again use the forge on a Saturday. Instead, he worked on what could be done quietly, such as fashioning wooden parts for things he was making, or doing leatherwork.

"Good morning, Stoic!" Gobber enthusiastically greets his best friend through the shop window, quickly adding as he notices him, "and to you Hiccup." He pauses as he looks at them with a considering gaze, asking, "So what brings you 'round today?"

"We'll talk inside, Gobber," Stoic answers sternly as he glances down at his son disapprovingly, causing the smith to furrow his brow and look askance at the boy.

"Oh, this should be good," the smith says as he opens the door for them, watching as Stoic hurries his son inside. "What'd he do this time?" the smith asks wearily, and suddenly the situation feels to all three of them like any given day before Hiccup changed everything.

"Why don' you tell Gobber where you spent last night, son?" Stoic asks sternly as he sits on a stool, watching the boy intently. The smith closes the door behind them and hobbles towards them, grabbing a stool and bringing it next to Stoic, seating himself as he waits for the coming story. The young man squirms under the gaze of his father and his surrogate uncle, blushing as he tries to force himself to answer his father's question.

"Uh, uhm," he starts nervously, looking from one to the other. "I was…outside in the forest," he answers vaguely, as if he had any chance of keeping the truth hidden. Gobber lifts an eyebrow at the
benign sounding answer, glancing over at Stoic with a furrowed brow, trying to figure out what this was all about.

"And who spent th'night out there with ya?" Stoic asks pointedly, allowing the boy no room to wriggle out of it. Gobber's eyebrows shoot high up his forehead as he turns back to look at Hiccup, already guessing what the answer will be.

The boy clears his throat anxiously as he blushes a bright red, hesitating for a moment before he mutters, "A-A-Astrid…"

Gobber slaps his forehead at the confirmation of his suspicions, dragging his hand over his face and then giving Hiccup a disappointed stare. "Did'ja not year me yesterday when I tol' ya t'not do anything t'interfere with yer father's plans?!" the smith asks incredulously, making the boy shrink even more under his gaze. The lad looks down at the floor, unable to face his father and Gobber as he again feels the embarrassment of getting caught with Astrid.

"Well, what now?" Gobber asks Stoic, glancing over at his chief.

The big man glowers at Hiccup one last time, then looks back over at his friend. "I'll tell ya more about it later, but fer now, I need ya to say that th'boy was here since before dawn."

The smith nods at the man's words, "Aye, consider it done," he says, glancing back at the boy as Stoic continues.

"Also, Freja stopped by to look for Hiccup and Astrid." Gobber glances back over at the chief's words, furrowing his brow.

"Come again?" he asks, tilting his head slightly. "Did'ja say Freja, Astrid's mother, stopped by?"

Stoic nods. "Aye," he says, "She was looking for th'both of them, but of course, she only found Hiccup and you, because he was here since before dawn."

"Riiight," Gobber answers, furrowing his brow.

Stoic sighs, rolling his eyes. "Like I said, I'll tel ya more 'bout it later," he explains.

"Well, this should be a good 'un," he answers, then adds with a grin. "You can tell it ta me o'ere a couple of flaggons with lunch t'day." Stoic nods with a smirk of his own. The smith then glances back at Hiccup and asks, "So what're we doin' wit' lover boy, here?" Hiccup shrinks a little at the stare he receives from the two men.

Stoic smiles grimly at his son, making the boy squirm all the more. He then looks about the shop and sees the large pile of half-finished dragon saddles. "Well," he says, "since th'boy has doubtlessly had such a good night's sleep, it only seems fitting that he spend th'whole day catching up on his saddle work."

Hiccup's jaw drops as he cries in protest, but his father merely goes on to say, "Yer lucky that's th'only thing I do t'ya after this 'un," he says with a stern voice.

Sighing, Hiccup hangs his head. "Yes, Dad," he says in a defeated voice.

Nodding in satisfaction that his son has been dealt with, Stoic stands up and walks to the door glancing at Gobber as he joins him. He opens the door and half steps out, then leans in to whisper to the smith, "don' keep 'im here past lunch."
The one-legged man raises an eyebrow at his chief, whispering back with a grin, "you goin' soft on th'boy, Stoic?"

The big man chuckles, shaking his head, "No," he answers in a hushed whisper. "You are, since you'll be th'one t'let him out early…" He winks at Gobber, who smirks wryly at his best friend.

"Thanks much, Gobber," Stoic then says in a loud voice, glancing over to see Hiccup hobbling over to the bench with the pile of saddles. "Make sure you have Hiccup put in a full day, now…" He and the smith share a knowing smirk, unbeknownst to Hiccup, who's shoulders slump as he seats himself at the table.

His father goes on to say to Gobber, "I've things t'attend to now, but thanks as always fer yer help." He reaches for Gobber's good hand and the smith meets the gesture, the two clasping forearms while nodding at each other.

"Always glad ta help you out, Stoic," he answers with a smile, the two nodding at each other.

Stoic looks at Hiccup as he goes to leave, saying, "I'll see you t'night, Hiccup. Remember yer promise fer th'nex't two weeks…"

Hiccup looks back at his father, meeting his gaze with a solemn nod. "I remember, Dad," he tells him. "See you t'night."

With that, Stoic turns to go.

"Dad…?" Hiccup suddenly says again, causing the large man to stop and turn to look back at his son, who hesitates before he speaks.

"Thanks again…for everything."

His father smiles appreciatively, nodding at his boy as their gazes meet. "Yer welcome," he answers, adding, "It's what I'm here for, son." Without another word, he leaves the smithy to see about his duties as chief, while Hiccup turns back to the table to see to preparing more saddles for the dragons of Berk.

Gobber watches the entire exchange with a knowing smile, nodding to himself as he busies himself with his own labors.
"Mom, I really don't like sewing," Astrid complains as she sits with her mother, working on stitching together a shirt.

"Astrid, just because you don't like something doesn't mean that you don't have to learn to do it," she says in an exasperated voice as she works on a pair of pants. "It is the role of a woman to keep the home," she tells her daughter in a stern voice. Lowering her voice to a whisper, she leans in and asks, "You want to be a good wife to Hiccup, don't you?"

Sighing, Astrid glares at her mother before looking back at her work. "We don't have that kind of relationship, Mom," she says in just as hushed a voice, "I don't think he's going to expect that of me."

Her mother laughs softly, saying, "sweetie, you've only been a couple for, what? Three days?"

Astrid blushes deeply at her mother's point, stabbing the shirt with her needle in frustration, then drawing the thread through violently. "You don't know what kind of wife he wants," she tells her quietly, pausing before she adds, "besides, you'll be the wife of a chief. Certain things will be expected of you," she warns her daughter, looking over her child's work critically as the girl scowls at her mother's words.

"Mind your stitches," she says firmly. "You're making them too loose, and you need to put them closer together." Astrid sighs in exasperation, trying to follow her mother's advice, but to her frustration, her stitches look nothing like the clean rows that her mother makes.

The girl would much rather be practicing with her axe, or riding Stormfly, or even better yet, fooling around with Hiccup, even though that last one was impossible for the next two weeks. However, her mother had insisted that they sit together after they finished breakfast to work on her domestic skills.

Thorsten had trained her hard as a warrior through the years, leaving little time for Freja to teach her daughter how to be a home maker. She knew her daughter wasn't one who cared for womanly responsibilities, but she still took it as a matter of personal responsibility and pride that she teach her daughter everything that her mother had taught her.

Even if she had to make Astrid miserable in the process, she would see her daughter knew how to be a proper wife.

At least the girl had a chance at a happy marriage. Freja intended to do everything in her power to make sure the match was a healthy one.

"That's better dear," she tells the girl as she watches the new stitching. She still has a long way to go, but that will come with practice.

She's about to explain to Astrid another way she can stitch up the seem, when suddenly a shadow falls upon them from the front door to their household. Astrid looks over in a panic as Thorsten's large body fills the open doorframe, his face hidden in the shadows from the sunlight streaming in behind him.

The girl's mother places a gentle hand upon hers, the cool touch serving to calm her. Freja looks over at the man in the doorway, smiling pleasantly.

"There you are, Thorsten," she greets him with a pleasant voice and a smile as if nothing were wrong. "I'm glad you've returned, I was starting to worry."
The man says nothing for a moment, but silently watches the two women.

"Where were you, Astrid?" he finally asks with a tense voice, taking a step inside.

Before the girl can open her mouth, her mother starts to answer with a casual tone, "Oh, she was-"

"SILENCE!" he barks at his wife, turning his head to stare at her. Even though they still can't see his face because of the light behind him, both women imagine the hateful stare that he gives her.

"I asked our daughter," he then says in a quiet, yet tight voice.

Looking at him, Astrid gives him the answer that she and her mother had talked about before he got home. "I couldn't sleep, so I went out flying. I didn't get back until a while after dawn."

The man says nothing. Astrid starts to fidget at the silence.

"You expect me to believe that?" he asks, his voiced dripping with venom. "You were with the Haddock boy again, I know this!" he spits. "We went to Stoic's house and the runt was also nowhere to be found!"

"Yes, now that you mention that," Freja answers firmly, "it was a shame you didn't accompany me to the forge, because that's where I found Hiccup. The boy was there since before dawn, working on all those saddles he's been making for everyone."

"You're a lying bitch," Thorsten spits, stepping deeper into the room. Astrid tenses as he starts to approach, trying to remember where she left her axe.

Her mother merely shrugs and goes back to her sewing. "Well, if you don't believe me, you can go ask Gobber," she says with a bored voice. "He was there with the boy when I arrived. We had the most entertaining conversation about the preparations for the upcoming Harvest End Festival."

Thorsten takes another few strides into the room, watching the women intently. They can see his face now, as he walks away from the doorway. The man stares at them with a hateful, suspicious gaze, his eyes probing for some fault in their stories.

Following her mother's lead, Astrid looks down at her sewing, trying to appear as uninterested in her father as possible.

She hopes it's convincing, because she fears that he could hear the pounding of her heart from where he stands halfway across the room, it beats so loud and fast in her chest, filling her own ears with its drum like cadence.

After several moments of silence, the man finally speaks.

"Astrid," he finally says with an even, yet tension filled tone. The girl looks at him.

"Did you spend the night with the Haddock boy?" he asks plainly, watching her with a penetrating stare.

She looks back at him in silence for the space of one breath, amazed at how calm she feels.

"No, Dad," she flat out lies to his face, "I didn't sleep with Hiccup last night."

She looks into his eyes in silence for another few moments before she then looks down at her sewing, looking fixedly upon her stitches as she tries desperately to keep her hands from shaking.
Thorsten stares at her intently, watching her for any small slip up that might give her away as lying.

Without another word, he turns and walks back to the door of their house.

"Dear," Freja calls out pleasantly, "would you like something to eat? Astrid and I fried some fish, there's still plenty in the pan."

The man pauses at the door, looking back at the two women again. He narrows his gaze at them, again trying to read them better. Astrid focuses all the more intently upon her sewing, trying desperately to ignore her father's stare upon her.

"No," he says, with a hint of uncertainty in his voice, pausing before adding, "I'll get something at the Great Hall."

"As you like," his wife answers indifferently, looking back at her work.

The man hesitates for a moment more, then turns on his heel and disappears.

Astrid waits a little bit before glancing at the empty doorway, then breathes a sigh of relief, slouching down in her chair as her hands drop into her lap. She glances over at her mother who smiles knowingly at her, winking. The girl smiles back, sitting up as she again lifts up the shirt she's working on and resumes sewing.

Leaning over, Freja looks keenly at her daughter's work again, nodding appreciatively. "That's better," she says, pointing at the seam Astrid is working on. "Those stitches you've just finished up are your best yet," she elaborates with the slightest of smiles, meeting her daughter's gaze as she looks over at her.

The girl can't help but grin at her mother's comment, shaking her head as the woman resumes her own work. Astrid moves onto the next seam, trying hard to imitate the excellent stitching she just did while under duress from her father's interrogation.

The two work together, side by side, in comfortable silence as the air of tension lifts from the room.

"We really need to come up with a way to help them get together," Fishlegs insists. The four teens sit together by the docks, the twins throwing rocks, trying to hit the top of a nearby ship's mast, while Snotlout plays tug of war with Hookfang, using one of the heavy ropes from the ships. Fishlegs just sits on the dock next to Meatlug, while Barf and Blech are sleep, furthest away on the dock, on the side closest to land.

"Well, I'm about out of ideas," Tuffnut complains as he hurls yet another rock, missing the mast yet again.

"We have dragons!" Snoutlout points out for not the first time as Hookfang drags him along by the rope. "We should just threaten her father until he gives up and lets them get together!"

"Yeah, no thanks," Ruffnutt answers. "I value living," she says further, her voice dripping with sarcasm as she picks up a rock and hits the mast, for the twelfth time in a row. She grins at her brother when he glares at her.

"What're you talking about?" Snoutlout protests, stopping to cry out in alarm as his dragon flicks the rope and sends the boy flying down the dock to land roughly by the twins. The two look down at him in irritation as he says, "we have dragons! There's no way Thorsten could beat us!"
Rolling his eyes, Tuffnutt answers, "Yeah, well, maybe you've already forgotten, but, our parents used to kill dragons for a living?" Snoutlout frowns at the other boy's answer, getting up while the twin goes on to ask, "and on that topic, who was the second best dragon killer in Berk…?"

"Yeah, that was Astrid's father," Fishlegs supplies. "He was second only to Stoic, of course," the boy adds, though it was completely unnecessary. There wasn't anyone on Berk who wasn't familiar with the top five dragon killers in the village.

"Fine," Snoutlout answers in a frustrated, somewhat pouty voice. "Well, I'm out of ideas too," he says, walking back over to Hookfang as the dragon swings the rope back and forth, as if to tease the boy. The red lizard lifts its head up to put the rope just out of reach, forcing the burly lad to leap to try and grab it. The teen curses under his breath as he misses and tries again, glaring at the grinning dragon as it continues to successfully play keep away. He then asks the other teens bitterly, "so, why do we want to help Hiccup and Astrid get together again?"

The other three teens exchange weary looks at his question before Ruffnutt answers wearily, "because it's a pain in the ass dealing with those two while they're like this." It's not the first time they've gone over this with Snotlout, who has shown a remarkable lack of enthusiasm for the idea, even though he was the one who excitedly told Hiccup about their intentions, just yesterday.

The other three quickly concluded he was just sucking up to Hiccup. They all knew that, given half the chance, Snoutlout would steal Astrid away from the skinny teen.

Fortunately, they also all knew that was an impossibility. But it would be entertaining to watch him try and fail.

Tuffnutt elaborates on his sister's answer with a frustrated tone, "we can't all hang out together while Astrid's Dad says she can't see Hiccup. When we're with Hiccup, he doesn't do much to help us train our dragons cuz he's too mopey and sad about Astrid." The other two teens nod along with him as he continues, "When we hang out with Astrid, she's pissy and violent cuz she can't be with Hiccup." Snoutlout looks at the other boy with a lifted eyebrow. "Well, you know…more pissy and violent than usual." The others smirk at his words.

"If we don't get the two of them together, I think I'm going to end up killing them both," Ruffnutt adds, drawing a chuckle from her brother.

"Yeah, like you'd ever be able to beat Astrid," he says with a laugh.

"I can beat you!" she hollers and then lunges at her sibling, who lifts up his hands defensively and cries out as she tackles him. The two hit the deck noisily and scuffle for a while before Tuffnutt cries out in pain.

"ow, Ow, OW, QUIT IT!" he barks. Then she gets up and kicks him one more time for good measure. He cries out, "OH, I am VERY much hurt!" Ruffnutt only laughs and adjusts her helmet before speaking.

"We shouldn't worry about her father," she says. "Let's just help them spend some time together. Doing things under our parents noses without getting caught is what we're good at, anyway." She watches her brother warily as he stands up, then grins as he avoid her and instead picks up a rock, then trying and failing once more to hit the mast.

"We might not be able to hang out with them both if we do that," she adds, "but at least they'll both to stop being so damned annoying just because they can't see each other." Snoutlout barks a laugh at this.
"I think Ruffnutt's right," Fishlegs says in a defeated voice, causing everyone to look over at him.

"What?" Tuffnutt asks, furrowing his brow as he looks at the other teen. The other two do the same, watching the large boy with equal measures of surprise. He had been the loudest proponent to helping Astrid and Hiccup solve their parental/relationship problems, so his about face is quite the shock to the group.

"Well, none of us can figure out a way to make Astrid's Dad stop being such a jerk," he explains, shrugging his shoulders as he scratches Meatlug’s neck. "So we might as well just do something that would help them out."

"Well it's about time," Ruffnutt says as the last proponent of that idea surrenders.

"Okay," Tuffnutt says with a grin. "Here's what we're gonna do…"

"Alright, Hiccup," Gobber tells him, glancing up at the sun as it nears it's apex in the sky for the day. "I think you've done enough saddle work for a Saturday. You can go now."

The boy looks over in surprise at the smith's words, furrowing his brow in confusion. "My Dad said I needed to put in a full day's work," he protests, not wanting to run afoul of his father again, especially given what the man had promised him if he behaved for the next two weeks.

Gobber grins knowingly, "Oh, don' you worry about that," he says with a smile. "I'll take care o' th'old man if he gives you any trouble." Hiccup returns the smile, but then Gobber adds with a wink, "Besides, you're usually pretty good at not getting caught, so I doubt it'll be a problem."

The boy frowns slightly at his mentor's words, glaring at the man a little. "I don't know what you're talking about," he protests as he gladly puts down the heavy needle he was using to sew up the latest saddle he was working on. As he picks up his crutch, putting his weight on it while sliding off of the stool, Gobber answers him.

"Hiccup, you captured a Night Fury, tamed it, and trained it fer weeks under th'nose o' th'whole village w'out gettin' caught," he answers with a grin as he also puts down his work and stands.

"I didn't fool the whole village," Hiccup answers with a smirk, to which the smith lifts an eyebrow. "Astrid figured me out just before my final exam."

Grinning from ear to ear, the smith answers, "Oh did she, then?" He chuckles wickedly. "Well that must a'been quite th'unpleasant shock fer you."

The teen laughs as he hobbles over towards the smith. "Yeah, she scared me half to death," he answers. "I had gone to where I was keeping Toothless, not realizing that she was following me there." Gobber chuckles mischievously as Hiccup continues, "I was just going about my business when I suddenly turned around and there she was, sitting on a boulder behind me, sharpening her axe and looking angry enough to cut me in two with it."

The smith chuckles as the boy reminds him, "she was pretty pissed off that I beat her at Dragon Training."

Gobber laughs at the story, grinning as he looks his apprentice over. "Sounds like we're lucky t'have you in one piece, then."

"Yeah," Hiccup admits. "Goes without saying she was caught off guard when Toothless showed up."
"Just 'caught off guard'?” Gobber asks with a smirk.

"Okay, she was pretty freaked out," Hiccup admits, grinning wryly.

Gobber chuckles at his apprentice's words. "I'll bet she was," he answers. "So how'd you deal with that?"

"Well, she running back and tell everyone what I'd been doing, so Toothless and I…” he hesitates as Gobber lifts an eyebrow. "Well, we kinda kidnapped her," the boy admits sheepishly.

Gobber guffaws at the lad. "Oh, did'ja now?" he asks with a wide grin. "Well that must'a been quite th'sight." Tilting his head slightly, he asks, "So she was pissed at you for winning at Dragon Training, and freaked out about yer dragon, and then you kidnapped her." Furrowing his brow, he asks, "So then…how'd ya win her over?"

Hiccup smiles from ear to ear at the question, pausing dramatically as he watches Gobber's anticipation grow. "I took her flying," he says simply with a shrug, the devilish look in his eyes making it clear to the smith he'd get no more details on that account.

The older viking watches Hiccup with a wry grin, chuckling again at the boy's story. "Well, I fer one am glad how e'erything worked out," he says with a smile. "Yer still in one piece, we're at peace with th'dragons, and you and Astrid are…” he pauses, grinning all the more as Hiccup lifts an eyebrow. "Well, yer one cute couple," he says with a wink.

The boy blushing at his mentor's words, clearing his throat. "Gee, thanks," he says with a sarcastic tone.

"Don' mention it," the man says, grinning at the lad. "Well, you've lingered here long enough, be off with ya." Pausing to look about, then out the window into the sunny day beyond, he adds, "actually, I think I might call it a day, m'self. Yer father owes me a couple o'flagons an' some lunch…” He then flashes another smile at Hiccup and sets about closing up the shop.

"Thanks again, Gobber," Hiccup says, smiling at the smith as he makes his way out of the shop and into the beautiful day to try and find some relaxation while he still can, even as he wonders how he'll distract himself from missing Astrid.
Chapter 20

Astrid walks towards the edge of the marketplace, carrying her purchases in a basket. Her mother had sent her to pick up a few things they needed around the house, and the girl was glad for the distraction. Now that she is faced with two whole weeks without her boyfriend, she desperately needs to fill her time so she won't spend every waking second missing him so much.

Having done her shopping, though, she now needs something else to do. Already, her mind is filling with thoughts of the skinny boy with the shaggy mop of hair who has so completely captured her heart and turned her world upsidedown.

With everything that had been going on between her and Hiccup the past few days, she hasn't had a chance to practice with her axe in a while, so she quickly settles on that. If she was going to be without Hiccup for the next two weeks, then she was going to take advantage of it and catch up on her exercises.

Besides, the workout could help her deal with the frustration she feels at the complete lack of intimacy she now faces. Her dreams last night had been filled with visions of her and Hiccup doing all kinds of naughty things to each other, even going all the way, leaving her frustrated and wanting in the morning.

Who knew that in so short a time, she would become so addicted to what she and Hiccup do when they're alone.

Even now, just thinking of it, she feels herself warming inside as a tingling in crotch starts to grow, her mind filled with memories of what they did together on the island, in his room, and at Toothless' Cove.

"Astrid!"

The sound of her name snaps the girl out of the rather lascivious reverie that her mind had wandered into. She suddenly blushes guiltily, even though nobody could possibly have any clue what she had been daydreaming. She stops walking through the street near the baker's shop and turns to look behind her.

A slight smile crosses her lips at the sight of Fishlegs, Tuffnutt, Ruffnutt, and Snoutlout walking towards her.

"Hey," she greets them pleasantly. "What's going on?" she asks the other teens as they catch up with her.

"We haven't seen you for days," Ruffnutt answers her, "what've you been up to?"

Astrid furrows her brow in irritation. "What're you talking about?" she asks, then counters, "you just saw me on Friday."

"Yeah, but that was while you were out with your Mom and you couldn't hang out with us," Tuffnutt answers. "Then the day before that, you were gone all day, and the day before that you wouldn't come out of your house." He pauses, then adds, "Now that I think about it, we haven't seen much of you at all for the last three weeks." Astrid scowls as the twin adds with a suspicious voice, "It's like you're avoiding us or something."

Rolling her eyes, she answers irritably, "No, I'm not avoiding you."
"Well, how come you don't hang out with us anymore?" Snoutlout asks in a defensive tone.

Astrid huffs a sigh at the boy. She had been kind of avoiding them for the previous three weeks before the last few days, but only because almost every time she went to see them, Hiccup was already with them. The few times she did catch them without the chief's son, they kept asking her these same kinds of questions.

It was getting to the point where she didn't want to be with them, having grown weary of dodging their queries. Then, of course, for these last few days, she had been busy with Hiccup or her mother.

She couldn't wait until her betrothal to Hiccup and everything was public, so that they could all hang out again and stop the drama.

In the meanwhile, however, she knew she had to keep up appearances. Her mother had made that clear to her after they went home.

"I've been busy, okay?" she asks, clearly annoyed. "I don't have to hang out with you guys every day, there's other things I need to do, you know."

"Like what?" Snoutlout challenges, lifting an eyebrow.

Furrowing her brow in shock at his question, the girl crosses her arms while answering indignantly, "That's none of your business."

"Well, are you too busy to hang out with us today?" Fishlegs asks innocently, a pleasant smile on his face as she looks over at him. "It has been a while since we've all done anything together…"

The boy's honest naïveté causes Astrid relax. She forces herself to ignore Snoutlout, whom she always found to be obnoxious. Glancing over at the twins, she sees them watching her hopefully as she thinks it over.

"Yeah, sure," she says, unable to resist smiling when she sees the others light up at her words. "What'd you want to do?" she asks.

"Oh!" Fishlegs says with eager anticipation, "Hiccup had thought up this awesome way to race our dragons that we want to try!" He's about to say more, but then Astrid cuts him off.

"Wait," she says, "you're not planning on inviting Hiccup to join us, are you?" she asks, suddenly worried.

"Why?" Snoutlout asks with a leering smile, drawing Astrid's scathing gaze back to him as he asks further, "Don't you want to see Hiccup?"

Astrid scowls at him, uncrossing her arms and curling her fingers into tight fists. As usual, her blood boils at his behavior. There's no way she can tell them what's going on, and even if she could, she had no interest in telling Snoutlout anything.

As it is, she feels like beating the crap out of him, but she decides to resist that impulse, at least for now.

"Well if Hiccup's joining you," she says as she turns to look at the other three, "you can count me out." Her voice carries an edge of anger as she struggles to quell her temper that the brawny lad had managed to get fired up, while she also fights her frustration at the current situation.

Though they expected her not to want Hiccup around, given her father's rule against her seeing him,
Fishlegs and the twins share a surprised glance at the hostility in her reaction.

After spending a moment looking around to ensure that nobody else is in earshot, Ruffnutt steps closer and says quietly, "If you're worried about your Dad finding out, we can make sure you guys won't get caught together…"

Astrid looks at the twin with wide eyes, starting to shake her head, suddenly very worried about breaking the promise she and Hiccup made to their parents.

"No," she says firmly.

She's about to add something more when Tuffnutt also steps closer. "Astrid, it'll be fine, we're good at this," he assures her with a whispering smile while his sister nods eagerly, the two of them watching her intently.

The girl scowls at their insistence, furrowing her brow.

"NO," she repeats in a loud voice.

The four look at her in surprise, the twins each taking a half step back. Anger was the last thing any of them had been expecting in response to that offer.

Not wanting to leave anything to chance, she adds plainly, speaking slowly with emphasis, "I do not want to see Hiccup."

Of course, that was as far from the truth as possible. There was nothing more she wanted than to see the skinny lad, to wrap her arms about him and kiss him senseless. But, she wasn't about to put her upcoming betrothal to him at risk just because the twins thought they could help her and her boyfriend sneak a fast one.

Those two weren't nearly as good at getting away with things as they thought.

The four other teens look at each other in disappointed surprise, except for Snoutlout, who half grins at what he thinks is the prospect of an opening for him with Astrid.

"Okay, okay," Ruffnutt finally answers, "sorry for trying to help." She watches Astrid with a penetrating gaze, trying to discern what's going on. Her attitude doesn't make sense to the twin, considering the talk the two girls had just a week ago. Astrid had been so besotted and randy for Hiccup that it made Ruffnut's stomach turn. So the girl's fury at the idea of seeing Hiccup, even without the risk of her father finding out, leaves the twin very confused.

Astrid isn't talking though, and her frown persists as she glares at them. Ruffnutt wonders if she can get it out of the other girl later, when they can talk alone, girl to girl.

"So…how about we go race our dragons?" Fishlegs asks hesitantly, clearly concerned that Astrid will take his head off for his suggestion. When she turns suddenly and looks at him, he quickly throws up his hands as if in surrender and quickly says, "Just the five of us, no Hiccup!"

She watches Fishlegs and then the twins for a moment, then relaxes.

"Yeah, sure," she says as the large boy heaves a sigh of relief that she didn't hurt him. "I'll go get Stormfly," she goes on to say. "Where should we meet?"

Suddenly the door to the baker's shop next to them opens and Hiccup hobbles out into the street on his crutch, a covered basket in his free hand. Everyone turns to look at the sound of the door and
stares at him in surprise, especially Astrid, who's jaw drops at the sight of him.

As he's about to turn to go, he glances over at the group of people, not realizing who it is until it's too late. He stares at the other teens in shock, though his eyes quickly settle on Astrid.

The secret lovers stare at each other mutely with wide eyes, each stunned by the sight of the other. It's only been a day since their parting and promise to their parents that they'd stay apart until the Harvest End Feast, and now suddenly by chance they're faced with one other in the middle of the marketplace. Astrid finds her heart beating quickly as she sees the love of her life, while Hiccup notices his breath coming faster as he looks into the lovely blue eyes of the beautiful girl whom he cares for more than anything else in the world.

While the two stare at each other in shock, the other teens quickly recover and watch how the undeclared couple watch each other. In the space of a few heartbeats, the four teens assess the other two and share knowing glances amongst themselves, each starting to smile, except for Snoutlout who looks on with a sour frown.

Without a word, Hiccup grits his teeth, his expression falling as he turns to go the opposite direction from the others. Astrid says nothing as with wide eyes she watches him turn to leave, though she grips the handle of her basket so tightly with both hands that the wicker crinkles noisily. The twins grin to each other while Snoutlout looks on disappointed, his early hopes of a chance with Astrid already dashed to pieces.

Even Fishlegs looks on with a knowing smirk.

"Hey Hiccup, hang on a second," Tuffnutt calls out, causing Astrid to look over at him with a hostile, penetrating stare that should have knocked him dead on the spot.

Hiccup freezes at the sound of his friend's voice, his whole body tensing up as if he were caught doing something wrong. He quickly thinks through his options and realizes he has no choice but to stop to hear what the twin wants.

"Yeah?" he asks over his shoulder, not turning around enough to look at them. Out of the corner of his eye he can see Astrid glance over at him with a longing, yet worried glance.

"We're about to go dragon racing with Astrid, want to come with us?" Tuffnutt asks, smirking with his sister as they watch the girl's head whip around at his words to stare daggers at him, her face turning beet red as she's overwhelmed with anger.

Hiccup swallows tightly at the question, desperately wishing he could agree and spend the day with his friends and his girlfriend, but he doesn't dare break the agreement that he and Astrid made with their parents.

He wants nothing more than the promised betrothal to his girlfriend. He won't do anything to jeopardize that.

"Sorry, can't," he protests weakly. "I...can't fly Toothless without my leg," he points out and starts to hobble off again.

"Well, I'm sure Astrid would let you ride with her on Stormfly," Ruffnutt points out in a suggestive voice, struggling to keep a giggle down as she and her brother exchange another glance. Astrid's face goes white, she's so livid with anger right now.

"Maybe another time," Hiccup says without much conviction. "I've...gotta get home, right now..."
"Aw, come on, Hiccup!" Snoutlout protests with an obnoxious grin. "Astrid has been begging for you to join us!" he adds, though his smile disappears as soon as he sees Astrid turn her death-gaze to him.

The smaller boy says nothing, but instead moves faster to get away from the lot of them. The five look on as he quickly makes his way out of the market, the smaller boy disappearing when he turns the corner at the tailor's shop. Astrid swallows heavily as she watches him vanish, both relieved and dejected that he's gone.

As soon as her secret boyfriend disappears, Astrid turns her attention to the other teens standing with her. They all take a step back when they see the look of rage on her face.

"I am SO going to kill you guys," she says with a quiet, even voice that puts the others even more on edge.

"Come on," Tuffnutt protests. "It's so obvious you want to be with him, just let us help you two get together."

"Yeah," Ruffnutt adds, meeting Astrid's gaze as she looks over at her, "we saw the way you two looked at each other. I think it's safe to say he wants you as much as you want him."

Narrowing her gaze at the twins, she says firmly, "I do NOT want to see Hiccup!"

With that, she turns and starts stalking off.

"Oh please," Snoutlout says,"we heard from Ruff about how soaked your panties are for him, just give up the act already…!" His words draw shocked gazes from the other teens as Astrid halts in her tracks, drops her basket and slowly turns to stare at them with such vitriolic hatred that they all take another step back.

"THAT'S IT!" she shouts, then lunges at the four, fully intent on beating the living shit out of the lot of them.

The other teens scatter, though Astrid quickly hones in on Snoutlout, who backpedals away, trying to turn and run. She grabs him by the vest and pulls back to punch him in the nose, when he cries out in desperation, "Not in the face! Not in the face!"

Pausing for a moment, Astrid considers his plea and instead swiftly kicks him in the nuts, grinning in satisfaction as he instantly doubles over, dropping to his knees and crying in pain.

"Well, you said not in the face," Astrid tells him with a wry smirk. In answer, Snoutlout looks up at her and groans in pain, his eyes crossing as he starts to fall over onto his side.

Astrid grabs his helmet by one of its horns and pulls it off his head as he falls, looking towards the twins who have run the length of the marketplace while she dealt with Snoutlout. The girl smiles grimly as she pulls back with the helmet and wings it towards her targets. She watches as the helmet spins through the air, whistling as it nears the two running teens. Tuffnutt and Ruffnutt look back just in time as the hurtling metal object strikes the boy in the back, knocking him down and into his sister, the two tumbling together into the dirt.

"Oh, I am VERY much hurt!" Tuffnutt cries out to Astrid's satisfaction, her smirk lilting even more as she sees Ruffnutt push her brother off of her and proceed to beat on him herself, the boy punching back and wrestling with her fiercely.

With a snort, Astrid turns to see Fishlegs standing not ten feet away, looking at her with a terrified
expression.

She grins in amusement at him, though her gaze is gentle.

"Don't worry, Fishlegs," she tells him, her smirk fading into a pleasant smile as he visibly relaxes. "I'm not mad at you."

With that, she turns to go, picking up her basket.

"Astrid," he calls to her, causing her to pause and look back at him with a questioning gaze.

"We're just trying to help you and Hiccup," he says in an apologetic tone.

Astrid sighs, smiling gently at the large teen and suddenly feeling a touch guilty at her reaction, even though the other three had really earned the beat down she just gave them.

Their intentions may have been good, but their execution sucked.

"I know," she tells Fishlegs, her lips twitching into a grin as he starts to smile. "I appreciate it, I really do, but…" She sighs, considering her words carefully.

"It's best if you guys don't get involved," she tells him.

The large teen furrows his brow in confusion and concern, leaving Astrid feeling horribly guilty for not being able to share with them what's really going on.

Without another word, she turns and walks off, stepping over Snoutlout as he moans pathetically on the ground, curled up in a tight fetal position.

"So she's finally ready then?" Gobber quietly asks Stoic, furrowing his brow as his chief takes a long pull of his flagon of mead.

"Aye," the large man answers after he puts down the large mug, nodding firmly. "It'll be done at the Harvest's End Festival," he says in a low voice. The two sit together in a corner of the Mead Hall, well away from the other vikings.

"Well it's about time," Gobber comments as he too takes a drink. In front of the two friends were plates of well cleaned bones. "I've always wondered why she held on fer so long," he adds thoughtfully.

Stoic shrugs, "It was fer Astrid, why else?" Gobber nods knowingly, unsurprised by the answer. "But now with what's goin' on 'tween th'girl an' Hiccup…"

"…suddenly what's good fer her daughter has changed," Gobber finishes. Stoic nods as the two look at each other with knowing smiles. "Well, I still say this shoulda been done years ago," the smith reasserts. "It should never'a lasted this long…"

Stoic shrugs. "Easy fer us t'say, Gobber," he shrugs, "you and I wouldn'a been the one to deal with th'consequences." The smith hums in answer as he considers the chief's point. "Before all this happened, there was nothing I could'a done to help her afterwards…"

Gobber grins all the more, "aye, but now e'erything is different." Stoic nods as the smith again finishes his thought, taking another pull of his drink as his friend furrows his brow.

"Stoic," he says, "If she's goin' ta do it in th'middle of th'Harvest End Festival, then all Hel's going ta
The chief nods firmly again, keeping his eyes upon his friend. "I expect so," he says with a serious tone.

"Right," the smith answers. "I'll talk t'Vali. We'll need to make sure we have e'eryone ready."

"Good," Stoic says. "Placement will be key. When it happens, it'll happen fast." Gobber nods, his expression as dark and serious as Stoic's. "We can't afford t'leave anyone unchecked."

"Don' you worry, Stoic," Gobber tells his chief. "We'll make sure this goes off without a hitch."

"I hope so," the large viking answers. "Because if any of us fail, there will be blood…"

"Ow," Tuffnutt complains, trying to get comfortable as he sits with the others at the Mead Hall. "I think my butt has a hole in it," he complains. When he and his sister went tumbling into the dirt after he was hit in the back, he ended up rolling over Snoutlout's helmet and one of the horns caught him in his posterior. There was no blood, but it hurt like Hel.

Next to him, Ruffnutt likewise winces in pain, both twins having given each other a number of new bruises. Snoutlout sits down feebly, grimacing as he puts his head down in his folded arms upon the table, whimpering quietly. Only Fishlegs seats himself comfortably without any effort, making no noise whatsoever. He puts his plate of food down, the others not having bothered with any lunch. Humming happily, he starts eating one of the legs he pulls off of his whole chicken.

"What're you so happy about?" Tuffnutt complains to the large teen, drawing his sister's gaze to join him in looking at the other boy. "Didn't Astrid beat you up too?" he asks.

"Uhm…nope," Fishlegs admits with a slightly guilty voice as he realizes he's the only one at the table who isn't in pain.

"Well how'd you get away with that?" Ruffnutt asks, looking irritated. Next to Fishlegs, Snoutlout whimpers miserably.

Shrugging, the boy answers, "I dunno." He pauses, furrowing his brow slightly then adds, "maybe because I wasn't doing anything to make her mad?"

"Yeah, we noticed you didn't do anything," Tuffnutt complains, "we coulda used your help in convincing her to let us try and help her and Hiccup."

"Yeah, uhm," Fishlegs counters, "I don't think that I could have helped." The twins look at him with confused, annoyed expressions. "I don't know if you noticed, but you three were really upsetting her. Every time you said something, she got more angry."

"That's just because she's upset she can't see Hiccup," Ruffnutt says with a wave of her hand, dismissing Fishlegs assessment of how they had gone about trying to help their friend. "Until we get those two together, they're both going to keep on being miserable."

"Yeah," her brother agrees with her, "and they're going to keep making us miserable along with them." He furrows his brow as he lifts his shirt and looks at one of the bruises his sister gave him. "We gotta figure out a new plan," he says.

"I am done with helping those two," Snoutlout weakly says, his voice muffled as he keeps his face buried in his folded arms upon the table top. "If I help them any more, I might not be able to have
"Oh, you're going to help us," Ruffnutt says bitterly, causing him to look up at her with a confused, angry look. "Otherwise, after those two are together and happy? We're going to tell Astrid that the reason you didn't help is because you wanted to ruin things for her with Hiccup so that you could try and get together with her." Snoutlout looks at her with wide eyes, glancing at her brother when he chuckles darkly at his sister's words.

"And you thought she was rough on you today," the twin remarks while looking at Snoutlout with a smirk to mirror the one his sister wears. The burly lad scowls at the twins as Tuffnutt adds, "Boy, I wouldn't want to be you when that happens…"

Glaring at the twins, Snoutlout considers his options for a few moments before groaning, "fine, I'll help…!" He drops his head into his arms again, moaning pitifully.

"Good," Ruffnutt says. "So here's what we're gonna do." Her brother and Fishlegs lean in to listen as she says, "the direct approach didn't work," she says with a scathing glance to her brother, who frowns. "So we're going to try something more…sneaky."

Tuffnutt grins at his sister's words, glancing over to Fishlegs, "Oh, I like the sound of this…"

Fishlegs furrows his brow at the twins. "Uhhmm…I'm not so sure this is a good idea, guys…" Both siblings look at him with a frown as he continues, "I mean, we already tried to get them together, and it didn't go over so well." Brother and sister glance at each other, then back at the large teen as he adds nervously, "After she finished beating you guys up, Astrid told me it'd be better if we didn't get involved…"

Ruffnutt makes a disbelieving sound with her lips as she shares another glance with Tuffnutt. "Puhleeze," she says. "She'll thank us for this when she's with Hiccup," she argues, smiling with her brother as he nods in agreement. "We just need to get them alone, so there's no chance of being caught and getting in trouble with her father."

"Right," Tuffnutt agrees, while Snoutlout whimpers in answer.

"I don't know about this…" Fishlegs says warily, looking worried.

"You're outvoted," Ruffnutt tells him flatly, causing the boy's shoulders to slump as she and her brother share a conspiratorial grin.

"Okay," she says, "here's what we're gonna do…"

The next day, Hiccup grunts as he hefts his weight onto the bellows, getting the forge good and hot. "Gobber," he puffs between breaths, "I'm telling you, we need to retrofit the forge…!"

Gobber glares at his apprentice, snarling back, "Hiccup, one more word outta you about that Gods-be-damned dragon-fired forge, and I'm gonna make you work every Saturday from here til' Snoggletog!" His voice grows to a crescendo as he speaks, until he's yelling at the boy.

The skinny apprentice glares at his master, the two staring daggers at each other in silence until Hiccup stops pumping the bellows, half dropping off of the large apparatus and falling back against the wooden column behind him. He rests there as he puffs for breath, the two looking darkly at each other, until Gobber turns away first to see to the metal he's tempering in the now red-hot forge.

The smith mutters under his breath, trying to keep his temper in check. Hiccup has been in a foul
mood since he arrived this morning, snapping when spoken to and being insolent in a very un-Hiccup like way. Normally, the two traded banter in a rather lighthearted manner, or at least the older man was always able to disarm Hiccup's cheeky attitude with a good bit of witty responses.

But not today, he wasn't.

Today the smith finds himself dealing with a Hiccup that he doesn't recognize.

This Hiccup is a surly, rude character who is most unsavory.

It didn't take long for the smith to conclude that the reason for his surrogate nephew's spiteful behavior was the separation from Astrid. He quickly got a confirmation to his theory when he delicately asked Hiccup if he was feeling a little tense because of the forced two weeks of distance. The snarling answer he got had shocked Gobber into stunned silence. It took a few moments before he could get the presence of mind to bark back, after Hiccup wouldn't stop ranting in reply.

Gobber realizes that this all really started yesterday. After Hiccup had returned to the forge from a mid-day trip to the baker's for his father, he had been usually quiet and brooding, even moreso than usual. He wasn't quite as cranky as today, but there was definitely a change.

As the smith moves the red hot axe head to the anvil and started to pound upon the metal, he considered the probability that Astrid was getting just as cranky. If gentle Hiccup was so easily upset by the distance the two teens were forced into, Gobber could only imagine what the fiery girl would be like.

A wry smirk turns up his lips as he wonders if Berk could survive the two of them being apart, now that they had finally become a couple.

Glancing back behind him, he sees Hiccup hobbling over to the bench where his unfinished saddles sit. He sighs as he finds himself wishing the next two weeks were done already, just so that the boy would stop being such a little prick.

The smith finishes beating upon the unfinished axe head for now and puts it back in the fire, when he hears Tuffnutt call out, "Hey Hiccup!"

Gobber half turns and glances over to find the boy standing at the shop window, leaning in and looking into the building for the smaller teen. The smith frowns slightly as he wonders why the twin would be here without his sister, or all the others, for that matter.

"What?" Hiccup snaps in answer as he whips his head around to see who called for him, causing Tuffnutt to jump back out of the window in surprise. Gobber chuckles to himself as he waits for the show, eager to see someone else fall victim to the new, surly Hiccup.

"Uh," Tuffnutt hesitates, clearly taken aback by the other boy's reaction. "Uhm, Barf and Belch are acting...kinda funny. We think they might be sick," he says with a worried voice. Hiccup puts down the saddle he's working on and turns to face the twin, now looking concerned. Gobber likewise turns his attention fully to the lanky boy, furrowing his brow.

"Acting funny? How?" Hiccup asks, his attitude completely gone, replaced by his old self, compassionate and selfless. Gobber smiles, glad to see proof that once he's back with Astrid, grumpy Hiccup will go away.

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"I, uh...I can't explain it, I've...never seen anything like it," the twin says, looking exceedingly worried. Hiccup frowns, his brow knitting together with concern. Tuffnutt asks, "Look, I know you're busy, but could you come and take a look at them?" He hesitates, then adds anxiously,
"They're in the training ring, they won't come out of their old room."

"Gobber…?" Hiccup starts to ask, when the old smith cuts him off.

"Say no more, Hiccup," the larger viking answers, holding up his hand before him in surrender. "A sick dragon takes priority o'er saddles, you go with Tuffnutt an' see to it," he says. While all that was true, the smith was also leaping with joy inside at the excuse to send Hiccup away and to let someone else deal with his mood swings.

"Thanks Gobber," Hiccup says with a genuine smile, grabbing his crutch and making amazingly good time to the door. It had only been four days since he had been forced to abandon his leg while he healed, but Hiccup was already starting to master getting around on just the crutch.

"Any time, Hiccup," Gobber says with a wide smile, watching the two teens walk off quickly. As they do, the smith hears Hiccup barraging Tuffnutt with questions about Barf and Belch. The older man smirks as he hears the twin's stumbling, incoherent answers.

Turning his attention back to the axe head, Gobber smiles contentedly at the silence and sighs happily before he starts to work on the heated metal, singing in time with his hammer as he makes it ring against the anvil in time to the beat of his song.

"Astrid!" Ruffnutt yells, jogging to catch up with the other girl. It was the second time she had called out to the other blonde, who didn't break her stride after looking back to see who it was she who had called her.

"Go away, Ruff!" Astrid barks over her shoulder. "I'm still pissed at you for telling the guys what I told you about how I feel about Hiccup!"

The twin groans at her friend's words, running faster so she can catch up. Grabbing Astrid by the arm, she tugs on her to stop, but then has to duck as the other girl swings back with the fist attached to that arm.

"Hey!" The twin barks back, frowning bitterly. She meets the furious gaze of her friend, now that they've both stopped walking. "I only told them because Snoutlout was saying that the reason you weren't together with Hiccup was because you were crushing after him!"

Astrid furrows her brow at her friend's answer. She hesitates as she absorbs her friend's story.

"Well," she starts to say, her scowl lessening. "I guess that's not the worst reason for you to have told them," she says reluctantly, then adds bitterly, "but I'm also pissed at you for what you and the guys did yesterday!"

Frowning, Ruffnutt barks back, "Astrid, we're just trying to help you and Hiccup!"

Sighing, the other girl's expression softens a little bit. "Yeah, I know," she says. "But it's really better if you guys don't get involved. I told you, I don't want to see Hiccup anymore." Of course that isn't true, but the girl hopes to keep Ruff from trying again.

Furrowing her brow, the twin asks skeptically, "Why?"

Astrid falters, unsure of how to answer. She can't tell her friend the truth, even though she wants to, but she doesn't want to lie, either. "It's…" she hesitates, causing Ruffnutt to lift an eyebrow at her.

"It's complicated, okay?" she says in an uncertain voice, looking at the twin with a pleading gaze.
"Well," the other girl starts, pausing before she adds, "it's easy for you to say don't get involved, but we already kind of are." Astrid furrows her brow in confusion, causing Ruffnutt to smirk. "I don't know if you've realized, but you two are kinda miserable without each other," she says, her grin twisting all the more at the cross look on Astrid's face, "and it's kinda made things all messed up with the six of us…"

She falls silent when Astrid's shoulders slump, the girl's face contorting with guilt. "Yeah," she acknowledges, "I know. Sorry about that…"

Ruffnutt crosses her arms, asking, "well if you won't take our help, can you at least tell me why?"

Astrid sighs, hesitating before she shakes her head, "Sorry, I can't."

The twin frowns, watching Astrid shift uncomfortably under her gaze. "Fine," she says bitterly. She pauses before asking, "Can you hang out with us today? We're going to the training ring to spar for a bit."

Astrid considers her friend thoughtfully. "Maybe," she answers cautiously, asking further, "it depends. Will Hiccup be there?"

Ruffnutt rolls her eyes, sighing heavily. "No, Astrid," she says in exasperation, "Hiccup won't be there…"

The other girl watches the twin thoughtfully for a moment before a smile slowly blooms across her lips. "Okay," she agrees. "I would like to hang out with you guys today," she admits, then smirks wryly as she adds playfully, "besides, if we're sparring I can give you all a little more pay back for what you did yesterday."

Ruffnutt barks a laugh, tossing her head back. "You can try," she says, meeting her friend's gaze. "But this time, I'll be ready for you…"

Astrid grins along with Ruffnutt, the two looking at each other with friendly hostility.

"You're on…!" the other blond finally says before she and the twin start walking off towards the training ring, talking happily about other things besides Astrid's boy troubles.
"Gobber!"

The smith cringes at the sound of Thorsten calling his name. He finds himself gripping his hammer handle more tightly as he stops beating upon the axe head he was working on.

Glancing over his shoulder, Gobber asks unenthusiastically, "Aye? What'd'ya need, Thorsten?"

"Was Hiccup here early on Saturday morning?" he asks, intently watching the other man with a suspicious gaze.

Gobber frowns slightly before answering, "Aye." He pauses before adding, "th'lad has fallen a bit behind on his saddle work, so he's been putting in extra time t'make up fer lost time."

"Oh?" Thorsten asks. "What's been taking up his time?" he asks with a furrowed brow.

Shrugging his shoulders, Gobber looks back at the axe head he holds in his claws, moving the metal back into the fire as he answers, "Not sure, really. You'd have to ask him what he does when he's not here…" He tries very hard to keep the dislike out of his voice as he answers, wondering how long the man is going to stand there and quiz him.

"Freja stopped by that morning, didn't she?" Thorsten asks, suddenly sounding casual.

The change in tone instantly makes Gobber wary as he answers, "Oh, aye. She was lookin' fer Hiccup an' Astrid, as I recall," he says in as disinterested a tone as he can manage. "I told her I didn' know why she thought Astrid would be here, but she saw Hiccup with 'er own eyes."

Nodding, Thorsten says, "Oh, by the way, Freja wanted me to ask you something about the Harvest's End Festival, since she forgot to bring it up with you when you two talked…"

Furrowing his brow slightly, Gobber asks, "Aye, what's she need to know?"

Shrugging, the other man explains, "Oh, she just wants to know if the dragons will be allowed in the hall. She's not sure if we need to leave Stormfly home."

Nodding, Gobber answers, "Well, Stoic hasn't decided yet, but he's leaning towards allowing them."

Smiling widely, Thorsten nods. "Thankee," he replyes. "She couldn't believe she forgot to bring up the Feast when she saw you."

Shrugging. Gobber smiles and says, "Well, t'is understandable. It was early in the morning on a Saturday."

Smirking in satisfaction, Thorsten answers, "Aye, that it was."

With a nod, he says further, "Well, thankee again, Gobber. You've answered all of my questions. See you about."

The smith narrows his gaze a little at the other man's tone, regarding him thoughtfully as he walks off. "Yer welcome," he answers, "Faretheewell." The conversation left him feeling uneasy, but he's not sure why.

Sighing heavily, he forces himself to get back to work, but he can't stop turning the discussion over
in his mind as he tries to figure out why it doesn't sit right with him.

Hiccup stands next to Tuffnutt inside of one of the old dragon pens in the Training Ring, the two of them looking at the Ziffleback as the two heads look back at them.

"Well, they…they seem okay," Hiccup says cautiously, wondering if he's missing something subtle. Barf and Belch look at the scrawny teen with an interested gaze, expecting him to produce some fish like their one owner had done to get them to come into this room that they did not like. They try to stay on their best behavior, hoping to better improve their chances of a treat.

"Yeah, well, sometimes it takes a while for the sneezing to start," Tuffnutt says after a moment's delay, glancing out into the ring for the umpteenth time. It was getting harder to stall Hiccup. What was taking his sister so long?

"How long?" Hiccup asks, furrowing his brow as he studies the two heads.

"I dunno," Tuffnutt answers in a distracted tone as he leans out the one open door, half hiding behind the closed one, looking around and listening. "Maybe you can look for that rash again?"

Hiccup sighs, giving at the twin with an exasperated glare. "I'm telling you, there wasn't a rash back there," the scrawny lad says in an irritated voice.

"Yeah, well, you didn't look for the one under it's left wing," Tuffnutt answers, smiling as he finally sees Ruffnutt walking into the ring alongside Astrid. The two are chatting casually, enjoying each other's company as they stroll in.

Hiccup looks at the twin incredulously, furrowing his brow as he wonders what's outside that's got the other boy's attention. "You never said anything about a rash under the wing," he says skeptically.

He starts to hobble towards Tuffnutt when the other teen suddenly turns back towards him and walks over in a hurry.

"Yeah, well, it's twice as big as the one on its butt, so there's no way you could miss this one," he says quickly, turning Hiccup around and pushing him towards the Ziffleback. The scrawny lad scowls at the twin as he stumbles forward, struggling to keep his balance.

He starts to sputter in protest, but Tuffnutt says, "Hey, you said you'd help. Could you just go and look for the rash?"

With an exasperated sigh, Hiccup leans on his crutch and starts hobbling over to the dragon. "Fine," he answers bitterly, "but if I don't find a rash there, I'm done!"

"Okay, okay," Tuffnutt replies with a scowl, waiting a moment to be sure that Hiccup is actually following through with it. As he sees the other boy make his way over to the far side of the Ziffleback, he grins and quickly ducks out the open door and into the stadium.

Blinking a few times at the bright light, the twin walks towards his sister and Astrid who are already halfway across the arena.

"So where's Fishlegs and Snoutlout?" Astrid asks Ruffnutt, furrowing her brow as she only sees Tuffnutt. "I thought we were all going to spar together…"

Smirking, Ruffnut answers cryptically, "Oh….they're around."

"Hey Sis, Astrid," Tuffnutt greets the girls as they all meet together about two thirds of the way
inside the arena, nearest the old Ziffleback pen. "Took you long enough to get here," he complains, glaring at his sister.

"Cool it, we got here in time," she points out, causing Astrid to furrow her brow in confusion.

"What's the rush, Tuff?" Astrid asks with a slight grin. "Eager to get beat again?"

Just then, Hiccup hobbles out from the Ziffleback pen, squinting in the bright sunlight as he looks around for Tuffnutt. "Tuff, I don't see any rash on Barf or Belch, and I don't think there's anything wrong with that dragon," he says in an impatient tone, then mutters bitterly, "except for maybe it's owners…" The boy stops talking when his eyes settle upon the three standing not ten feet from where he halts in his tracks. His eyes instantly lock on his secret girlfriend.

Astrid looks at him with wide eyes as he gawks at her, both equally surprised to see each other. They quickly put two and two together.

"RUFFNUTT!" Astrid screams as Hiccup shouts, "TUFFNUTT!", each turning angrily towards their respective swindler.

Both twins jump away from their respective victims, backpedaling a few feet to put some distance between them.

"Look," Ruffnutt protests, putting up her hands defensively as she watches Astrid with a wary gaze. "You weren't cooperating, it was the only way to get you two together!"

Astrid groans in frustration as she glares at the twin, crying out, "I told you, I don't want to see him!"

"Oh, please!" Tuffnutt barks back in exasperation, "It's so obvious that you two have the hots for each other!" Astrid and Hiccup both glare angrily at him as he goes on to say, "We did you favor! Nobody ever comes around here anymore except us! You're not going to get caught together, your Dad will never know!"

Hiccup moans in frustration, rubbing his free hand over his face. "Didn't you hear Astrid?" he asks angrily, looking back at Tuffnutt again. "She said she doesn't want to see me, and I don't want to see her either!"

"I'm outta here," Astrid suddenly says, turning to go just as the gate to the stadium noisily drops shut with a loud clank.

"You're not going anywhere!" Snoutlout shouts from the upper decks, walking into view as he steps away from the gate mechanism to look down at the four inside. He sneers down at them as he puts his fists on his hips.

"SNOUTLOUT!" Astrid shouts at the top of her lungs, "You open that gate or I'll beat you senseless!"

"Yeah, good luck with that while I'm up here and you're down there!" he laughs, but then shrieks in a panicked cry and drops to the ground as a rock comes flying his way, thrown by Astrid. The fist sized object narrowly misses his head, then flies off into the void.

"Hey!" he protests angrily as he gets back up and adjusts his helmet.

"Snoutlout, I am SO gonna kick your ass!" Astrid angrily yells at him.
"Give it a rest, sweetheart," the burly lad barks back, the name he gives her causing Astrid to go nearly beet red with anger. "You two have obviously got some issues to work out, and nobody's going anywhere until this is all settled!"

"GODS!" Astrid cries out in frustration, turning her attention to Ruffnutt, who at least is trapped in the arena with her and she can beat up without too much difficulty. The other girl holds up her hands defensively as she takes another step back, eyeing her friend warily.

"Snoutlout's right," the twin says as she stares back into Astrid's hateful gaze. "You two are driving us all nuts with how you're mooning over each other but not doing anything about it." She pauses for a moment while the other girl clenches her fists angrily, then goes on to say, "we get that you can't be together publically cuz of your Dad, but we've got that covered. This place is safe, nobody ever comes here anymore!" she reminds them.

Sighing, Hiccup asks in an exasperated tone, "well, what if someone does decide to come and see what's going on here? We're all out in the open in this big, wide pit, so it'd be pretty easy for them to see us together here, don't ya think?"

Tuffnutt pipes up, explaining, "We've got that covered," he waves a hand dismissively as he crosses his arms arrogantly, proclaiming, "Fishlegs is on lookout."

"For the record," they hear the disembodied voice of the oversized teen calling out from somewhere up above, "I was against this whole plan…!" The twins roll their eyes while Astrid and Hiccup glance at each other and share an amused smirk, allowing themselves that small pleasure.

"I was wondering where he was," Hiccup comments.

"Yeah, well," Astrid answers in a disdainful voice, "it doesn't matter, cause like I said, I don't want to see you." She looks dead in his eyes as she says it, but Hiccup notices the most subtle lift of her eyebrow as she speaks, the slightest twist of her lips in a smirk. After a moment, Hiccup gives the least of nods.

"And I don't want to see you either," Hiccup reaffirms, frowning with a look of distaste.

Sighing, Tuffnutt asks, "Seriously? Are you two still trying to pretend that you don't like each other?" He shares an exasperated look with his sister. "That act's getting a little old, don'tcha think?"

"Yeah," Ruffnutt answers. "It's so obvious you two want each other. Everyone on the island can see it."

"Wait, me?" Astrid asks, furrowing her brow, "want him?" She looks at Hiccup up and down disapprovingly with a look of disgust on her face. "Not a chance. He's such a scrawny little geek."

Ruffnutt and Tuffnutt share a disbelieving glance at the girl's protest, then look over at Hiccup as he suddenly says, "Oh, a scrawny geek am I?" he asks indignantly before firing back, "that's typical, coming from such a witless idiot like yourself. Do you even know how to respond to anyone with anything besides, 'I'm gonna beat you up?'"

The other teens look at Hiccup in shock as he speaks so harshly to Astrid. In so doing, they miss how Astrid slips and grins at her secret boyfriend. Hiccup somehow manages to keep a frown upon his face as he watches her, while the others look at him in slackjawed disbelief.

Quickly recovering, Astrid scowls and asks in a disbelieving voice, "Witless idiot?" She scoffs and goes on to spit back at him, "Well at least my best friend is the same species as me!" The girl glares at him. The twins look from Hiccup to her, even more shocked at her rebuttle.
"Yeah, it's no wonder she's your best friend," Hiccup barks, pausing before he fires back, "she's about as dimwitted as you are!"

Ruffnutt furrows her brow at his remark, unsure if she should feel insulted by it or not. Her brother smirks at her and snickers, causing her fume at him.

She's about to say something when Astrid suddenly snarls at Hiccup, "Watch it Haddock," the girl takes a couple of steps towards him, "you don't have your precious Night Fury around to protect you right now."

"See? See?! There you go," the smith's apprentice says with a measure of satisfaction. "Violence is the only way you know how to deal with things." He shakes his head, "there is no way I'd be interested in a girl as shallow as that."

Barking a disdainful laugh in answer, Astrid spits back, "Yeah, keep telling yourself that, loser. Maybe it'll help you sleep at night, because you know I'd never go for a dweeb like you!" She crosses her arms indignantly, "You only wish you could get a girl as good looking as me!" She looks dead on at Hiccup, ignoring the twins who watch the verbal sparring match with utter amazement.

Lifting an eyebrow at her words, Hiccup strides forward to partly close the gap between them, answering her, "Oh please," he says, "I'm the hero that saved Berk, I could get any girl I want."

"Any girl but this one," Astrid fires back bitterly, stepping closer to leave only a few of feet of distance between them.

"That's fine, because I don't want you anyway," he reaffirms bitterly, glaring at her.

"That's because a little weasel like you doesn't have the guts to get with a girl like me," she says flatly, sneering as she crosses her arms and narrows her gaze at him. "You wouldn't even be brave enough to ask me out, let alone kiss me." The twins look on amazed, as does Snoutlout from the upper levels, the burly lad clinging to the chains as he looks on with excitement at what he thinks is his dream come true.

Barking an indignant laugh, Hiccup snarks back, "Please! I faced down the Red Death." He takes a step closer to her, staring intently up into her eyes. "I'm as brave as they come. I could kiss you any time I want."

Furrowing her brow indignantly, Astrid puts her fists on her shoulders and glares at him, saying simply, "Prove it."

Smirking, Hiccup answers, "Fine."

With that, he closes the remaining distance between them, throws down his crutch, grabs her face in his hands and pulls her down to kiss her passionately. Astrid cries out against his mouth as if in surprise, her eyes going wide for a moment before she slowly closes them as she falls silent. She then starts to moan weakly against him, her arms slowly slipping around his waist to pull him to her.

Hiccup leans in, pressing against her body as he wraps his arms tightly about her neck, caressing her intimately with his tongue and lips while groaning loudly. Astrid starts to respond eagerly, her hands sliding up his back to run her fingers through his hair. The two kiss each other hungrily and sloppily, being as noisy as they can together, moaning and slurping intimately.

The twins and Snoutlout look on in flabbergasted shock, completely speechless at the sight of Astid and Hiccup making out so furiously in front of them after the furious fight they just had.
Tuffnutt scratches his head with a confounded look while his sister stares at the kissing couple with slack-jawed amazement. From the upper decks, Snoutlout looks on with a heart-broken stare, his dreams of a date with Astrid yet again dashed by the Haddock boy.

Tuffnutt’s the first to break the silence, saying, "Oooh, I am so confused…"

At the sound of his voice, Hiccup and Astrid slowly end the kiss, the girl sucking on his lip as they pull apart until it pops back into place. The two lovers look into each other's eyes with an exuberant glee for a moment before they both break down into a fit of giggles, touching their foreheads together as they do.

The twins furrow their brows as they watch the two laugh with each other, the realization of how they just got played slowly dawning upon them.

"Heeeey," Tuffnut protests as he glares at the two, only looking away to share an indignant look with his sister.

"That was a mean trick," Ruffnutt protests as she looks back at the grinning couple, who stay wrapped up in each other's arms.

"It's no less than you deserved, Ruff," Astrid points out with a smirk, meeting her friend's gaze.

The twin stares back for a moment before grinning at her.

"Never said I didn't," she points out, pausing before adding, "I was actually complimenting you on it. Well played."

The girls smile widely at each other before Tuffnutt says, "So, I'm going to go out on a limb here and guess that you two are already seeing each other…" Astrid and Hiccup share a glance with each other, grinning from ear to ear at the question.

"What, me with this witless girl?" Hiccup asks with a wide smirk that mirrors the smile on his girlfriend's lips. "It'd never happen," he protests as he tightens his arms about her.

Astrid smiles all the more before she says, "Yeah, like I'd ever be caught dead with this cowardly geek…" The two giggle and smile all the more before they lean in and kiss each other again, this time sweetly and tenderly as they linger lazily.

"Ugh, okay, okay, we get it!" Tuffnutt says with an irritated voice, adding when the two don't stop kissing, "Break it up already!"

Astrid and Hiccup slowly end the kiss, smiling from ear to ear as they look into each other's eyes before turning their gazes back to the twins again.

"Hey, you were the ones so eager to get us together," Astrid admonishes him, smirking wryly. She shrugs, "you got what you wanted. So, deal with it."

"I take it back," Tuffnutt says with a look of disgust, "you two were more fun when you were fighting each other."

The couple chuckle together before Snoutlout calls down, "will someone please tell me what in the Hel is going on?"

Sighing, Hiccup and Astrid look at each other. "Well, I guess we kinda have to explain things at this point," he says wearily.
Nodding reluctantly, his girlfriend answers, "Yeah, we'd better, or these guys might just go and try and get us together again…"

"Wait, what?" Ruffnut asks. "I thought you said you two were already a couple. Why don't you want us to help you spend time together?"

"Yeah," her brother adds, "for that matter, why didn't you want us to help you in the first place?"

"We'll tell you, but first thing's first," Astrid says, "let's get everyone down here. I only want to have to do this once."

Hiccup nods, looking over his shoulder up at Snoutlout. "Hey Snoutlout, come on down, we're going to explain everything." He pauses, then calls out, "You too, Fishlegs!"

The burly lad looks down at the couple warily, answering, "I dunno, you two could be trying to trick me into opening the gate so you can make a break for it…"

Quickly losing her temper, Astrid turns around in her embrace with Hiccup and shouts up at him, "Snoutlout, get your ass down here before I kick you so hard in the nuts that you'll never have kids!"

Jumping back in alarm in spite of the distance between them, Snoutlout mutters, "Alright, alright…" With that, he walks off and disappears again.

The four inside the ring look on as the gate slowly and noisily cranks open. While they wait, Hiccup leans in to press his lips to his girlfriend's cheek, whispering against her ear, "Astrid, I missed you so much…"

Quickly forgetting how angry Snoutlout made her, the girl's lips curl into a sweet smile as she holds her boyfriend all the more tightly. "Gods, Hiccup, I missed you too," she says weakly, pulling back just enough to look into his eyes. The two quickly lean in and start to kiss again, chastely at first, but they quickly forget about their audience and start to press their lips together more fiercely, their tongues entwining as they moan softly and hug each other tightly.

"Alright, break it up," Snoutlout says with a disgusted voice as he walks up to join the group with Fishlegs in tow while looking at the couple with disdain. "So what the Hel is going on?" he asks bitterly, not bothering to hide his disappointment.

Looking back at each other as they end the kiss, Astrid and Hiccup pause before the boy replies, "Let's go into one of the pens first." His girlfriend nods in agreement and they look back at the rest of the teens. "We shouldn't stay out in the open, we can't afford to get caught together," he explains firmly in a tone that expects no argument.

The other four teens look at each other with confused glances, but then their gazes are drawn back to the couple as Astrid wordlessly bends down to pick up Hiccup's crutch for him. His hands never leave her as she does, the boy using her for balance as he wobbles uncertainly on his one leg. The others watch silently as the girl stands up and hands the crutch back to him. As she returns his wooden aide, her one hand naturally falls to his waist, gripping him to help his balance as he takes the implement and situates it under his arm. His other hand never leaves her hip, gripping her firmly as he gets himself settled.

As he turns to go, Astrid's arm snakes about his body to hold his waist by the other side, while his free hand slides up to grip her shoulder. He then starts to hobble off to the Ziffleback pen, his girlfriend walking slowly with him, automatically slowing to match his pace.
The four other teens finally look back at each other pensively, each astounded by the silent and intimate scene that just played out before them. Without a word, they all follow the couple the remaining length of the arena and into the pen.

They watch as Hiccup and Astrid enter through the door and make their way to the back wall of the room. When they reach the wall, the two of them turn towards each other and then further to face the others.

"Ruff, Tuff," Hiccup asks as he fusses with his crutch while Astrid helps to hold him up on his foot, "would you please let Barf and Belch out?" The twins glance at each other and then back at the smaller boy as he goes on to say, "I'm sure this is the last place they want to be anymore…"

The twins look back at each other with guilty expressions, then wordlessly move into action. Tuffnutt pushes the door open and is surprised when Snoutlout suddenly helps him, while Ruffnutt starts to coax their dragon out through the double doors.

The large beast requires little prompting, glad to be going back outside again. As the two boys finish pushing open the door and the dragon walks quickly out, they look back inside to see Astrid whispering to Hiccup. The boy shakes his head as he says something back just as quietly, but then Astrid whispers more insistently, pressing her lips against his ear. Sighing with a reluctant nod, Hiccup grips the girl as she holds him by the waist and shoulder, helping him ease down to sit on the ground.

The four teens watch as they stand in the doorway, the sun casting their shadows towards the young couple as they sit on the far side of the room, opposite the doors.

Glancing over at them, Hiccup asks, "Tuff, 'lout, could you please close that one door back up? Then you can all come sit with us…” The two boys look each other, hesitating for a moment before they comply. As the door swings closed, the resulting shadow covers Astrid and Hiccup, leaving them in the darker half of the partly opened doorway.

Ruffnutt and Fishlegs start to walk in when Hiccup adds, "Except for you, Fishlegs," Hiccup adds awkwardly, asking, "could I ask you to please stand by the door and keep a lookout?" The boy hesitates until Hiccup adds, "We'll make sure you can hear us…”

Fishlegs only hesitates another moment before nodding and walking over to the half closed double doors while Snoutlout and Tuffnut come to join Ruffnutt. They seat themselves next to her as she sits down opposite Astrid and Hiccup.

The two lovers sit nestled closely together, watching their friends as they get settled. Waiting just another moment until all four are watching them intently, Hiccup begins with, "I guess we should start with an apology," he says, "we really didn't want to keep you guys in the dark about us…”

"So why did you?" Tuffnutt asks defensively, furrowing his brow in confusion.

"We're getting to that," Astrid admonishes him, frowning slightly at the impudent interruption.

The boy bristles at her brisk response, looking like he's about to snap back at her but hesitates when Hiccup holds up his hand at him while simultaneously placing a restraining hand upon Astrid's forearm. The girl clamps her mouth shut as she looks at her lover, the two sharing a brief glance before she drops her gaze with a huffing sigh, the two of them then looking back at their friends.

"It's a long story," Hiccup starts to say when Snoutlout interrupts him.

"Well, we've got time," he says in a sharp tone, frowning when Hiccup answers him.
"No, actually, we don't." The scrawny lad meets the larger boy's gaze with an intent stare. "Guys," he begins, looking at each of the other four in turn, "Astrid and I can't afford to spend any more time together than we absolutely have to, here..." The others look at each other in confusion Hiccup's words, then glance back at him as he continues, "we promise we'll tell you the whole story in about two week's time, but for now, we'll have to just give you the important parts so you understand why we can't be together until then."

"We already do," Ruffnutt says with an irritated voice, adding while gesturing to Astrid, "it's because of her Dad."

"Partly," Astrid confirms, nodding. "But it's more complicated than that. My mother and Stoic have a plan for us to get betrothed." She half grins as their friends sit up and look at the couple with surprise.

"Wow," Tuffnutt says. "You two are really serious, huh?"

The couple smiles as they look at each other, holding each other more tightly for a moment before Astrid confirms in a nearly breathless voice, "Very serious..." Hiccup grins from ear to ear as he looks into her eyes, but then when Snoutlout clears his throat noisily, the young lovers look back at their friends with a couple of sheepish grins.

"Okay, we get it," Snoutlout says with a bitter tone, adding, "you two are madly in love, and want to get married." Frowning, he asks with a surly voice, "but what does that have to do with why you can't see each other?"

"It's simple," Hiccup says with a shrug. "My Dad and her Mom said that for us to get betrothed in two weeks time, we needed to stay away from each other until then."

"Why?" Tuffnutt asks, furrowing his brow in confusion.

"Because of my Dad," Astrid reminds him, getting a little impatient.

"Speaking of your Dad," Ruffnutt chimes in, "why would he sign a contract with Stoic for the two of you to get married, anyway?"

The young lovers look at each other uncertainly at Ruffnutt's question, hesitating before they glance back as Hiccup answers, "that's just it...we don't know."

The others look at each other in confusion and then back to the couple again a Hiccup says, "my Dad and her Mom won't tell us what their plan is, but they promised that we'd get betrothed by the Harvest's End Festival in two weeks, so long as we stayed away from each other until then."

The other teens look at each other, then back to the couple.

"Oh," Tuffnutt says. "Okay, so that explains why you two got so angry when we tricked you."

Ruffnutt frowns at the two lovers, protesting in a defensive tone, "yeah, but we didn't have any way of knowing all that!"

Astrid glares back at her friend, answering sharply, "no, you only had me telling you several times that I didn't want to see Hiccup!"

The other girl fumes at her friend's rebuke. "I thought you were just too shy to try getting together with him!"

"Shy?" Astrid asks, looking at Ruffnutt incredulously, "Seriously?! Since when I have I ever been
shy?" she asks in a disbelieving voice.

"Oh please!" Ruffnut barks back at her, "you spent almost the whole month whining to me about how much you wanted to be with Hiccup but couldn't cuz of your Dad!"

Astrid's face is overcome with a shocked expression at her friend's rebuttal, her cheeks flushing a bright red as she glances at Hiccup with an embarrassed gaze while the lad looks at her with wide-eyed surprise. The girl squirms a little in his arms as he starts to smirk at her.

"What?" she asks in a very defensive tone as she struggles to keep eye contact with him while he starts to smirk at her. "I told you back on the island that I was never happy with my Dad's order..."

Hiccup grins all the more and cups her chin in his hand, leaning in to press his lips to hers. Astrid blushes all the more furiously before she quickly relents, leaning in to kiss him back eagerly.

"Oh, enough with the kissing!" Snoutlout protests with a groan, sharing a disgusted look with the twins. "There are other people here, you know...!"

"Snoutlout, would you shut up?!"

Everyone turns in surprise at the sound of Fishlegs' voice, the young couple breaking their kiss to look over at him, each teen staring at him with wide eyes at his outburst. The large lad standing by the door glares at Snoutlout with a bitter frown as the other teen looks back at him.

"Maybe you haven't been paying attention," Fishlegs goes on to say in a passionate, exasperated, chiding voice, "but Astrid and Hiccup are in love and they can't see each other after today! Just shut up and let them enjoy what little time they've got, since we all went and almost screwed up everything for them!"

The twins look a little sheepish at his words, while Snoutlout frowns all the more bitterly. The three of them all look down at the ground, abashed. The young couple both smile appreciatively at Fishlegs, who grins back, nodding once to them. After a moment, Hiccup turns to look back at the other teens and speaks.

"So, that's about it," he says, looking from one to the other as they glance to him at his words. "Astrid and I can't be together until after we get betrothed at the Harvest's End Festival in two Sundays." He adds in a heartfelt voice, "we really appreciate what you guys did, we know it was with the best of intentions, but it was actually the last thing we need right now." The others look at each other with a mixture of guilt and uncertainty.

Hiccup pauses, then upon seeing their reaction he quickly adds, "but you guys couldn't have known that. We should have told you. We were just too afraid of word getting to Astrid's father about us and ruining what my Dad and her Mom are planning."

Scowling, Snoutlout says bitterly, "but we're your friends, Hiccup. You're supposed to tell us these kinds of things." Astrid stiffens at his sharp words, opening her mouth to lash out at him again when Hiccup places a hand upon her arm again, squeezing her gently. The fiery girl hesitates at his touch, glancing over at him with a furrowed brow. The lovers look into each other's eyes for a moment before she drops her gaze, sighing as she leans into him more. Looking back at their friends, Hiccup answers.

"I know," he tells Snoutlout, looking at him intently. "You're right, we should have told you." His voice is firm and resolute. He pauses, then adds, "like I said before, we're sorry for not taking you into our confidence in the first place." Glancing over to his girlfriend, he asks gently in a leading tone, "aren't we, Astrid?"
The girl looks up from the random spot in her lap that she had been staring at and hesitates as she looks into Hiccup's eyes with an irritated glance. He ever so gently lifts his eyebrows, causing Astrid to sigh heavily, her shoulders slumping as she looks back at their friends. "Hiccup's right," she admits in a somewhat reluctant tone, meeting their gazes one by one. "We're sorry for not trusting you with this. We should have told you everything from the start."

Her boyfriend smirks at her less than enthusiastic agreement, but figures it's the best he'll get from her today. Shrugging, he adds with finality, "So there it is." The others look at each other in silence, looking back when Hiccup adds, "of course, you guys can't breathe a word about this to anyone." He pauses for emphasis before adding, "and I mean anyone. Not your parents, not any of the other kids, not another soul."

He hesitates for another moment before asking, "can we count on you to do that?"

As soon as he's done talking, Fishlegs chimes in, "I promise."

Ruffnut is next, quickly saying, "I won't tell anyone."

Her brother doesn't hesitate before adding, "You can count on me."

Astrid and Hiccup smile as their friends quickly promise their silence, but then start to look worried as Snoutlout remains silent for a few moments. Scowling, Tuffnut pushes the other boy, causing the burly lad to look at him with an angry glare. The twin stares at him with a deep frown for a moment before Snoutlout finally says, "Yeah, I promise." Glancing back over at the couple, he adds, "I won't tell anyone."

The two nod in appreciation, smiling again. An awkward silence settles over the six.

"So," Ruffnut hesitantly says, drawing everyone's gaze. "What now?"

With saddened expressions, Hiccup and Astrid look at each other. Both are thinking the same thing, but neither wants to be the one to say it.

Finally, Hiccup laments, "I think we need to go back now." Astrid's face falls even more as she hears spoken what she already knew. Her boyfriend goes on, "we broke our promise today. Hopefully we can avoid getting caught by Stoic or Astrid's parents...."

"You didn't break any promises," Tuffnut protests with a frown.

"Yeah," his sister agrees. "It's our fault this happened," she admits, watching the two with concern.

"Well," Astrid starts to answer, "either way, we can't stay together." She sighs from the tips of her toes, "Now that you all know why, we need to separate again."

The six are silent for a moment before Fishlegs says, "This sucks."

The couple smirk at his declaration, looking over at him with affectionate, caring gazes. "Yeah, it does," Hiccup admits, then adds with a shrug, "but it's only two weeks."

Smiling, Astrid corrects him, "twelve days." Hiccup glances back over at her, lifting an eyebrow as she says, "Just a bit more than week and a half...."

Nodding, Hiccup grins as he says, "All the more reason to get out of here. I don't want to risk the rest of our lives together over a couple of hours...."
Astrid nods, agreeing, "Me neither." The two start to get up, when the other teens quickly jump up before they can.

"Look, you two should be able to say a proper good bye," Ruffnutt tells them firmly. "We'll keep a lookout and give you two some privacy…"

Astrid and Hiccup glance at each other dubiously before the girl looks back at her friend and says, "Ruff, we really appreciate it, but…"

Suddenly Fishlegs interrups. "You know, I've been standing here and watching out there, but I can't see what's going on outside of the stadium…"

"Yeah, good point," Tuffnutt quickly adds, "it might not be safe out there for you two yet."

"We should really check it out before you two go out into the open," Ruffnutt tells them as she and Tuffnutt start hustling Snoutlout to the door. The larger boy resists for a moment, then starts walking of his own accord out of the room.

Astrid and Hiccup glance at each other with confused expressions as the other three join Fishlegs by the door. Tuffnutt continues to push Snoutlout out while Ruffnutt lingers for a moment to look back at the couple.

"We'll go check out the area outside the ring," she tells them, drawing their gazes back to her. "It'll take at little while to make sure it's all clear up above."

Hiccup and Astrid watch their friends incredulously as Fishlegs adds, "I'll go guard the door to the stadium. When the others give the word it's safe, I'll come and knock to let you know."

The two young lovers look at him and Ruffnutt with disbelief, too flabbergasted to say anything. With a smile, the two other teens promptly disappear, leaving the couple alone.

The two are silent for a few moments before Hiccup asks, "What just happened?"
Chapter 22

Having just finished dealing with a dispute between two farmers, Stoic makes his way to the smithy. Like Gobber, the chief had noticed Hiccup's increasingly surly attitude since his forced separation from Astrid. He's decided that he would take Hiccup to the Mead Hall to have lunch, in part to give the boy some distraction, but also to have a talk with him about his unacceptable behavior.

Lovesick though he might be, Hiccup was still his son and heir. A certain level of self control was needed and expected.

As he reaches the forge, Stoic peers in the window and frowns when he realizes that Hiccup isn't there.

"Gobber," he called to his friend, "where's Hiccup?"

The smith looks over to his chief from where he was fitting the newly finished axe head to the handle he had carved. "Oh, he went with Tuffnutt to the old arena," he answers absentmindedly as he returned his attention to his work. "Apparently Barf and Belch are a bit under th'weather, so he's going ta see what he can do t'help th'beastie."

Nodding in satisfaction, Stoic answers, "thanks." He turns to go, intending to seek out Hiccup at the stadium, but then pauses as he has a thought.

Glancing back at his friend, he asks, "Gobber, I'm going to ask Hiccup to join me fer lunch at the Great Hall. I want ta talk t'him about his behavior since Saturday, when we asked him t'stop seeing Astrid until th'feast." He pauses as the smith looks back at him again. The other man smirks as Stoic finishes, "Would ya like ta join us?"

Chuckling warmly at his chief, Gobber answers, "Ah, so you noticed that about Hiccup too, didja?"

Furrowing his brow, Stoic replies, "it's hard not to. Th'boy's been getting more insufferable by th'day."

Grinning wryly, Gobber answers, "Aye, indeed. Well, thanks, but no thanks." Stoic frowns a little. "I've had a belly full o'him this mornin', and I'll have another this afternoon, t'be sure."

The chief pauses, then grins at his friend. "Aye, that's fair 'nuff. He should be a bit less touble after I've spoken with him."

Gobber shares in Stoic's smile, replying, "we can only hope." He pauses, then adds, "else, I might have t'knock some sense inta th'boy." The two men chuckle, then they bid their farewells as Stoic walks off towards the arena while Gobber turns his attention back to his work.

"What just happened?" Hiccup asks as their friends disappear, leaving them alone.

Astrid hesitates before answering Hiccup's question. "I think," she begins, "they just showed us what good friends we have…" Her voice carries a hint of wonder, while a grin starts to bloom upon her lips.

She sits back down from her half standing position, grinning as Hiccup hesitates to do the same. Without another word, she grabs his arm and shoulder and pulls him down next to her, causing him to grunt in frustration and a little pain.
"Astid, it's nice of them, but we really should get going," he says as he looks at her, surprised by her willingness to go along with their friends' latest hair-brained scheme. She was just agreeing with him about needing to go their separate ways again to keep their promise, why would she suddenly be willing to risk everything?

Astrid smiles at his confused look, straddling him as she looks into his eyes. 'We will," she tells him as she brushes the unruly mop of hair from his eyes. "Later…after Fishlegs knocks and tells us it's all clear," she says with a devilish smile, adding, "you heard Ruff…it'll take them a little time to scout it out, first. We have a little time…"

Hiccup furrows his brow as he looks incredulously at her, then lets out a surprised but muffled squawk as she leans in and kisses him firmly on the lips. He murmurs in protest as she pushes her way into his mouth with her tongue, but soon finds his willpower wavering at the velvety caress of her flesh against his. As her soft hands stroke his cheeks, he starts to whimper against her mouth, causing her to smile against his lips.

Her smile only grows as she feels his hands start to slide up her thighs to wrap about her waist.

Settling in, she sighs happily as she spreads her legs wider to start pressing her crotch against his, moaning softly against his lips as she happily finds his hardness pushing back against her.

GODS how she's missed that feeling.

Hiccup mumbles against her lips as she starts to rub his sex with hers through their clothes, his hands sliding up her body to grip her shoulders, pushing her away.

"Astrid!" he whispers sharply, furrowing his brows as he chides her, "are you crazy? Our friends are right outside!"

She smirks at him with a sultry look, lifting an eyebrow, "weren't you listening, Hiccup?" she asks in a whisper. "They said they're going to check outside the stadium." Hiccup narrows his gaze at her as she reminds him, "Ruff said it'll take them a while…” The girl smiles wickedly at him as she makes a mental note to thank her friend later for this opportunity.

She was going to owe the other girl big. Of course, Astrid had little doubt that Ruff knew that when she decided to set this up, but she didn't care.

It would be SO worth it.

Hiccup furrows his brow at her words. "Seriously?" He asks her with an incredulous whisper, "after what they just pulled, you believed them?"

Astrid hesitates at his point, frowning a little. After another moments pause, she puts her hand upon his chest and roughly pushes him back to the wall he sits against.

"Don't. move." She tells him sternly, staring sharply into his eyes.

Sighing heavily he answers, "fine," while rolling his eyes. She smirks at the irritated look on his face.

After a moment's hesitation to stare into his eyes further when he looks back at her, Astrid jumps up and jogs over to the closed door, peaking out to find the stadium completely empty. She quickly steps out a few paces to look behind the open door, and up on the level above the pen they're in, to yet again find they are alone.

Smiling from ear to ear, she dashes back into the room and resumes her seat upon Hiccup's lap.
"It's just us, babe," she says excitedly, meeting his gaze as she settles in, grinning wickedly as she once more grinds her crotch against his hard member. Hiccup shivers as she presses her warmth against him, starting to smile at her as he realizes this just might be okay.

His girlfriend leans in to kiss him, but suddenly what she said clicks and he puts his hand upon her mouth to block her. Frowning, she stops and looks at him with irritation.

"What?" she asks, annoyed by the further delay. How much time does he think their friends will give them?

Grinning like the cat that got the cream, Hiccup tells her, "you just called me babe…"

Astrid furrows her brow at his words, thinking about it. Did she?

She smiles as she realizes he's right. "Yeah," she answers. "I guess I did…" He smiles all the more at her as she lifts an eyebrow. "I take it you liked that, huh?"

He grins widely at her, his hands sliding down her body to grasp the curves of her ass. Squeezing her, he pulls her all the more closely against him, grinding his hardness against her crotch. "Oh yeah," he says huskily as his girl closes her eyes and groans at the feeling of his stiffness pressing against her. She starts to breathe heavily and smiles from ear to ear, then leans in and kisses him hotly.

Their tongues wrestle fiercely as their hips start to rock together, the two teens grinding their sexes together as they get very horny, very quickly. They both moan into the kiss as their hearts race together.

"How long do you think we'll have?" Hiccup asks breathlessly against her lips between kisses, whimpering as she presses her mouth passionately against his once more.

"Not as long as I want," she tells him as she leans in and starts to suck on his neck. "We shouldn't waste any time," she tells him with a hot whisper against his cheek before she then sucks on his ear, her hands quickly going down to untie his breeches.

Hiccup quickly follows suit, tugging on his girlfriend's skirt and leggings. He grins as she moves to allow him the liberty. She wriggles her hips to help him pull her clothes down, then smiles at him as he slides them over her legs to below the knees. As she kneels back down atop of him, she loosens his breeches enough to free his hardness, which she eagerly takes into both of her hands just as she feels one of his hands slide up her thighs to cup her crotch.

Her moans mingle with his in the largish room as she sits back to look into his eyes. The girl's breath comes quickly as she starts to stroke his length eagerly, her lips curling into a pleased smile. How she missed holding him like this.

As she starts to pleasure him, Hiccup's fingers part her lips and find her opening, slowly stroking her tender flesh, quickly becoming moist with her fluids. The girl gasps loudly as her eyelids droop half closed while he slowly works one of his fingers inside of her. His lips curl into a wide smile as he watches her face contort in pleasure, but then he closes his eyes and groans huskily as she suddenly squeezes his length firmly, stroking him more vigorously.

Looking back at her again, he sees her smirking triumphantly at him, but then he drives his finger all the way inside of her; until his hand is pressed against her tender mound. She cries out at the feel of his penetration, gripping his shoulder with her free hand as she struggles to keep stroking him with the other.
"Sshh," he admonishes her, leaning in to forcefully press his lips to hers. Astrid drinks in the kiss with an insatiable thirst, her tongue wrestling aggressively with his. Hiccup quickly breaks the kiss, then says against her lips in a chiding tone, "be quiet, Astrid..." The girl nods as she whimpers at the feeling of his finger sliding in and out of her as she grips his cock tightly, stroking his length with firm movements.

"Astrid," he asks her throatily, forcing himself to get the words out as she pleasures him, "what about the...mess I'll make?" As he asks the question, he continues to stroke his finger in and out of her, causing her to moan huskily and grip his shoulder firmly. She struggles to keep as quiet as she can, her hand upon his sex pausing, but only for a moment before she starts to stroke him again. Clearly, she's determined not to let him best her in this game.

Remembering his question, Astrid's other hand leaves his shoulder and goes to her belt pouch, where she pulls out another fresh white cloth, like she had the night she visited him in his room.

Smirking at the surprised look on his face, she says simply, "From here on out, I'm always prepared..." Hiccup meets her gaze with a wry grin as he chuckles, then grips her bare hip as he plunges a second finger inside of her.

The girl sucks in her breath sharply and closes her eyes as she again grips his shoulder tightly, saying huskily, "Oh Gods..." The struggle to keep quiet is driving her insane. Again her hand pauses upon his length, but she forces herself once more to focus, stroking his length firmly, moving faster with each stroke.

The boy groans at her hand stroking him, the excitement within him quickly rising as her hot breath spills over him. He moans happily at the pressure of her hand moving over his shaft, the feeling mingling in his mind with the feel of her warm, wet flesh enveloping his fingers. He smiles widely at the look of absolute bliss upon her face as she starts to lose herself in the feelings he gives her.

Astrid's body and mind are awash with the pleasure that her boyfriend's fingers deliver, and she finds herself struggling to keep moving her hand over his shaft. She forces herself to do it, though, imagining that's what's inside of her, plunging in and out. Suddenly she feels him rub his thumb against that tender nub between her lips and she can't help but cry out loudly.

Instantly Hiccup's lips cover hers to silence her, though she starts moaning loudly into his mouth, rocking her hips with the motion of his fingers inside of her, his thumb upon her clit. She kisses back forcefully as he caresses her sex so expertly, trembling as she squeezes his hardness in her hand. Inside her core she can feel the heat building, that wonderful feeling rising up in her again.

She hopes desperately that Hiccup is close too.

Suddenly Hiccup breaks the kiss and tells her in a husky voice, "look at me, Astrid."

His voice cuts through everything else and she opens her eyes instinctively, sucking in her breath as she finds herself staring into his lovely green eyes. She grips his shoulder tightly as she pumps his length with firm strokes, marveling at the look of pleasure she sees on his face. In her mind, she envisions that it's his hard length plunging inside of her as she stares into his gaze, and suddenly she feels the heat rising inside of her as she finds her release. She cries out as she starts to shake against him, her hand stroking him all the more furiously.

Hiccup stares back into her eyes as she starts to quiver upon his hand, the look of passion in her eyes overwhelming him. The feeling of her warm, wet flesh squeezing his fingers as she orgasms combines with the feeling of her hand frantically stroking his shaft. It's all too much and he feels his release rush upon him, and he starts to cry out with her.
He sees her hand with the cloth is upon his shoulder and he tries to hold it back, calling out in a broken voice, "Astrid…!"

She feels the waves of warmth crash over her body as they stare into each other's eyes as they climax together, then her name upon his lips cuts through everything. In a panic, she realizes he's cumming and quickly puts her other hand over his tip, wrapping the soft cloth around his head as she continues to pump furiously. She can see the relief on his face as he lets go.

She feels his length trembling in her grasp as she strokes him. Suddenly she can feel the cloth in her hand get very warm and very wet as Hiccup's shaft spurts against her grip. The sensation is amazing, and as she stares into his eyes while his face contorts with pleasure. She feels another wave of ecstasy crash over her as his thumb rubs her clit and his fingers continue to plunge inside of her, the sensations mixing deliciously with the feeling of his hot cum soaking the cloth she holds, her hand already getting sticky and wet.

Unable to resist, Astrid cries out loudly as she feels a second wave rip through her, so much so that Hiccup kisses her forcefully to cover her mouth. She screams against his lips as her body starts to thrash against him, her legs shaking violently as she squeezes his shaft in her hands.

Hiccup moans loudly as he cums violently into her hands, his whole body shaking with hers as he kisses her deeply, his tongue wrestling forcefully with hers. The gobs of hot fluid spurt out of him in a seemingly endless torrent as she strokes him, until at last it's all too much.

With his free hand he grips hers that pumps his shaft, stilling her motion as he breaks the kiss and presses his forehead against hers. Astrid savors the feeling of his hand pleasuring her pussy for another heavy breath or two before she finally whispers, "S-Stop…!" as the feeling becomes too much.

Her lover instantly stills his hand, but she's happy beyond measure when he leaves it there, just pressed up against her and inside of her. She shivers at his touch as the echoes of her ecstatic release course through her, and instinctively she squeezes his length with both her hands, smiling when he shivers from head to toe at her action.

Leaning in, she presses her lips firmly against his, hungrily and passionately kissing him. His tongue greets hers forcefully, and he wriggles his fingers inside of her just a little bit, sending a shiver down her spine as she strokes his lips with hers. The two kiss lovingly, their tongues entwining as they gently caress each other's tender sexes, moaning softly together.

Finally, Astrid breaks the kiss and presses her forehead against his. "Gods, Hiccup," she says huskily, her hot breath spilling over him. "Every time we do that, it's more amazing than the last…"

Her boyfriend starts to chuckle and she pulls back to look at him with a confused, irritated stare. He opens his eyes and looks into hers. "I know what you mean," he assures her, then adds with a wicked grin, "just imagine what it'll be like when I actually fuck you…"

Astrid feels an excited shiver race down her spine at his lusty words, and she's surprised when she has to close her eyes from the intensity of how the thought of it make her feel.

"Oh Gods," she can only answer.

The next thing she knows, he's kissing her again. She whimpers against his mouth, sucking on his tongue as it invades her, then forcing hers between his lips. The two kiss hotly for a short while, then reluctantly pull back, but only enough to look into each other's eyes again.
"I love you, Hiccup," Astrid breathes with a trembling voice, staring intently into his eyes.

"I love you too, Astrid," her lover answers her. The two smile from ear to ear, then rest their foreheads against each other. When Hiccup withdraws his hand from her sex, she whimpers pathetically, but then he wraps his arms about her shoulders, pulling her close.

With both hands, she uses the cloth to clean off his now soft length and her hands, then wraps her arms about him, nuzzling her face the crook of his neck. The lad sighs happily as she snuggles up against him, kissing her neck as he squeezes her tightly.

"How long should we give them?" Tuffnutt asks. The four teens sit together on the far side of the hanging bridge that connects the Dragon Training Arena to the rest of the island of Berk. The group had decided to give the other two teens the most amount of privacy, out of respect for their friends. Besides, none of them wanted to accidentally hear anything.

As it was with the distance they had, the four could have sworn they heard screams coming from the arena, but they quickly convinced each other that they were mistaken.

"Probably a little while longer," Ruffnutt answers her brother. "It's their last goodbye for almost two weeks, they deserve a little time."

"Uhm, guys," Fishlegs says nervously.

"Yeah, you're probably right," Tuffnutt tells his sister, blatantly ignoring the larger teen.

"Guys…?" Fishlegs says again a little more loudly, only for Snoutlout to talk over him.

"I'm sick of waiting," Snoutlout says. "I say they've had long enough, let's just go get them, already."

"GUYS!" Fishlegs barks, sick of being ignored.

"What?!!" They all three yell back at him, annoyed beyond measure at the other teen.

"Stoic is coming this way," he says with a worried voice, pointing across the chasm separating this stretch of the island from the other side across the water, where most of the buildings stood.

"Oh crap," the twins say together.

Astrid and Hiccup snuggle happily together in each other's arms, content beyond measure, and trying desperately to stave off the inevitable. With a sigh, the girl pulls back, but just enough to look at her boyfriend with a happy gaze.

"We should probably get ready to go," she says with some reluctance. The boy sighs, nodding at her.

"Yeah," he agrees, caressing her face with his hand and smiling. "The next twelve days are going to suck, but at least we had this…" His girlfriend smiles happily back at him as she leans into his hand, nuzzling the palm of his hand and kissing it.

"Mhmmm," she agrees, looking into her eyes with a contented sigh. She's about to say something else when suddenly they hear a loud knock at the doorway.

The young lovers look over at the entrance with panic in their eyes, suddenly both scrambling to cover themselves up.
"Don't come in here!" Astrid yells in a panicky voice as she jumps up off of him and yanks up her skirt and leggings.

"What is it?!" Hiccup asks with strained voice while he flips his breeches up and starts to tie them.

"Uhm," they hear Fishlegs say with a hesitant voice, clearly taken aback by the lovers' guilty reaction.

"Just tell them," they hear Ruffnutt's tell him from the other side of the door.

"Uh, Stoic is on his way…" Fishlegs goes on to say, causing Hiccup and Astrid to stare at the door in wide-eyed shock.

"Oh shit!" Astrid exclaims, looking at Hiccup with terror filled eyes. Her boyfriend reaches out his hand for her as he struggles to get up. She doesn't hesitate before grabbing it and pulling him up. Gripping his hand tightly as he braces himself with his crutch, she asks in a fearful voice, "what're we going to do?"

Hiccup's mind races frantically. "Maybe you could hide here, he's probably just looking for me," he reasons.

"So, can we come in there yet or are you two still naked or something?" they hear Ruffnutt ask in an irritated, yet urgent voice.

Glancing at each other in red-cheeked embarrassment, Hiccup and Astrid quickly make their way to the door of the pen.

Upon the first sight of them, Fishlegs gasps in shock and covers his eyes, even though both of them are completely dressed. Rolling her eyes, Astrid tells him with a weary voice, "you can look, Fishlegs, we're not naked or anything…"

"Oh," the large boy says with considerable relief, looking at his friends with a goofy smile.

"Okay here's the deal," Ruffnutt says before anyone else can say anything. "We sent Snoutlout to stall, while Fishlegs and I come and get you." She watches the young couple intently as she explains her plan, "Astrid, you're coming with me and Tuffnutt on Barf and Belch." The other girl furrows her brow slightly as the twin turns to Hiccup and says, "You'll go with Fishlegs and meet up with Stoic."

"What if my Dad sees Astrid as you guys fly off?" the smaller boy asks, looking deeply concerned.

"The longer we argue about this, the closer Stoic's going to get," she says. "I don't know how long Snoutlout can hold him off…"

"Good point," Hiccup says with a sigh. He turns to Astrid, "Guess this is it," he says, adding, "Again…"

She sighing she nods at him. "Yeah, but this time this is really it," she says.

She's about to say something else when Ruffnutt interrupts, "Enough, we gotta go!"

The young couple frown and blush at her point, then Astrid suddenly grabs Hiccup and kisses him passionately. The boy wraps his one arm about her, pulling her to him as he meets her lips with his, moaning as their tongues entwine.
"I love you," Astrid whispers against his lips.

"I love you too," Hiccup answers.

Suddenly Astrid pulls herself away from him and dashes off, quickly followed by Ruffnutt. Hiccup sighs heavily but doesn't say anything, watching the girls dash out of the stadium and up the ramp to the higher level. Fishlegs looks on sadly and quietly, having no idea what to say.

The two boys look on for a few moments before they see the green streak of the Ziffleback as it takes off. Hiccup smiles as he sees Astrid holding on behind Ruffnutt while looking back at him. Then, they disappear as the dragon wheels around behind the massive rock wall that shelters the stadium from the sea.

The two are silent for a moment before Fishlegs finds his voice.

"Sorry about today, Hiccup," he says simply, unsure of what else to say.

The smaller lad looks over at him and smiles. "Don't apologize," he tells the other. "You guys did this to help me and Astrid," he says. "She and I got some time together, and with any luck, my Dad didn't see her leave just now…" The larger boy smiles at his friend's words.

"Let's go see my Dad."

Deep in thought, Stoic makes his way from the last buildings of the village to the start of the path that leads to the Dragon Training Arena. He struggles with how he'll confront Hiccup about his mood swings. The man has always found conversations like these awkward and difficult, and now that the topic was girls, it was even more so.

Maybe he could just give Hiccup a stern talking to and not worry about all the touchy feely stuff. Just like in the old days.

That'd certainly be easier, but he's not sure he wants to do that now. Ever since their confrontation with the Red Death, he and his son have come a long way in building a better relationship. He's not sure he wants to jeopardize that just because he finds these talks difficult.

The chief frowns as he looks up and sees Snoutlout running towards him from the stadium. Gobber had mentioned Tuffnutt and Barf and Belch, but he hadn't said anything about the Jorgenson boy.

"Hello, Snoutlout!" He greets the other as he gets close. He watches as the lad as he stops in front of him, a little out of breath. "What're you doing here?" he asks.

Snoutlout looks shocked and nervous at the question. "Uh…nothing!" He says hastily.

Stoic furrows his brow at the boy's reaction. "Oh. I just assumed you were helping Hiccup and Tuffnutt with Barf and Belch," he says with a slightly confused voice.

Hesitating for a moment, Snoutlout suddenly blurts out, "Oh, yeah! I mean, of course that's what I was doing!" He smiles widely, attempting to appear nonchalant about the whole thing.

Stoic regards the boy with a measure of suspicion, wondering why he's acting so strangely. "Well, was Hiccup able to figure out what was wrong?"

"Uhm," he hesitates in answer. "Yeah, he was!"

"Well that's good," the large man replies, still trying to figure out what's wrong with Snoutlout. "So
what was the problem?"

"Uhhh…" Snoutlout furrows his brow as he tries to think of an answer to satisfy the chief. "I, uh…I dunno!" he answers a little too emphatically. "I mean, Hiccup never tells me anything about that kinda stuff," he says with a shrug. "You know how he is with Dragons, chief…" the boy grins conspiratorially.

Looking at Snoutlout askance, the man hesitates before answering. "Well then, I should just go and ask Hiccup myself," he says, then walks around the lad with his typical large strides to make his way to the arena.

Snoutlout hesitates, stunned by the big man walks starts on his way again. "Uh, wait not yet!" he suddenly says after he regains his wits, scrambling to move in front of Stoic again, who stops.

Furrowing his brow at the lad, Stoic looks down at him. "What is it?" he asks in an irritated voice.

"Uh," Snoutlout says, having absolutely no idea what he'll say to stall the big man. "I, uh…" he looks down as he desperately tries to think of something.

Suddenly Stoic's gaze is drawn away from the boy by the sight of the Ziffleback suddenly flying away from the arena.

"Well, it looks like Barf and Belch are better" he says, drawing Snoutlout's attention back up.

Seeing the chief is looking off into the distance, he turns and sees the large green dragon as it disappears. The boy frowns slightly as he catches a glimpse of Astrid sitting behind Ruffnut. Looking over at Stoic, he wonders if the large man saw the same thing.

If he did, he gives no indication of it. The boy breathes a quiet sigh of relief, when the chief looks back at him. "Now then, Snoutlout," Stoic begins, then asks, "what was it you were going t'ask me?"

The boy smiles, relaxing as he realizes he doesn't need to stall anymore. "You know what, chief?" he asks rhetorically, "I forgot, and it doesn't matter."

The large man furrows his brow in amused confusion at the son of his friend, then shrugs. "Well then," he says, "I'll jest go and see Hiccup, then."

Just then, Hiccup and Fishlegs walk up out of the stadium and start making their way towards the chief and Snoutlout. Looking over, the Jorgenson boy says with a smile, "No need, Mr Haddock, he's coming to you!"

Glancing down at the lad with an irritated gaze, Stoic answers, "yes, I can see that, Snoutlout. Thank you"

The boy beams at the chief, answering exuberantly, "you're welcome!"

Stoic rolls his eyes and walks around him, making his way to meet Hiccup. "Hello there, son!" he greets his son with a hearty shout, while the two are still a fair ways apart.

"Hiya, Dad," his son answers as he finishes crossing the bridge and makes his way towards the large man. "What brings you out here?" he asks pleasantly, though with a touch of nervousness.

Had his father seen Astrid as she made her escape with the twins?

"Ah, I just thought we could have some lunch together," the man answers with a smile, intent on not
tipping his hand as to why.

"Oh," Hiccup starts to answer, pausing in surprise. "Yeah, sure," he says with a smile. "You ready now?" he asks.

Nodding, the chief turns to go. "Aye. Let's head over to th'Mead Hall," he answers. Hiccup walks off with him, leaving Fishlegs and Snoutlout standing together, watching father and son walk off.

Leaning towards the other boy, Fishlegs asks quietly, "Do you think Stoic saw Astrid flying off with the twins?"

Frowning and glancing over at the other teen, Snoutlout barks back. "Who cares?" He then walks off, leaving a confused Fishlegs standing there for a few moments before he too walks back towards Berk.
Astrid holds onto Ruffnutt as the Ziffleback leaps into the air and soars away. The girl looks back, catching sight of her boyfriend standing in the ring and watching her leave. She watches with frustration as he gets smaller and smaller until suddenly the dragon flies around the tall rock wall on the one side of the stadium and he disappears from her sight.

With a heavy sigh, she turns forward as they soar over Berk. Very quickly, the dragon reaches the far side of the settlement, the twins guiding it back to the ground. Astrid hops off immediately as the creature touches down. She feels a confused mixture of disappointment, anger, sadness, and excitement at having gotten to see her boyfriend again.

She hadn't been getting used to not seeing him, but each day without him had been getting just a little easier. Now she dreads every moment ahead of her as the memories of the shaggy-haired boy and their very intimate time together are so fresh and crisp in her mind.

On the other hand, she and Hiccup had taken full advantage of their unexpected encounter, so she couldn't exactly be mad about that. She still tingles at the thought of it, and feels like a world of frustration had been lifted from her.

She's not sure how she'll get through the next twelve days, but at least it's not fourteen anymore.

"Hey, Astrid," she hears Ruffnutt from behind her. Turning to face her friend, she's surprised to see an abashed, apologetic look on the other girl's face.

"I'm really sorry that we messed up by getting you two together," the twin tells her, clearly feeling awkward at having to apologize. The other girl asked for forgiveness less than Astrid did, and it wasn't really a habit the bold warrior had. Astrid was often amazed at how much she had apologized to Hiccup since they started seeing each other.

Quickly coming to a decision about how she feels over all this, Astrid smiles warmly at her friend. "You don't need to apologize, Ruff," she tells her with a smile. "I'm actually really glad you did," she says, but then quickly adds when Ruff looks excited at her words, "just don't try and do it again, okay?"

The other girl chuckles and nods. "Yeah, we promise," she tells her friend, glancing over to her brother, who shrugs and nods. "We were just trying to help," she adds.

"I know," Astrid answers, "and I think you actually did." The other girl smiles even more, looking quite pleased with herself. "I don't think Stoic saw me as we got away, and I got to see Hiccup one more time before the Harvest's End Festival."

She smiles widely at her friend, saying with the deepest of sincerity, "Thank you, Ruff." After a moment's pause, she glances over at other twin and adds, "you too, Tuff. Thanks for helping out." The boy smiles at her words, nodding.

The twins smile at their friend and the three fall silent, none of them sure what to say next. Finally Ruffnutt speaks up. "It really sucks, though…that you can't see him until next Sunday…"

Astrid answers, "yeah, but it's not all that far away." The girl half wonders if she's trying to convince her friend, or herself. Shrugging, she points out, "it'll be totally worth it, if Stoic and my Mom can arrange our betrothal in the end."
She pauses, then adds with a sigh, "but yeah…the next week and a half are going to be torture for me."

Frowning, her friend says, "I wish we could help you guys some way."

Smiling gently, Astrid says, "Thanks, but I don't think there's anything you can do at this point."

Tuffnutt smiles and says, "well, after the way you and Hiccup tricked us this last time, I'm not sure I want to help anymore…” The playful lilt of his grin makes it clear he's not too serious.

Astrid smirks back at him. "Hey, like I said, it was no less than you deserved."

The twins chuckle, glancing at each other in amusement. "Yeah, you're right there," Ruffnutt answers.

"You really had us going," Tuffnutt adds. The girls grin as they look at him. "I mean, we all kinda don't get how you could be interested in Hiccup." He pauses as Astrid lifts an eyebrow and he hastily adds, "I mean, don't get me wrong! We're happy for you and think it's great, but…” He pauses, collecting his thoughts, "I mean, he's just so…different. He's such a geek, always coming up with crazy ideas, always reading stuff or writing in that book of his…”

The twin's voice falls off at his last words. Furrowing his brow with a thoughtful expression, he looks away from the two girls, who glance at each other with a mix of confusion and concern.

"What is it, Tuff?" Astrid asks after a few moments of silence. To the surprise of Atrid and Ruffnutt both, Tuffnutt looks up at both of them with a wicked smile.

"Astrid," he says, "I know how we can help you and Hiccup again…”

Hiccup sits down with his father in the Mead Hall. As always, the boy can't help but notice the difference between their two plates. Hiccup has a roasted turkey leg, half a loaf of bread, and a wedge of cheese.

His father, by contrast, has two whole roasted chickens, two loaves of bread, and a small wheel of cheese.

The contrast never ceases to amaze and annoy Hiccup, reminding him as ever how small and scrawny he is when compared to the rest of the tribe. Although he has turned that into his greatest asset with everything that happened, the old insecurities still haunt him.

Of course, a sure remedy to his insecurities is to push them out of his mind with something worse. Like one of those awkward conversations with his father.

By the look on his Dad's face, the boy can tell that's what's about to happen.

The large man hesitates as he stares at his plate, as if he's trying to choose his words. Hiccup waits expectantly, getting increasingly nervous with the silence. Stoic glances up at his son and the two make eye contact for the space of a few heartbeats. The large man then looks down, tears a chicken leg off of one of the birds, and starts to eat it.

Rolling his eyes and sighing, Hiccup says, "Okay, Dad…what is it?"

The large man looks up at his son anxiously, still in mid-bite, his mouth affixed to the chicken leg he has in his hands. Furrowing brow, the man tears the meat off of the bone and starts to chew on it,
asking in response, "What do you mean, son?"

Hiccup smiles beatifically, "as much as I like having lunch with you, there's obviously something you want to talk to me about." Stoic frowns a little, which only serves to confirm Hiccup's suspicions. "How about we just get that out of the way, so we can enjoy the rest of our lunch together?"

Stoic narrows his gaze as he looks at his son, suddenly finding himself idly wondering when his boy grew up.

Smirking at the young lad, the chief nods. "Aye, well said, son. Better to get this done, and quickly too." He's quite relieved that his son wants to speak frankly about the matter at hand.

Hiccup smiles back at his father, feeling very satisfied with himself, when suddenly his father blurts out, "Son, yer driving e'eryone nuts with how surly y'are because of not bein' able t'see Astrid. You need to get a grip an' stop bein' such an' insufferable little prick."

The boy's eyes grow wide at his father's words as he listens in shock.

That wasn't exactly what he had been expecting.

He's not sure what he had been expecting, but that sure wasn't it.

Reading his child's stunned expression, Stoic suddenly looks a little chagrined. Realizing that wasn't the most tactful way of delivering the message, he hastily adds, "because, ah…well, you know…we understand how hard it is for ya, but…ah well, e'en when life's tough, it's important you…uhm, face the challenge with grace an', ah…dignity…"

Clearing his throat, Stoic pauses, hoping that he managed to undo some of the damage from his too-hasty first attempt to explain the issue to Hiccup. The boy still stares at his father with wide eyes, his jaw hanging open while he feels far more uncomfortable than he had expected he would, even though he had no idea what his father was going to talk about.

"Well, ahm," he starts hesitantly, very unsure how to respond to his father's blunt answer and subsequent blathering.

As he thinks about it, what his father said suddenly sinks in. "So, uh…I've been acting…ah, grumpy?"

Grinning, his father relaxes as he sees his son start to consider his words seriously. "Son, you've been snapping at e'eryone fer th'last two days," he says. "It's really not what we've all come t'expect from you."

Blushing slightly as he's confronted with this, Hiccup rubs the back of his neck. "Gee, I…I hadn't really noticed…" he says absentmindedly, but then the arguments he had with Gobber in the last couple of days come to mind. Furrowing his brow as memories of other, similar circumstances pop into his mind, he smiles sheepishly and tells his father, "I guess I've had a lot on my mind, lately…"

Chuckling heartily, his father nods knowingly. "Aye, t'is understandable," he says, "but that's no excuse fer yer behavior," he tells his son in a stern, yet caring voice. "Gobber and I may well understand yer reasons well enough, but other's won't," he warns, adding, "Besides, as my son and heir, I expect better of ya. Th'tribe expects better…"

Sighing at the latest reminder of his status and future, Hiccup scowls as he turns his attention the plate of food before him. "Yeah, Dad," he says irritably, "I know." He picks up his turkey leg and is
about to take a bite when his father gently grips his wrist. Looking back up at the man across the table from him, the boy is surprised to see a gentle, compassionate look on his face.

"Son," he says quietly, "I know this isn't easy fer ya." He smiles slightly as he goes on, "but trust me, this'll all be over soon enough." The man pauses for a moment, then adds, "just remember what happens in less than two weeks…" Hiccup can't help but smile at his father's words.

"Yeah, I know, Dad," he tells him.

"Thanks," he says, at a loss for any other words.

The large man nods appreciatively, then the two start to eat in silence. It's a few minutes before they start talking again, but when they do, it's a pleasant conversation with smiles and laughter, about things other than Hiccup's girl troubles.

"You want to do what, now?" Halvar asks Thorsten, looking at the man with confusion and concern.

The two sit together in a dark corner of the Great Hall, each with a flagon of ale. This is not their first round, by far. The cold of the late night chills the room, and with the hall being nearly empty, the two have plenty of privacy.

Thorsten grins at his trusted friend, having expected this reaction to his new scheme. "I plan to approach Stoic and ask him to write up a contract for Astrid and Hiccup to marry," he explains with a devious grin, adding, "and I'll tell Astrid that she can see the boy whenever she wants."

Halvar looks at his life-long friend with a furrowed brow, wondering if the man has finally caved and decided to stop trying to become chief.

"Why?" he can only ask.

Astrid's father chuckles at the man's reaction. "Do you remember what I told you on Saturday?" he asks.

Nodding slowly, Halvar answers while his friend takes a long drink. "Of course…Astrid and Hiccup had snuck off Friday and spent the night together. When you found out early the next morning, you went looking for them."

Grinning, Thorsten finishes his pull from the large flagon and answers, "Aye…but I didn't catch them in th'act. If I'd'a done that," he says, his voice trailing off suggestively.

"You could have killed Hiccup then and there, the law would have been on your side," Halvar answers with a furrowed brow, pondering it.

Thorsten nods as his friend thinks the matter through, then smiles along with the other as he realizes the plan.

"You want a second chance to try kill the Haddock boy," Halvar says quietly.

Chuckling, Thorsten nods again. "Exactly," he says with a wicked smile. "Astrid hasn't gone near the runt since Saturday. She's been home or with her mother almost constantly."

He frowns slightly, "I'm betting that after the weekend, they wised up and decided to play it safe…"

Nodding, Halvar adds, "So, you want to lull them into being careless…"

With a smirk, Thorsten explains as his friend drinks, "It'll be easy. She's wanted to see him so badly
that she dared to defy me after I told her no." He pauses, then adds, "if I tell her she can see him, they won't be able to control themselves. They'll take it too far, and I'll catch them in the act…"

As he finishes his drink, Halvar nods. "Then you can put an end to th'boy, and lay claim to th'tribe."


Nodding thoughtfully, Halvar answers, "I like it. It's simple, clean." Thorsten smiles, taking another pull, when his friend furrows his brow thoughtfully. "What if you can't catch them?" he asks. "Stoic'll be expecting to sign a contract with you."

Thorsten shrugs. "I'll never actually sign the damned thing," he answers. "But I can draw out th'negotiations. The longer those two have, the more likely I'll get to put an end t'he boy."

Nodding, Halvar smiles grimly. "Aye," he says. "I think you're in the right of it. They won't be able to resist th'chance to be together."

Smirking, Thorsten answers, "Of course not. They're young and in love, and can't see sense. I'm sure I'll have more than one chance, and the more they take advantage and get away with it, the more careless they'll get." Halvar nods as his friend adds, "it'll be just a matter of time."

Grinning, Halvar replies, "You'll be chief before the Harvest End Festival, I wager."

With a devious smile, Thorsten answers, "Aye. It'll be about bloody time, too." He frowns, "I've waited nearly twenty years for another opportunity this good. I'll not let it slip by me again." He then adds, "once his boy is dead, Stoic will either break and become too weak to stop me, or he'll try and kill me, which is where you an'th' boys come in to help me take him down."

Halvar nods, smiling. "We'll be ready," he answers.

Nodding, Thorsten smiles grimly, "Good."

Raising his mug, Halvar says quietly, "To yer reign as chief! May it be longer and more prosperous than Stoic's!"

Chuckling, Thorsten hits his flagon against Halvar's. "Oh, it will be," he says. "It will be…"

Hiccup slams shut the door to the forge on his way out. Inside, Gobber glares at the closed portal with a measure of hostility. Since the lad had come in this morning, Hiccup was just as surly as he had been the previous day. Yesterday afternoon, after his lunch with Stoic, the boy had been better behaved.

Today, however, it was as if the father-son discussion had never even happened.

Sighing heavily, Gobber goes back to his work while praying to Thor that the youths' betrothal comes quickly, before the smith gives in to temptation and hurts the boy.

On the other side of the door, Hiccup glares at the unfinished wooden surface, seething inside. Everything had been bothering him today. Nothing went the way he should have when he was working on the saddles. Gobber was being completely unreasonable in how much he asked for, and the boy was even sure that the forge was just too hot today.

He was glad to be out of there. Now he just had to go home and suffer through his father.

Eleven more days. He only had to wait eleven more days.
His father damn well better keep up his side of the bargain.

The smith's apprentice hobbles off towards home, wallowing in his self pity and feeling generally miserable, when suddenly Tuffnutt walks swiftly up to him out of nowhere. Hiccup looks at the twin with a shocked expression, as he hadn't seen the other boy approach.

Before the smaller lad can get a word in edgewise, Tuffnutt suddenly presses something thin, flat, and flexible into Hiccup's free hand. The twin meets his gaze with a stern look as the smaller boy looks at him with a confused expression as he takes hold of what was just given to him.

"Don't read it here," the twin admonishes him in a low voice. "Go home first."

Without another word, the boy quickly walks off while looking about to see who's around, disappearing into the village as quickly as he arrived.

Stunned, Hiccup looks at where the other boy vanished in wonderment, then glances down to the thin object that had been forcibly pushed into his hand.

He finds himself holding a folded up piece of parchment that's sealed shut with a spot of wax.

The boy looks on in astonishment for a few moments before he remembers the twin's warning. Suddenly looking about anxiously, though he has no idea why he should be worried, Hiccup stuffs the paper into the inside pocket of his vest, slipping it in beside his book that he always carries with him.

He makes quick time back to his house, hobbling at a fast pace, no longer caring about having to face his father tonight. Instead, he spends the whole torturous trip home wondering what's written on the piece of parchment that he now carries.

To his amazement, Hiccup comes home to find the house cold, dark, and empty.

The boy quickly remembers that his father had told him that he'd be back late tonight, due to some commitment he had elsewhere in the village.

Hiccup is glad that he doesn't have to worry about feeding Toothless, as Stoic has taken that task on while he heals. Without a moment's hesitation, the boy quickly scurries up the stairs, anxious to get into his room and see exactly what it is that Tuffnutt had given him.

Upon reaching his room, he closes the door and hobbles over to the desk. Setting his crutch against the desk as he sits down, he then fumbles around in the dark until his fingers find the candle, flint and steel. Smiling in growing excitement, the boy strikes the flint a few times with the steel until he finally gets the wick to catch.

A soft, warm glow fills the room as the candle comes to life, casting its dim and flickering light across the room. Shadows dance upon the walls and over the desk as Hiccup sits back in his chair, pulling out the parchment from his pocket and looking at in the dim light.

He sees that it's folded into thirds, with the top and bottom overlapping, sealed together with candle wax. There is no sigil pressed into the wax, it's just a smooth drop of hardened wax. As he turns it over, the boy sees that the paper is blank on both sides.

Hesitating for a moment as he examines the outside one last time to make sure he didn't miss anything, Hiccup then carefully breaks the seal, grinning excitedly as he hears the wax pop. He gently unfolds the paper, eagerly looking at the inside to see the page is filled with writing.
Leaning forward in his chair as he spreads the page out on the table before him, he starts to read.

Dearest Hiccup, I wish I could take credit for this, but really, it was Tuffnutt's idea. Since we have to spend the next eleven days without seeing each other, he thought we could write to each other to help pass the time. He and Ruffnutt volunteered to take our letters back and forth, so that we can stay away from each other and keep our promise to my Mom and your Dad.

Hiccup smiles from ear to ear. Leaning forward eagerly, he keeps reading.

The twins also said that since they're the best at not getting caught, our letters will be safe. I don't think they're as good as they think they are, but I figured it was worth the chance. This way, we can still spend time together, even if it's at a distance.

He chuckles at her comment about the twins and their abilities to avoid being caught. As he takes in her comments about being together while apart, he starts to feel giddy and excited inside.

I don't know if you'll think this is smart or if you even want to do this, but I miss you so much that I wanted to try. I think about you every day, Hiccup. All day, and all night, too. You fill my dreams, where I see us doing things like we did on the island, in your room, and at Toothless' Cove. I imagine us doing even more. I dream about you slipping your stiff cock inside of me and pumping it in and out until we both scream together in joyous release. Then I hold you in my arms and kiss you until we both fall asleep.

Hiccup finds he has to adjust in his seat as he reads Astrid's words, his body suddenly reacting as expected to her steamy words, his breathing coming more quickly. Blushing in spite of being alone, the boy swallows heavily and keeps reading.

When I wake in the mornings, I'm so frustrated to find it was just a dream and I still have to wait to be with you. I love you so much that it hurts, Hiccup. There's nothing I want more than to be with you, to marry you and be your wife. The next eleven days aren't going to go fast enough. Once they're done, though, I'll be happy beyond words to finally be your betrothed.

Hiccup swallows heavily, his heart bursting in happiness as he reads on.

So, I guess I should finish this letter, I'm almost out of paper. I hope you like this idea and write me back, I really want to hear from you. I love you so very, very much, Hiccup. I can't wait until the Harvest's End Festival. There's nothing I want more than to hold you and kiss you again. Well, there may be a few things I want to do more than just that. All my love, Astrid

The boy sits back in his chair as he finishes reading, his heart pounding hard and fast. While nothing in Astrid's words was really news to him, it all still hits him hard, the emotions crashing over him like a tidal wave. He closes his eyes, squeezing tears out as he remembers Astrid's face, remembers how it felt to hold her in his arms and kiss her, remembers what it was like to be intimate with her.

The tears stream down his face as he smiles happily, hugging himself and sighing raggedly.

Opening and wiping his eyes, he reads the letter again, savoring every word. Then he reads it several more times, so much so that he nearly commits her message to memory.

Sighing happily, he sifts around the papers on his desk until he finds a blank one. Reaching for his charcoal pencil, he starts to scratch out his reply.
The light of the morning sun washes down on Berk, bathing the chilled village in its warming light. Squinting against the bright rays of the yellow disk slowly rising into the sky, Hiccup makes his way into the market square. In his pocket, he carries the letter he wrote to Astrid last night, in hopes of finding one of the twins so that they can take it to her today.

He wants his note delivered as soon as possible. The boy can only imagine his girlfriend's anxiety after sending her own letter. It was pretty clear from her message that she is unsure whether Hiccup would be interested in corresponding, so he wants to put her doubt to rest as quickly as possible.

As he hobbles into the open area on his crutch, the young apprentice finds he doesn't have to wait at all. His eyes quickly settle upon the twins, Snoutlout, and Fishlegs, all walking together through the open space, talking with each other as they go. He's about to call out to them when, as they walk along, suddenly Astrid comes into view among them. Hiccup halts in his tracks at the sight of the love of his life, his heart suddenly leaping with a bittersweet happiness. Unsure about what to do now, Hiccup resigns himself to having to find the twins later today. Just as he's about to turn to go, Astrid happens to glance his way. Her eyes fly wide open as she sees her secret boyfriend.

Unthinkingly she halts in her tracks, causing Fishlegs, who happened to be walking behind her, to nearly run into her. The larger teen yelps as he has to do a funny kind of spin to avoid bowling the girl over, but Astrid doesn't notice. The rest of the group stops at the commotion and looks to see what the problem is. They all look at Astrid, who gawks unblinkingly out into the marketplace. Upon seeing the wide-eyed stare she gives, the four quickly look to see what has captured her attention.

When they see Hiccup standing there, staring forlornly back at the blonde warrior with such an intense look of love and longing, they all smirk and share knowing glances with one another. From his vantage point, Hiccup can see the other teens start to talk with each other quietly. None of them directly address Astrid, but it's clear from how they look at her and him what the topic of their conversation is.

The boy doesn't really care, however. He's perfectly content to stand here and stare at Astrid. For her part, the girl seems just as content to watch him. The two share a sweet, happy smile as they just look at each other from across the way.

In the back of his mind, Hiccup realizes that this can't go on for much longer, there are people about and they'll start to talk. For right now, though, he just doesn't care.

Just then, as if on cue, Ruffnutt lightly touches Astrid's shoulder. The contact breaks the spell, causing Astrid to jump a little and blush as she realizes the show she just put on by ogling her secret boyfriend. Glancing over, she listens as Ruffnutt leans in and speaks. Hiccup watches his girlfriend hesitate for a moment, then nod with a slight smile while answering with a few words of her own. Ruffnutt grins at her friend's response, then says something briefly to the other teens. Her brother and Fishlegs both smile knowingly, while Snoutlout rolls his eyes and huffs a sigh, crossing his arms in irritation.

Furrowing his brow, Hiccup watches as Ruffnutt dashes off from the others, running in his direction.
He glances back over at the group in surprise, watching as Astrid's lips bloom into a wide smile filled with eager anticipation.

"Hi, Hiccup," the twin greets him with a grin as she finishes sprinting across the square to where he stands.

"Uh, Hi," Hiccup answers, looking confused. Ruffnutt only smirks at his reaction. Stepping closer to him, Ruffnutt looks around the square to see who else is around. A few vikings mill about, but otherwise it's just them and the others across the way.

"So, did you read the note Astrid sent you?" Ruffnutt asks eagerly in a quiet voice, grinning as she watches him intently.

Hiccup hesitates at her exuberant query, then looks across the square to see his girlfriend watching them with an eager expression. The boy smiles as he meets Astrid's gaze, nodding. Astrid's whole face lights up at his reaction, and she watches with a combination of excitement at his affirmation and frustration at not being able to hear him as he goes on to answer Ruffnutt, "I did. I'm happy beyond words that she sent it, and I have a letter for her."

As he speaks, he keeps his gaze fixed on Astrid, watching her intently as he reaches into his vest pocket to pull out his letter. The girl's eyes grow wide as she sees what he's got. She gets visibly more excited as he hands to Ruffnutt, biting her lip and gripping her hands together. Hiccup winks at his girlfriend, smiling from ear to ear as her expression softens while she just melts in side. Silently, she mouths three words to him, beaming happily as he answers with the same three words, also in silence.

Ruffnutt, who takes the letter from Hiccup with a wry grin, watches their exchange with a happy gaze and then looks about the square. Frowning, she notices Halvar standing in the doorway of one of the shops in the far corner of the square. The rough cut man watches them with an interested gaze.

She quickly grabs Hiccup by the shoulder and leans in, whispering, "Cool it! Thorsten's toady is over there…!"

Hiccup furrows his brow at her words, reluctantly turning away from Astrid to glance at the twin. She briefly meets his gaze, then nods towards the man. Frowning, Hiccup looks in that direction to see Halvar staring back at them, his dark eyes watching intently.

Pursing his lips in frustration, Hiccup looks back across the way to where Astrid and the other teens are. He sees that she's also watching at Halvar now, though she quickly looks back at him. The two look into each other's eyes with grim expressions, the joy of their shared moment now shattered.

With a sigh, he breaks away from her gaze to glance at Ruffnutt. "Better get back there," he tells her, glancing back at Astrid as he adds, "tell her I love her, and I can't wait for her reply."

The twin nods as she meets his gaze. "Will do," she answers while stuffing Hiccup's letter in her pocket. With a final smile to the boy, she turns and dashes back across the square to meet back up with her friends.

As their friend runs off, Hiccup looks back at Astrid to smile at her and mouth three words again to her. She smiles happily, doing the same. Hiccup grins from ear to ear and sighs happily before reluctantly turning and hobbling off.

Astrid frowns as she watches her boyfriend leave, but then glances over as Ruffnutt arrives, eagerly asking, "So what'd he say?" As she speaks, she holds out her hand for the letter.
Glancing back at Halvar, who is still watching them, Ruffnut makes no move to give it to her. "Not here, Astrid," she says, keeping her eyes on the man who furrows his brow at the twin's attention. "We should go…"

Astrid scowls in anger and disappointment, following the other girl's gaze to her father's friend. Her gaze darkens as she watches the man she hates nearly as much as her father.

Huffing a sigh, Astrid's shoulders slump as she realizes her friend is right. "Okay, let's go, then," she says, quietly walking off with the group to find somewhere more private to discuss things and get the letter Hiccup gave her.

After they leave the marketplace, the five make their way down a couple of streets before they stop. Turning to Ruffnutt, Astrid asks, "So? What'd he say?!

The twin grins at her friend and answers, "He said he read your letter, and that he had one for you."

After a moment's pause, Astrid asks insistently, "is that it?"

Chuckling, Ruffnutt answers with a teasing voice, "well, he also said he loves you…"

The three boys snicker at the girl's words, but stop suddenly when Astrid whips her head around to glare at them with a hostile gaze. The three watch her nervously as her glare makes it clear what the cost of any further mirth at her expense would be.

After a few moments of silence, Ruffnutt adds, "but that's it…there wasn't time for any more."

Frowning slightly, Astrid sighs and looks back at her friend, saying, "well, at least I have his letter…" With that, she holds out her hand, but the twin steps back.

"Nope," her friend says, shaking her head. "I'm going to hold onto it for safe keeping."

Frowning deeply, Astrid steps forward, holding out her hand further. "Come on, Ruff, it's mine."

Stepping back again, Ruffnutt explains, "Yeah, and I'll give it to you…after we've finished riding our dragons together."

Furrowing her brow, Astrid looks at her friend with a measure of confusion and frustration. "Why not now?" she asks with a tense voice.

Sighing and rolling her eyes, Ruffnutt answers, "because if I give you this letter now, we won't see you again all day. You won't ride dragons with us because you're going to want to read it now, probably several times, and then you'll want to write a response." She grins as Astrid start to fidget, blushing as her assessment hits home. With a smirk, she adds, "You'll probably even ask me or Tuffnutt to take it to Hiccup. The last thing you'll want to do is go dragon riding with us."

Astrid frowns uncomfortably and crosses her arms as she tries to find the words to protest her friend's assertion, even though she knows there's no use. She opens her mouth but Tuffnutt chimes in. "As much as I hate to say it, my sister's right," he says. Astrid glances at him as he adds, "you said you'd ride dragons together with us today. If you get that letter from Hiccup, we're not going to see you again." She frowns as he adds, "We get why you wouldn't spend time with us before, but with how things are now…"

Sighing heavily, Astrid interrupts him. "Okay, fine," she says, blushing all the more. She hates being this besotted with Hiccup, but she just can't help it. "We'll go dragon riding now, and Ruff can hold the letter until we're done." The others all smirk at her reaction, causing her to blush all the more.
"Don't worry Astrid," Ruffnutt says with a wry grin. "You'll have fun, the day'll be over before you know what happened."

Looking at her friend with a sullen glare, Astrid sighs from the tips of her toes. "Yeah, I guess," she says, still feeling thoroughly chagrined. She's half tempted to snatch the letter from Ruffnutt and run off, but decides it'd be better to spend the day with her friends.

Ruffnutt just laughs and puts her arm around Astrid's shoulders and starts to lead her away, the others following so they can all start their day of dragon riding.

Freja frowns as she stirs the stew that she's preparing for tonight's dinner. Lost in thought, she stares into the bubbling liquid, trying to figure out what her husband is up to now.

As usual, he had come home late last night from yet another round of drinking with Halvar. This time, however, something was different. Her husband had been in in an unusually good mood, particularly given how much his plans had been stymied this past week. From Astrid's rebellious acts of spending time with Hiccup to his foiled plan to marry her to Snoutlout, the man had become even more dark and brooding than usual, so much so that Freja worried she couldn't wait until the Festival to make her move.

However, she decides that all she can do for now is wait. The Festival is the best time for her plan, and besides, Stoic has already put things in motion. She can't change it now. Frowning, she stirs the stewpot, a deep expression of worry settling upon her face.

The door to their house suddenly flies open, causing Freja to quickly look over in concern that it might be Thorsten. She quickly smiles as Astrid comes bounding in from outside, the late afternoon sun shining in from behind her.

The woman grins as she watches her daughter nearly sprint to her bed and exuberantly jump onto the feather mattress. Stretching out on her belly, the girl pulls something out from a pocket in her skirt and with a wide smile looks at it in the light that streams in from the open window by her bed.

Furrowing her brow as she grins at the excitement her daughter showed, Freja says, "Good afternoon, Astrid…"

Jumping a little at the sound of her voice, Astrid turns back to look at her mother with a surprised expression. Freja smiles warmly as she wonders if her daughter had even seen that she was there.

"Oh, uh…hi, Mom…!" Astrid says, blushing a little and smiling sheepishly as she realizes she hadn't even said hello to her mother yet. Truth be told, the girl hadn't even noticed her as she charged into the room.

"How was your day?" her mother asks pleasantly, watching her with a curious gaze. The girl still holds the object pulled from her pocket tightly in her hands in a way that shows how precious it is to her, and it's clear from how she squirms that the last thing she wants to be doing right now is having a conversation with her mother.

"Did you have fun dragon riding with your friends?" Freja asks further. Whatever has her daughter so excited, it could wait a few minutes while they had a civil conversation.

"Yeah, it was good," Astrid answers quickly with a tight smile, turning away to look at what she has in her hands.

Frowning slightly at her daughter's distraction, Freja asks, "what've you got there, sweetie?"
Stifling a frustrated sigh, Astrid hesitates for a moment before answering, "it's a letter from Hiccup."

"Oh, that's lovely!" she says. "So he decided to write you back?"

Sighing from the bottom of her toes, Astrid puts her forehead down on the mattress in exasperation. "Yes, Mom, he did," she answers in a frustrated tone, "and if you don't mind, I'd really like to read it, please…!"

"Oh," her mother answers, a little put off by her daughter's tone. "I'm sorry, I just haven't seen you all day and thought we could chat a bit before your father comes home…"

Groaning as the guilt washes over her, Astrid lifts her head and looks over at her mother to say in a pleading tone, "I know Mom, and I'm sorry I snapped at you, but I've been waiting all day to read his note." Her mother is about to say something when she goes on, "I'd like to read it before Dad gets home, since I'll have to hide it then…"

Freja frowns a little, disappointed in herself for not having realized that before. "Of course, dearest," she says apologetically. "Please, go ahead and read it, we'll talk later…"

Smiling happily at her mother, Astrid meets her gaze as she says sincerely, "thanks, Mom." With that, she turns back again to look at the letter she holds in her hands.

The parchment is as plain on the outside as the note she had sent Hiccup, and the glob of candle wax sealing it is as unadorned. Her hands tremble excitedly as she pops the seal and opens the two-fold letter, feeling butterflies in her stomach as she starts to read her boyfriend's writing.

My dearest Astrid, You have no idea how excited I was to find out that you had decided to write me a letter.

Astrid smirks wryly at the irony as she reads those words, chuckling a little to herself. She reads on.

Of course I want to write letters with you. I think it's an amazing way for us to be together while we're apart and waiting for the Festival. I am so glad you decided to try it.

Astrid smiles, squirming excitedly in her bed as she keeps reading.

It made me so very happy to read your letter. It really is the next next best thing to being with you. Of course, there's nothing as good as holding you in my arms, or as sweet as pressing my lips to yours, or as wonderful as touching my lips your pussy, caressing your warm, tender, wet flesh with my tongue until you cum against my face.

As she reads, Astrid's heart starts to beat faster while her breath becomes heavier. Her cheeks flush and she smiles demurely. In her crotch, she feels a familiar warmth and tingling start to grow as her boyfriend's words summon up those deliciously vivid memories of all the times they were intimate this past week, including yesterday, which is still so wonderfully fresh in her mind. She shifts in her bed, rubbing her legs together ever so slightly to try and relieve some of the pressure as she feels a burning frustration well up inside of her.

Closing her eyes for a moment to enjoy the feelings as they wash over her, she draws in a deep, calming breath and resumes reading.

I hope that excited and frustrated you as much as your writing did to me. If so, it'll only be just deserts for you. But, don't worry - I'll be doing the real thing to you the very next chance I get.

Astrid smirks wryly at his words, pursing her lips as she already starts to ponder how she'll get him
back. A tiny voice in the back of her mind warns her this little game could get quickly out of hand, but she decides to ignore that for now while she plays a few rounds with her boyfriend.

Smiling, she reads on eagerly.

*My daily visits to the healer are getting better each time. Gothi tells me that my leg is healing very well. I'm going to ask her tomorrow when I can start wearing my peg leg again. I hope it's soon, Toothless is becoming insufferable without his daily flights. I usually go flying with him more than once per day, so this past week has been particularly hard on him.*

As she reads, Astrid smiles slightly, excited that Hiccup is getting well enough that he can probably go without his crutch soon.

*I think about you every day, Astrid, and there isn't a night that goes by without me dreaming of you. Finding out that you love me has made me happier than I could have ever imagined. It thrills me to think about all that we've shared together, and what still lies ahead for us in the years to come.*

Astrid smiles from ear to ear as she finds herself tearing up just a little at his words. Her heart swells in her chest as she reads his final words.

*I love you more than I can say with words. I wait eagerly for when we will be betrothed, but until then, I wait anxiously for your next letter. Write me back soon, my beloved. All my love, Hiccup*

With a heartfelt sigh, Astrid rolls onto her back and holds the letter to her chest, closing her eyes as tears roll freely now and she smiles from ear to ear.

"That good, hm?" Freja asks, smiling as the sight of her daughter's reaction to reading the letter.

Chuckling, Astrid smirks at her mother's words. "Gods, you have no idea, Mom," she says happily as she forces herself to stop crying, wiping the tears from her eyes with her palm. "He makes me happier than I thought I could ever be."

The woman smiles sweetly at her daughter's answer, taking solace in her daughter's joy. Still, she feels the need to warn her. "I'm glad for that, child, but you need to be careful by writing with him."

The girl sighs as her mother repeats her warning from yesterday. "By putting your thoughts and feelings for each other down on paper, you're taking a huge risk. What if your father finds your letters?"

Astrid frowns as she struggles with the wisdom of her mother's words and the need she has to be with Hiccup, however she can manage it. She's about to answer when a shadow falls over them as a large man steps into the light streaming in from the door Astrid left open. Mother and daughter look over in concern as they hear Thorsten speak, "Good afternoon, my darling family…"

Astrid's heart jumps into her throat as she panics, suddenly rolling over onto her belly to hide the letter she has pressed to her chest.

"Good afternoon, husband," Freja greets the man pleasantly, smiling at him as he looks over at her.

Astrid's heart pounds in her chest as with one hand she slowly starts to move the letter from under her. "I'm glad for that, child, but you need to be careful by writing with him." The girl sighs as her mother repeats her warning from yesterday. "By putting your thoughts and feelings for each other down on paper, you're taking a huge risk. What if your father finds your letters?"

Astrid's heart jumps into her throat as she panics, suddenly rolling over onto her belly to hide the letter she has pressed to her chest.

"Good afternoon, husband," Freja greets the man pleasantly, smiling at him as he looks over at her.

Astrid's heart pounds in her chest as with one hand she slowly starts to move the letter from under her. "We're having beef stew tonight, I hope that's to your liking…" Once the letter is free, Astrid folds it up as quietly as she can and gently pushes it under her mattress.

Thorsten is quiet for a moment, watching his wife then casting his gaze to his daughter. Astrid's blood runs cold with fear as she finishes stuffing the letter between her mattress and the bed frame, while watching her father. With the light to his back, she can't see his face and has no idea whether he might have realized what she was doing.
Stepping inside, the man turns his attention back to Freja. "That sounds very good," he says with a smile in his voice. Sitting up on her bed, Astrid furrows her brow slightly at the unusually good mood her father seems to be in. He almost never came home happy.

For that matter, he was almost never happy at all.

As he steps out of the sunlight and walks into the one room house, his face becomes visible. Astrid can see a smirk upon his lips as he makes his way towards them. The girl watches with confusion as he strides in and looks from her mother to her and back. He stands near Freja as he smiles all the more, making both mother and daughter nervous at what he intends.

"Well I have good news for you, Astrid," he says suddenly, watching her intently. The girl furrows her brow in surprise as she sits up more straight, her heart pounding anxiously in her chest at what could be coming. Freja watches her husband with a guarded gaze, worried at what scheme he's hatched now.

The man flicks a glance at his wife and almost smirks at her expression. Looking back to his daughter, he tells her, "I've decided to ask Stoic to write up a contract for you and Hiccup. You can see the boy now, whenever you want."

After a long day at the forge, Hiccup wearily makes his way up the hill to his home. His whole body aches and he wonders if this is Gobber's punishment for the surly attitude he's been sporting for the past few days.

Just after he'd arrived, the smith gave Hiccup a long series of tasks to do, each one increasingly arduous and tiring. It wasn't long before the apprentice realized what this was all about.

If he was going to be difficult, Gobber would simply exhaust him to the point where he wasn't a problem anymore.

It was an effective strategy. The boy was too busy and too tired to say or do much of anything, let alone be troublesome.

Not that he wanted to be a problem, but with his time apart from Astrid, Hiccup finds everything bothers him more than it should.

With a heavy sigh, Hiccup opens the door to his house and hobbles inside. A He's greeted by the warm glow of the fireplace and his father, who smiles.

"Evenin' son," he greets the boy as he closes the door and smiles back at him. The chief is tending to a large hunk of meat that's suspended over the fire on a spit. He gives it a turn and drops of juice fall into the fire, sizzling loudly and sending up strands of smoke that then curl over the roasting food.

"Hey, Dad," he greets him with a tired voice. The smells from Stoic's cooking bring a smile to his face as he comes in and sits with him by the fire. "So what's cooking?" he asks his father pleasantly.

Grinning from ear to ear at his son's question, the man answers, "Just some deer I killed. Went huntin' wit'Vali this mornin'."

Nodding, Hiccup looks at their dinner appreciatively. "It looks and smells great, Dad," he says with a smile.

Stoic is about to answer when Toothless walks up on the other side of Hiccup and drops something from his mouth that lands on the floor with a loud clunk. The boy turns to look and smiles as he sees
his best friend looking at him eagerly. "Hey there, buddy," he says happily as he starts to scratch the
dragon under his chin.

The ebony lizard grunts appreciatively as Hiccup looks down and sees what he dropped. He sighs as
he sees his own fake leg. "Sorry, Toothless," he tells the dragon as he picks up the leg, grimacing at
the slobber on the item while putting it on the bench next to him. "I'm not well enough to wear this
again yet." The dragon warbles as if in confusion at the boy's words. "In a few more days, I
promise," he tells the disgruntled lizard.

The dragon grumbles in dissatisfaction then nudges with his head under the boy's shoulder.
Laughing slightly, the lad scratches the top of the dragon's head and says further, "Sorry, bud, there's
nothing I can do."

Grumbling again, the dragon walks off to the corner where his bed is and curls up, glaring at the boy
for a few moments before closing his eyes.

Sighing, Hiccup glances over at his father who chuckles heartily. "Looks like yer not in Toothless'
good graces t'night, son," he says with a lighthearted tone as he turns the meat again.

Grinning at his father, the boy sighs as he answers, "Yeah…I can't blame him, though. It's been five
days since he's last flown." Glancing back at the dragon, he adds, "the poor guy's probably going
stir-crazy right now."

His father laughs again as he nods, glancing over at the dragon then back at ther dinner again. "Well,
I imagine you two should be back up in th'air by th'end o' the weekend," he tells his son, who nods.

"Yeah, that's what Gothi was telling me," he answers.

His father lifts an eyebrow as he asks, "So how're you holdin' up, son?" he asks. "It's been se'eral
days since ya seen Astrid." Hiccup gets nervous at the mention of his girlfriend, suddenly feeling
guilty for having spent time with her the other day, even though it wasn't their fault. "I imagine yer
anxious fer th'two weeks ta be done?"

Glancing up at his father with a nervous smirk, Hiccup nods. "Yeah," he readily admits, hoping the
guilt isn't apparent on his face. "The next ten days aren't going to go fast enough," he says with a
sigh.

"Hang in there, son," Stoic tells him with a smile, which his boy forces himself to return. Both turn
their attention back to the meat that the chief turns over the fire now and again.

The two are silent for a few moments, the only sound being the crackling of the fire, the sizzling of
their dinner, and the squeaking of spit as it's turned.

"Dad," the boy finally says, continuing to stare into the fire as Stoic glances at him, "why is Astrid's
father like this?"

The large man sighs and hesitates to answer for a moment. "Because he's a selfish, shallow man who
only thinks o'himself," he answers. Hiccup glances up at him as he adds, "he's always put himself
ahead o' e'eryone else, and he don' care who he hurts t'get what he wants."

Furrowing his brow in consternation, Hiccup asks, "but even his own daughter?"

Stoic grimaces at the question, hesitating before he answers. He opens his mouth to say something,
then hesitates. Hiccup furrows his brow at this, but then Stoic goes on to say, "Aye. E'en his own
daughter."
Hiccup cannot help but think about what he learned from Astrid in Toothless' cove. The fact that her father hits her has been haunting him for days, particularly when he's alone and has nothing to distract him. He frowns as he looks into the flames, his stomach twisting as he wrestles with worry for her.

Watching his son's face with concern, Stoic frowns slightly. He can see that something is troubling the boy, and it's more than just the fact that he can't see Astrid because of Thorsten. Gently and quietly, he asks his boy, "are you alright, son?" Hiccup hesitates for a moment before he glances up at his father. "Is there somethin' you need t'talk about?"

Hiccup hesitates, pursing his lips as he struggles. He wants nothing more than to tell his father about what he knows, but the promise Astrid made him swear keeps him from blurting it out. His father watches him intently as he struggles inside, frowning slightly as the boy looks away into the fire.

"No, Dad," he says sullenly. "I'm just frustrated about not being able to see Astrid, that's all," he lies with a shrug, his gut twisting still with the conflict within.

Frowning as he watches his son with concern, the large man considers him for a moment. "Well, if there e'er is something ya need t'talk about," he tells his boy, pausing when the lad looks up at him again, "don' be afraid ta tell me," he says. Smiling at Hiccup, he adds, "I'm here if ya need someone t'talk to."

The boy smiles at his father, pausing for a moment before answering, "Thanks, Dad." Stoic smiles back at him, nodding once before looking back at their dinner.

"Well, I think this is about done," he says, picking up the stick and walking over to the table, sliding the meat off and onto a waiting metal platter. "Let's eat!" he says with a wide smile.

Hiccup smiles back as he pushes himself up with his crutch and hobbles over to the table to join his father. "Definitely," he says happily. "It smells great."

"What?!" Astrid asks, not believing her ears. She couldn't have heard what she thought she had. Smiling sublimely, Thorsten tells her again, "I said, I'll be asking Stoic to write up a contract for you to marry Hiccup." He pauses for his words to sink in, then repeats further, "and you can see Hiccup whenever you want."

Astrid's jaw hangs open as she looks at her father in wonder. She can't find the words as the news numbs her mind. As she stares at her father, who merely grins at her as he watches her reaction, the girl misses how her mother looks at the burly man. Freja's brow is furrowed with worry while she ponders this change he's made. She doesn't for one moment believe that he's doing this out of the goodness of his heart, but yet she can't yet see what his angle is.

Jumping up off her bed in excitement, Astrid can only say, "Thank you!" She runs past her parents towards the door, intending to go see Hiccup right now.

"ASTRID!" her mother calls to her as the girl reaches the door.

Reluctantly stopping, Astrid groans inside as her mother's words keeps her from leaving. "What?" she asks with a pained voice, looking back at Freja with a frustrated gaze.

Her mother hesitates for a moment, then explains, "you can't go to see Hiccup yet, we haven't had our dinner."
Astrid looks at her mother incredulously. The woman had never before insisted that she eat dinner at home. Although she regularly did eat with the family, Astrid often ate in the Great Hall or with her friends out and about.

"I'll have dinner with Hiccup, Mom," she says dismissively, turning to go.

"Astrid," her mother calls again, a measure of anxiety in her voice. "You said that you would help me with the sewing tonight."

The girl looks back at her mother in disbelief. Why would she be doing this, when her father suddenly allowed her to have what she wanted most in this world?

"Mom, we can do that tomorrow night," she says, starting getting angry now. She glances over at her father, who has been watching his wife and daughter with a thoughtful gaze. "I want to go see Hiccup tonight, and Dad says it's okay…"

Freja flicks her glance up to her husband, who looks back at her with the slightest of smirks. The woman has no idea what he's up to, but there's one thing she's certain of - he does not want Astrid to marry Hiccup. That would end any claim he might make to the title of chief.

He's up to something, she just doesn't know what.

Looking back at Astrid, she explains calmly, "yes, I know, dearest, and I know you're excited. But you already told me you would help me with the sewing tonight." Flabbergasted, the girl looks at her and scowls, wondering why her mother would be so insensitive. "I'm asking you to please do what you said you would do."

"Mom," Astrid begins, when her father cuts her off.

"No, your mother's right, Astrid," he says evenly, glancing down at Freja, who looks up at him in shock as he supports her. He looks back over at his daughter, and explains, "You need make good on your commitment. You can see Hiccup tomorrow."

The girl looks at her father with a shocked expression. "But, Dad…!"

Frowning at the girl, Thorsten answers sternly, "that's enough, child!" Astrid shrinks a little as he becomes his more familiar, intimidating self. Seeming to realize the effect his demeanor is having, he says more gently, "come inside and join us for dinner. Afterwards, you can help your mother. Tomorrow, you can go see Hiccup as much as you want."

Astrid hesitates, looking from one parent to another. Freja watches her anxiously, while Thorsten stares at her sternly.

Frowning darkly, the girl steps back inside, muttering dejectedly, "fine." As she walks past her parents, she casts a scathing glance at her mother, who flinches visibly. Unbeknownst to both women, her father sees the look their daughter gives his wife and smirks.

Astrid goes and lays down on her bed, facing the wall with her window. She just can't believe that her father just suddenly let her go see Hiccup, but her mother put a stop to it before she could even walk out the door. Inwardly, she curses her mother. The girl considers just running off to see Hiccup, but she realizes that she can wait until tomorrow. Her father gave his blessing, and she never told her mother that she'd do anything tomorrow, so the woman won't be able to stop her.

To console herself, she starts to reach for the letter from Hiccup to read. Her father said she could marry Hiccup, so clearly she doesn't need to hide it from him anymore.
As her hand nears the section of the mattress where she hid it, she hesitates. Something inside of her is screaming to not let Thorsten know about the letter. She glances over her shoulder to see the man watching her intently. Suddenly feeling a chill run down her spine, she furrows her brow as she looks back at him.

Thorsten only smiles as he makes eye contact with his daughter, then turns and goes to get a bottle of mead to have with dinner. Astrid frowns, watching him for a moment before turning back to look at the wall.

She decides that she won't let him know about the letter, but she will definitely go see Hiccup tomorrow.

With a sigh, she resigns herself to an evening with her family.

Tomorrow will not come fast enough.
Astrid snaps awake the next morning, sitting up suddenly in bed. Looking about, she sees the house empty and dark, except for streams of the early morning light filtering in through the shuttered windows on the other side of the room. Smiling from ear to ear, the girl hops out of bed and pulls her nightgown over her head, intending to get dressed as quickly as possible so she can go find Hiccup, wherever he is.

"You're up," she hears her mother say, causing her to jump a little. She holds her nightgown against the front of her naked body for the moment it takes her to recognize the voice. Looking over where she heard the voice, Astrid squints in the darkness, trying to find the woman. As best as she can tell, Freja is sitting on a chair in front of the main door to their house, blocking the way.

Astrid can guess what she's going to say.

"Good morning, mother," she answers coldly as she goes back to getting dressed. Folding up her nightgown, she lays it on the bed and starts to pull on her leggings as her mother speaks again.

"Astrid, we need to talk," the woman says in a serious and concerned voice.

"Mom, there's really nothing to talk about," she says indignantly as she pulls on her top. "Dad said I'm going to marry Hiccup, and that I can see him now. I'm going to go see him." Her tone is resolute as she grabs her skirt and starts to pull it on.

"No, you're not," Freja answers firmly in that tone she always uses when Astrid is petulant.

Laughing slightly as she adjusts her skirt, she replies, "Mom, it's over. Dad gave up, we won. I get to see Hiccup and I'm going to marry him. We don't need to sneak around anymore."

The silence that follows is oddly disturbing to the girl. She hesitates in getting dressed for the few moments that pass before her mother replies.

"Gods, child. Is that what you think happened last night?"

Astrid opens her mouth to reply, but the cold feeling that has started to build in the pit of her stomach steals her words away. Gritting her teeth, she forces herself to answer. "Well…I mean, yeah…you heard what Dad said…"

"Oh, Astrid," her mother laments, "if only it was that easy…"

Now the chill in her gut starts to grow, running up her spine. Trying to shrug it off, the girl sits down her bed and picks up one of her boots, tugging it on. "Well…why couldn't it be?" she asks while trying to hide the nervousness in her voice.

Another pause as she waits for her mother to answer and the frigid feeling inside of her drops by a few degrees. With her next few words, Freja causes Astrid to stop in the middle of putting on her other boot.

"Astrid, how long has your father been hitting us?"

The girl grips the leather footwear tightly at the question, swallowing with difficulty as she suddenly remembers the thing that she never allowed herself to think about when it wasn't happening. Closing her eyes, she struggles to answer as her throat dries up.
"I dunno," she rasps, "a few years, I guess?"

"Seven years," her mother answers firmly in a voice that forces its way into Astrid's mind, knocking through the walls that the girl has built up around her soul to protect herself from that part of her life. "He's been hitting you and I for seven years now," she repeats forcefully to drive the point home.

"So?" Astrid asks bitterly, putting on her other boot and standing. "When I marry Hiccup I'll finally get away from him…"

"Do you know why he hits us, Astrid?" her mother asks sharply, not allowing the girl her out. Sighing in frustration, she closes her eyes and grits her teeth, swallowing bitterly as she forces down the answer she feels compelled to give, that it's her fault. Instead, she struggles to say the reason her mother had repeated to her again and again for the last seven years. "Because he's weak and he only thinks of himself…"

"That's right," the woman says in a tender, comforting voice. "but do you know why those things make him hit us?" she presses further. "What makes the hate and anger well up in your father so much that he takes out his frustration on us?"

The question gives Astrid pause. This isn't a something she's thought about before, it was something they never discussed. "I…" she hesitates.

"I don't know," she confesses as her throat constricts.

"What does your father want more than anything in the word?" her mother asks further.

This the girl knows. "To be chief of the tribe, to get rid of Stoic," she says incredulously, trying to figure out where her mother was going with this.

"How long has he been trying?" Freja presses.

Frowning, the girl gives back the same answer her mother always told her. "Over twenty years," she says, "even before you two were married."

"That's right," her mother says. The silence that follows leaves Astrid even more uncomfortable.

"Do you think that after all that time, Thorsten is just going to give up on his ambition?" she asks pointedly.

"Well," Astrid begins, faltering. "I mean, I dunno…maybe."

"Oh, Astrid," her mother says. "The man has spent his whole life in pursuit of a goal that he'll likely never achieve and in his later years, he has turned his frustration on you and me, his daughter and wife." She pauses, allowing the words to sink in. "Do you think he'll just give up on that?" she asks, then adds, "do you think that man's pride would ever allow him to admit such a defeat to himself?"

Frowning in frustration, Astrid asks, "Mom, what does this have to do with me marrying Hiccup?"

Half laughing in disbelief at he daughter's question, Freja asks, "Child, who is Hiccup's father?!"

Scowling in the darkness, Astrid answers bitterly, "Stoic."

"If he marries you, his daughter, to the son of the chief," she says, speaking slowly for emphasis, "what would that do to any hope or claim he has to becoming chief of the Hooligan tribe?"
Astrid swallows bitterly. The chill feeling in the girl's gut returns as the truth in her mother's words hits home. "So..." she starts to ask, hesitating before she can continue, "why is he doing this?"

A pause, much longer than any before. The girl starts to shift nervously, and is about to say something when her mother answers plainly, "I don't know."

Sighing in exasperation, Astrid answers incredulously, "You don't know, and you expect me to stay away from Hiccup?!"

The woman gets up from the chair, walks swiftly over to Astrid, and grips her daughter by the shoulders. Now that she's closer, the girl can see that she's been crying. Inwardly, Astrid wonders if its because she's worried, or was Thorsten hitting her again? She furrows her brow with worry and is about to ask, when her mother speaks first.

"Astrid, there isn't anything Thorsten wouldn't do to become chief," she tells her daughter with a passionate voice. "Trust me, I know. I've seen what he's capable of..."

"But...what could he gain from this?" Astrid asks again, her voice small and confused as she looks up at her mother, the emotions twisting and turning inside of her.

Shaking her head slowly, she says reluctantly, "I don't know, but I know we can't trust him." She sighs heavily, pushing her daughter's bangs from her face as she looks at her with an pleading gaze. "What's more, I don't think he'll actually let you marry Hiccup."

Astrid looks at her mother in surprise as she goes on to say, "Please trust me, Astrid. He's doing this for his own reasons, not because you love the boy."

Astrid pauses for a few moments, then asks, "So...what should we do?"

Smiling in relief, Freja strokes her daughter's cheek. "We stick to the original plan," she says. Her daughter watches her intently. "Stay away from Hiccup. Wait until the Harvest's End Festival, and then you will be betrothed to him and your father will not be a problem anymore."

Frowning, Astrid asks, "How're you going to do that?"

Shaking her head, her mother answers, "you have to trust me on this, Astrid."

Astrid hesitates, looking down as she considers her mother's words. Freja holds her breath as she waits anxiously.

After a few moments, Astrid looks up and says in a defeated voice, "Okay, Mom. I'll do it." Her mother smiles widely, wrapping the girl up in her arms and holding her tightly. Astrid hugs her back as she sighs in frustration. "It's just really hard to stay away from him," she says in a small voice.

"I know, child," her mother says. "Just remember, it's only ten days away. That's not worth risking whatever your father has up his sleeve."

"Yeah," Astrid answers wearily, knowing full well how many days are left. "I know."

Pulling back to look at her daughter again, Freja smiles pleasantly. "Now, how about I braid your hair this morning, hm?" Astrid smiles slightly at this, then her mother adds, "afterwards, you can write another letter to Hiccup. That will make you feel better."

The girl smiles more, looking almost happy now. "Okay," she says before hugging her mother one more time. The two then open up all of the shutters to let in the light, and Astrid sits down for her
mother to brush and braid her hair. As the two talk about other things, Astrid ponders what she'll tell Hiccup about all of this when she writes her letter.

"Stoic!"

The chief visibly flinches at the sound of Thorsten calling his name. Glancing over his shoulder as he walks, he sees the man approaching him.

Stopping with a sigh, he turns to face the other. "What'd'ya want, Thorsten?" he asks with a weary voice.

Astrid's father grins at the look on Stoic's face. "Relax, Stoic. This will be something you want."

Lifting an eyebrow, the chief replies with a sarcastic tone, "Oh aye? Well I'll be th'judge o'that. Out with it. What is it this time?"

Chuckling as he pauses to savor the moment, Thorsten looks Stoic in the eye with a widening grin. Finally he answers with conviction, "I want you to write up a contract for Hiccup to marry Astrid."

The look on Stoic's face is more satisfying than Thorsten could have anticipated. The larger man stares back at him with wide eyed shock, furrowing his brow in disbelief. He quickly recovers, however, narrowing his gaze dangerously.

"I'm not about t'pay th'bride price you've asked for," he says dangerously, his hands curling up into fists as he stares hatefully at his rival.

To Stoic's surprise, Thorsten merely smiles magnanimously. "Oh, I won't ask that of you," he says with a pleasant tone. Again, Stoic looks at the man in shock, trying to absorb the news. "You just write up the contract with what you think will be a fair bride price, and we can negotiate from there."

The chief looks at the other man with a thoughtful gaze. He's silent for a few moments, before asking in a dangerous voice, "what're you playing at, Thorsten?"

Chuckling, he shakes his head. "Hard as it may be to believe, I'm not playing at anything."

Shrugging, he adds, "I've already told Astrid that I was going to ask this of you, and I've freed her to go see Hiccup whenever she wants." Stoic looks even more confused as he adds, "this is about the children now, enough of our petty squabbles.

Stoic looks at Thorsten with a disbelieving gaze, watching as the other man turns to go, saying, "so bring me the contract when you've drafted it, Stoic. We can go over it and start negotiating terms."

With that, the man walks off and leaves the chief there to look on in confusion.

Stoic can only wonder, what is Thorsten up to?

As he works on the latest saddle, Hiccup finds himself once more thinking about his run in with Astrid yesterday and letter that she sent him the day before. He smiles pleasantly as he replays every detail of their encounter in his mind, not realizing what he's doing when he starts to happily hum to himself. From across the shop, Gobber glances over at the sound of the boy's musical reverie with an amused expression, glad to see his apprentice happy again.

Though, given the last few days, the smith wonders how long this could last.
Unaware of how his master ponders his emotional condition, Hiccup continues to work on the saddle, drawing the heavy needle and thread through the holes he prepunched to stitch up the stirrup to the main body, all the while thinking about what Astrid wrote to him, "Hey, Hiccup…"

Being so wrapped up in his work and memories of his girlfriend, Hiccup jumps when Tuffnutt calls to him, "Hey, Tuffnut…"

The smaller boy turns suddenly to see the twin standing at the shop window, leaning on the countertop.

"Hey, Tuff," he greets his friend with a smile. Grabbing his crutch, he hobbles over to the window. "Got something for me?" he asks hopefully.

The other teen smirks at the question, chuckling mischievously as he reaches into his vest to pull out a nondescript letter. "Why it just so happens-"

The boy cuts himself off as Hiccup wordlessly yanks the letter out of his hands. Gobber snickers as the twin looks on in surprise while the smaller lad hobbles back to his bench, his attention wholly focused on the parchment he now eagerly holds in his hand.

"You're welcome," Tuffnutt grumbles as he looks at the smith's apprentice with a measure of irritation.

"Oh…!" Hiccup says suddenly at the twin's words, glancing up from the letter with a flush to his cheeks. "Uh, yeah. Sorry, Tuff…thanks for bringing this to me, I really appreciate it," he says with a sheepish smile.

His friend can't help but smirk at his reaction. After a moment's pause, he says with a good natured tone, "yeah, it's no problem. Think you'll have a reply ready today?"

Hiccup can't help but smile at the question, nodding. "Yeah, I think I might," he says with a nod. "Could you stop by my house tonight, after dinner time?" He asks.

The twin nods. "Sure thing," he says, then adds, "enjoy the letter…" The two boys smile widely at one another and then Tuffnutt turns and leaves.

Sitting himself down on the stool again, Hiccup returns his attention to the letter he holds. Gobber grins at the excited look on the boy's face. "Is that from who I think it is…?" he asks his apprentice with a teasing tone.

Glancing over at his friend, Hiccup smirks back at him. "Yeah," he says eagerly, then looks back at the letter. Gobber chuckles as the boy refuses to talk to him, but decides to leave him be.

Hiccup turns the letter over as he studies the outside. As with the last one, it's completely unadorned, including the glob of wax. Smiling, he pops the seal and unfolds the two ends, opening the letter reverently.

Sighing happily, he starts to read.

_My darling Hiccup, I was so excited to get your letter yesterday. But then, you probably already knew that by the look on my face when you gave it to Ruffnutt to deliver._

Hiccup smirks wryly at her words as he remembers that moment from yesterday, then reads on.

_Can you believe that she held onto the letter all day before she let me have it? I can't really blame
her, though. She was holding me to my promise that I would go dragon riding with her and the rest of our friends. For some reason, they all thought I'd disappear and spend the whole day reading your letter over and over and writing a response.

As he reads her words, Hiccup lifts an eyebrow, then reads on.

Of course, they were completely right. That's exactly what I would have done.

Hiccup laughs at her words, ignoring Gobber as he glances over with a wry smirk. The lad reads on.

That's also what I would have done last night, if it weren't for my father being home. Truth be told, it's what I spent a lot of this morning doing, since he wasn't around.

The boy smiles from ear to ear at her words, sighing happily as he imagines Astrid doing exactly what he's been doing since he got her first letter.

Speaking of my father, something extraordinary happened last night. Dad came home and told me that you and I could get married. He also said I could go see you now, whenever I wanted.

Hiccup blinks in surprise, stopping and rereading the last two lines a couple of times to make sure he read it correctly.

I'm sure you're as stunned as I was, but there it is. So you might be asking yourself why I'm not there with you, right now.

Furrowing his brow in confusion as her words mirror his own thoughts, he continues reading anxiously.

Of course, that's exactly where I want to be, but my Mom told me we still shouldn't get together. She doesn't trust my father, and is worried about what his true intentions are.

As he reads her words, he frowns in concern.

I confess I'm a little worried about that, but the thought of being able to see you whenever I want is just so damn tempting that I'm not sure I care what he's up to. I miss you so much it hurts inside, Hiccup. There's nothing more I want than to just be with you without worrying about getting caught.* be it out and about, with our friends, or alone together* somewhere.

Hiccup smiles sweetly at her words, even as news of Thorsten's apparent change leaves him feeling confused and uneasy.

What do you think we should do, Hiccup? Should we take my father at his word and get together, or should we follow my mother's advice and wait until the Harvest's End Festival?

The boy swallows heavily at her questions, his gut twisting with uncertainty.

I'm so confused right now. I wish I knew what the right answer is. All my love, Astrid

The boy blows out a breath that he didn't realize he'd been holding as he finishes reading the last of the letter. Inside he feels a tumultuous mix of emotions swirl about as he tries to make sense of everything Astrid told him.

"Everything alright there, Hiccup?" Gobber asks with concern as he watches his apprentice react so unexpectedly to the letter. The man had been expecting the love struck youth to be floating on the clouds and sighing happily like a lovesick fool when he finished reading.
This somber reaction was the last thing the smith would have thought to see from the boy.

Looking over at Gobber's words, Hiccup hesitates before he answers, his muddled brain taking a few extra moments to process the man's words. "Huh? Oh, uh...yeah, it's fine," he says, very unconvincingly. The smith lifts an eyebrow, causing Hiccup to sputter some more. "I mean, it's not fine, but it's...well, it's not bad either, at least, I don't think it is, but..."

Gobber furrows his brow in confusion at the ramblings of his apprentice, who stops talking at the sight of the man's face. "Aaaagh!" he groans in irritation, putting his head in his hands while leaning in towards the desk.

"What's wrong, Hiccup?" the smith asks, very concerned now.

Rubbing his hands over his face, the lad hesitates as he looks over at his friend. He hesitates, then asks, "Gobber, could Thorsten ever be trusted?" he asks.

The man's eyes shoot up into his hair line at the question. He hesitates only for a moment before answering definitively, "No. Absolutely not." He pauses, then asks, "Why? What happened?"

Hiccup frowns all the more as he waits a moment before answering, "Astrid's Dad says we can see each other again," he says, causing Gobber to look on with an astounded gaze. "He's going to ask my Dad to draw up a contract for Astrid and me to get married."

The smith's jaw drops at this, and he stares at Hiccup in disbelief.

He quickly recovers, pointing his claw at the boy while saying, "You mark my words, Hiccup. That snake is up t'somethin'!"

Furrowing his brow, the boy asks, "Well, if he is, then what is it?"

Gobber hesitates as he thinks about it. "Not sure," he admits. "But I'll wager it's no good..."

Hiccup sighs as he leans against the table, looking at Astrid's letter. The smith watches him thoughtfully.

"Maybe, Gobber," the boy answers. "Or maybe he's just changed his mind..."

The smith frowns as he watches his apprentice fold up the letter, put it in his vest pocket. Grabbing his crutch, he gets up.

"Where ya goin', Hiccup?" Gobber asks the youth.

Glancing at the man, Hiccup smiles slightly, "I'm going home to think about this and write my reply to Astrid," he says. Without another word, he hobbles off and out the door.

Gobber watches the boy silently, his brow furrowed in concern as he ponders what Thorsten might be doing now.

The cold wind cuts across the heights of Deadman's Peak, chilling Astrid to the bone. Stormfly lies next to her as she sits on the edge. Absentmindedly, the girl strokes her dragon's head while looking out over the vast stretch of the sea yawning before her.

After writing her latest letter to her boyfriend, she had promptly left to go spend some time alone and think. Her mother had been worried that she was going to go see Hiccup, but seemed to calm down after the girl did a fair bit of persuading, explaining that all she wanted to do was go and be by
herself.

She chose to come here for one reason only. It was here where this whole mess started.

Her lips lilt into a wry smirk as she thinks about that fateful day, when Hiccup finally confronted her about her mixed messages. Closing her eyes as a particularly cold blast of wind cuts through her, she sighs happily as the delicious memories of what followed on that day start to flow her mind.

If she could go back and do it again, she wouldn't change a thing.

Well, maybe she would have said something to Hiccup sooner.

But either way, she's happy beyond words with what they share now. She only wishes that her father wasn't causing so many problems.

Her father.

The man had meant so much to her when she was younger. Pleasing him was all that she cared about.

Even after the abuse started, she still found that making him happy was important to her. She learned that if she did everything he demanded of her, if she could become as good as he wanted, that he didn't hit her nearly as much. Besides, when she did well, he was proud of her, and that still made her feel more happy than anything.

There were yet nights when the blows would come anyway. However, she had decided she was too tough to let that bother her.

She almost always believed that.

Somehow, though, things had started to change in the last few months. It all started with Dragon Training.

When Hiccup started to show her up in the ring, at the time she couldn't blame her father for his anger, or the harsh punishment he administered for her failures. She was just as angry at herself for letting it happen, and she felt like she deserved it.

But then she confronted Hiccup. Though she had been shocked and disgusted at first when she saw him and Toothless. But then, everything changed when he kidnapped her and she learned what the boy had accomplished together with the dragon. By the end of the night, she came to start to really appreciate the lad and what he had achieved.

She doesn't understand how she fell in love with him, but when he took her flying, it awoke something deep inside of her. There was a wonderment she suddenly felt inside that had been dormant since she was a young child.

It put everything in a whole new light.

That crazy day following their together flight only made her fall more in love with the boy. With every selfless act, he proved himself to her. With no regard for his own safety, he tried to help everyone but himself, and in so doing he showed Astrid what true strength was.

When she thought he had paid for their lives with his own, her heart broke.

When she heard Stoic cry out in triumph, "You brought him back alive!" her heart nearly burst with
Joy and love for the scrawny boy.

After he awoke, when she kissed him in front of everybody, she was secretly promising herself to him. From that point on, he was the only thing that mattered to her.

Somehow, through all that happened to make her fall in love with Hiccup, suddenly what her father was doing wasn't okay anymore.

It wasn't just because the man told her she couldn't see the boy she loves.

Now, how he treated her just felt very wrong.

When her father forbade her from seeing Hiccup, she started to feel hate for him. After weeks of trying to obey, something snapped inside of the girl. Then everything happened with her and Hiccup this past week, all of which only served to solidify her dislike for her father and what he represented.

Now her father has shocked her with a complete turn around. He's promised everything she wants, and it seems too good to be true.

Her mother doesn't trust him, and who can blame her?

Astrid considers that maybe she shouldn't either, especially after how he's treated her.

Hiccup would never do those things to her.

The girl closes her eyes and sighs heavily. She opens them again and picks up a rock, tossing it with a furious throw into the void below her.

She wishes she knew what to do.

"You seem troubled, daughter."

Astrid whips her head around in shock at the sound of her father's voice. She jumps to her feet in alarm and turns to face him, stepping away from the ledge while tensing up. Stormfly, sensing her companion's distress, hops up as well, trilling as she looks at Thorsten with that sideways glance that Nadders always do.

"What do you want, father?" Astrid asks sharply, looking at the man with a wary glare.

Thorsten smirks at her reaction. Unfazed, he walks slowly towards her, but stops about ten paces away.

"I simply want to talk with my daughter," he says with an even voice, holding out his open hands at his sides with his palms facing her to show his intentions are harmless. He looks at her intently. "Is that such a bad thing?"

The girl narrows her gaze at him, regarding him warily. "What about?" she asks coldly, not trusting the man.

He hesitates for a moment, then says, "I'm surprised that you're not spending time with Hiccup." Lifting an eyebrow, he asks sincerely, "I hope all is well between you two?"

His words catch Astrid off guard, leaving the girl feeling uncertain. "It's fine," she says simply, choosing not to elaborate.

"Well, I'm surprised that you're not with him," he says with a furrowed brow. "I thought that's what
you wanted so badly?"

The girl hesitates, unsure of how to respond. "Just because I want to be with him doesn't mean I need to spend every waking moment with him," she retorts with hostility.

Holding up his hands as if in surrender, Thorsten smiles apologetically. "Easy there, girl," he says with an amused voice. "I'm just worried for the two of you."

She narrows her gaze at his words. "If you were so worried about us, then why'd you keep us apart in the first place?" she asks bitterly.


He goes on, "I realize my mistake now, and I'm trying to make up for it." He pauses while Astrid hesitates to answer.

Smiling with understanding, he adds, "Before I came here, I went to see Stoic." The girl can't help but look surprised. He smiles all the more at her widening eyes as he elaborates, "I told him to write up a contract and bring it to me as soon as he is ready."

The girl's jaw half hangs open. Maybe this is real. Maybe she'll actually get to marry Hiccup with her father's blessing.

Maybe they can stop all the games and just be happy together.

Thorsten watches her with amusement. "Hopefully that's what you want," he says. Waiting another moment as his daughter gawks at him in shock, the man starts to walk away.

Astrid blinks a few times as his turning to go snaps her out of her stunned reverie.

"Dad…!" she suddenly calls out, without really knowing why.

He pauses, glancing back at her over his shoulder. "Yes, Astrid?" he asks.

Hesitating another moment or two, she finally meets his gaze and blurts out, "Th-Thank you…"

Nodding at her, he smiles back pleasantly. "You're my daughter," he says. "I should have done it a long time ago."

Astrid beams at him and he turns to go again.

As he walks off with his back to her, the man's smile turns absolutely wicked.

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