Heart stuffed with ashes

Posted originally on the fanfiction.lol at https://fanfiction.lol/works/1674.

Rating:	General Audiences
Archive Warning:	Major Character Death
Category:	General (non relationship-focused)
Fandom:	Hiccup series [Book Series] - Cressida Cowell
Characters:	Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III, Wodensfang [How to Train Your Dragon], Alvin the Treacherous, Toothless [How to Train Your Dragon], Furious [How to Train Your Dragon]
Additional Tags:	Temporary Character Death, Drowning, he gets better tho, Angst, spoilers for the last book, AU, No beta we die like [SPOILERS], Canon-Typical Violence, Cross-Posted on AO3
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2022-09-14 Words: 3,371 Chapters: 1/1

Heart stuffed with ashes

by DragonWolf

Summary

The moon is beautiful and I want to see you hope
Where am I buried

Notes

Originally posted on ao3
Posted to Fanfiction.lol archive on 11.11.26

See the end of the work for more notes

“You have nothing - *nothing*! And the Hero you’re waiting for is *dead*”

The Witch crooned cruelly, and truly, to all present to hear the words, it appeared so. The Hero had been shot in the chest by a flaming arrow just the previous day and went down to the bottom of the ocean.

Unbeknownst to them that, in fact, was not the Hero. That was Snotlout, whom they’d thought, still, a traitor, taking the arrow and the flame meant for Hiccup.

Unbeknownst to all but the little, old, withered dragon Wodensfang, The Hero had met a different final fate.

His final living moments were those of delirium and frantic flight on a sinking ship, thinking he was saving his little hunting dragon, and the lost things, but the ship was broken in half and filling quickly with water. And because he did not quite understand what was happening anymore, his head filled with all-consuming fog from a blow to the head, he did not even try to save himself as his piece of ship got caught in the north wind and soon finally, unfortunately, went down with her captain.

The little body that washed up on the beach of hero’s end was nothing more than a corpse of a boy who was almost king.

The Wodensfang tried to warm the body but there was no life left in it. Not a flutter of an eyelid, not a breath, however shallow, whooshing in the boy’s lungs. Not a thrum of a heartbeat.

No warmth could chase away the eternal chill of death.

The little ancient sea dragon curled up on top of the bedraggled body’s chest.

There was no hope left for any of them. In a few hours the king of the Wilderwest would be crowned, and it would be that blasted Alvin, who, for all his bastardous, treacherous ways, didn’t even have the real dragon jewel.

So when he went to fight Furious, well. That would be it for humanity wouldn’t it?

All because the real, true king of the Wilderwest was lying dead on the sandy beach of Hero’s end.

The Wodensfang let himself lie limply on top of the scratched up, beaten, pitiful looking corpse of his last hope and wept, silently.

The wind almost seemed to echo his small, insignificant sobs.

***

The vampire spy dragon made an inquisitive sort of noise as it listened to its singing teeth.

It was a peculiar feeling. Not a one it’d felt before, not quite.

It always knew if the prey it’d been following had perished, and this was close to that feeling, but… wrong, somehow. There was a buzzing, uncomfortable and whining, that made it almost feel like the little tooth thief was on the brink of death, but again, that wasn't it.

It didn't feel dead, but it sure didn't feel alive either.

The target that had its teeth was weird, and the vampire spy dragon did not like it. It made its remaining, non-vampiric teeth, itch and its hackles stand on end. It wanted the thief dead, as soon as possible, it wanted its teeth back from that weird uncomfortable buzzing.

So it flew, swift and silent, towards the song of its teeth.

It did not notice the pack of sandsharks following it closely. Just as the sandsharks did not notice its discomfort.

***

It was a sad sight, on the morning of doomsday of yule, on the solemn sandy beach of the isle of Hero's End. Among the fog that hid the wreckage of countless ships a corpse of a little, scrawny bedraggled human, with an ancient wrinkled seadragon perched atop of it, lay still.

The little dragon had run out of tears a little while ago and just lay, motionless, on the chest of the human he'd already betrayed but didn’t. Not that it mattered now anyway. The boy would not wake up to face this betrayal, not anymore.

This was how their journey, the long, hard, painful journey, ended, the Wodensfang supposed. With a tiny whimper of a sad old dragon on an island so close to Tomorrow it was just a 20 minute sail away, so close to victory yet unbelievably far.

Now the body of the boy that was to be king would be taken back into the sea by the rising tide, and be given the sea burial without any grace or fanfare it deserved.

He let himself wallow in his sorrow, quietly, as the fog swirled around them, covering the destruction waged by the dragon army from his tired gaze.

It was in this quiet, sad moment, that something happened. Something that should, by all logic and laws of existence, have not happened.

The corpse's hand, the one that was not swollen and didn't have the awful vampiric teeth stuck in it, twitched ever so slightly. If anyone had observed this they most likely would have thought it a trick of the light, or their eyes betraying them for a single moment, but then it happened again, this time more definitively, the cold dead fingers flexing slightly before becoming still once again.

Then the boy's eyelids fluttered, gently, and there was a momentary noise in the back of his throat, a mix of a quiet whimper and a wet gurgle, that startled the Wodensfang into alertness. For just a moment he stared at the boy's scratched up pale face, the eyelids fluttering yet still

tightly shut, before it scrunched into a grimace of pain and disgust and the boy rolled over onto his front and retched.

Seawater came pouring out of him like a great torrent. He coughed and coughed as more and more of it left his lungs, making its way out of his mouth and nose and leaving his entire body quivering in pain at the action. It was a bit before it stopped and a good while yet before he'd stopped coughing and retching, what little there was in his stomach all being purged from his system, almost-clear bile spilling over the already wet sand.

…

He took great big gulps of air once he could, supporting himself mostly with one good arm, the other hanging down, almost completely numb.

His lungs stung as he tried to breathe, his heart beat erratically in his chest, beating out a sickly off-beat rhythm that started and stopped at seemingly random intervals, his head hurt so badly when he tried to think, like the great Thor had hit it with his hammer both on the inside and out at the same time.

He could only whine as all the different pains in his body overwhelmed him. That, and try to curl in on himself to cut out as much of the outside stimulus as he could.

He did both of these things.

The world was too much, the sky and fog too bright, even though he could only sort of see them out of one slightly less bruised eye, the sea too loud, as everything attacked his newly restored senses at once, and the muffled stream of thoughts in his head couldn't keep up with it.

Eventually, after what felt like hours, but was actually maybe a few minutes, he could hear the world clearly again, and understand what he was hearing. There were words, worried and relieved all at once, and he could understand them if he paid attention.

Slowly he removed his hands from his ears and listened to the little dragon worrying over him.

"**It is so great that you're awake, my boy!**" The little dragon wheezed, slightly hysterically "**though i do not understand how, it does not matter, what matters is that you are here, and you are awake. How are you feeling?**"

"Sore" The boy answered without thinking. Sore was an understatement, he felt like he'd been torn apart and then crudely sewn back together and possibly run over by a chariot a couple times afterwards. Everything hurt and he felt a sort of buzzing at the back of his head that made his teeth itch uncomfortably "Where am i?" He asked, looking around the unfamiliar beach.

"**You're on the isle of Hero's end**" Answered the little dragon "**your ship sank while you were trying to retrieve the lost things, but-**"

"Why was I on a ship?" The boy asked, confused.

"**Pardon?**" The dragon tilted his head, puzzled.

He dug around in his mind, reaching back into the space where his memory should have been but found only an icky cold, much like the dreadful fog all around, and no memories to speak of. It was quite disorienting and alarming to find out that he hadn't a clue who he was or why he was there, or who the little dragon in front of him was.

He didn't even know his own name, having to be reminded of it by Wodensfang.

He tried to blow on his hands to warm them up. The breath that left his mouth was as cold as the surrounding air, so it did not help.

He heard his heart beating unsteadily as he tried to listen to the little dragon's explanation of the situation, and he felt it skip a beat or two as a poison dart of a sandshark just missed his face.

He didn't have the time to examine the sickly off-beat noise as the situation quickly went dire, so he elected to not think about it for a bit, and ignored how strangely every breath stuck in his lungs.

***

He almost gave up a couple times on his journey. Finding a working boat, trying to sail a half crushed little boat he did find across the Hero's gap.

He felt very tired and lost, and the journey was a bit long for his condition, the confusion about what he was supposed to be doing,and why, weighed on him as much as the physical injuries, and at times he just, Just wanted to lie down on the bottom of his dinky little boat and let it sink. Let himself go, let himself rest.

But the buzzing in his head sprung him back into action every time, sending his heart stammering wildly in his chest. He remembered, vaguely, that he had something important he had to do, that there was a very, Very important reason he had to keep going. It bounced to the forefront of his mind again and again and he strained to row forward. Breath caught in his throat as he struggled to pull air in and back out.

His progress across the Hero’s gap was too slow, but it was progress. Even with the deadly shadow attack and the mess of nasty dragons afterwards and his little unfortunate boat sinking and having to swim the last bit, it was progress. He made it to the beach of Tomorrow. Barely, painfully, but he did.

He landed on the beach and wearily staggered up it.

He didn’t know what came next.

It was very important, he was On the Island of Tomorrow for a reason, he had to be crowned king instead of that Alvin guy whom he couldn’t remember but somehow hated anyway, he knew this, but he didn’t know how to go about doing that.

The tall, terrifying, inscrutable figure of the guardian did not help him in his confusion. Actually he might have made it worse.

And, of course, the true deathly fear of being picked up, and subsequently dropped back down, by the unspeakable horrors that were the Dragon Guardians of Tomorrow, while sobering, and helpful for clearing up the drowsiness of his mind, did not clear things up in his head.

As he lay in the marsh after falling, all was quiet for a moment, for he did not hear the hurried footsteps or the semi-distant cries of the Human Guardians starting their search for him, nor the screeching of the horrifying Dragon guardians, still soaring somewhere in the stratosphere overhead.

No, for a few moments he heard nothing at all as he lay completely still in the swamp on the Island of Tomorrow, to all the world becoming once again a lifeless thing, never to get up again.

Then the buzzing was back and he gasped painfully as all senses returned to him at once, however addled they were by injuries. His pulse, silent a few moments ago, resumed its mad staccato of a rhythm, echoing ominously in his ears. He coughed madly for a few seconds before regaining his breath, then, as the sounds of the outside world finally filtered through to his barely functioning brain, he scrambled up onto his feet once again and ran further inland.

…

And so what walked in to stop Alvin’s coronation was not a ghost, like the not-quite-king had thought, but it was a damn close guess.

The old man in charge could see it, even through his blindfold, without any real sight. The child that dared interrupt the ceremony was something else, whatever energy that was animating his little bruised and battered body flaring up, sputtering, unstable, on the old man’s senses. He could almost hear the off-rhythm heartbeat as the child - Hiccup he was called - staggered forward, starting and stopping, two beats right then one skipped, one beat right then another one skipped, almost at random, like the tiny half-dead heart was trying desperately to give up and finally fully die, but something wasn’t letting it, spurring it ever onwards.

He didn’t need to see the boy's eyes to know they would be wrong. They would be glassy, only barely noticeably so, somewhat lacking that shine that was always present in the eyes of living things.

Nevertheless the old man let the boy, driven by gods know what, make his claim to the throne, and despite his sort-of protests and demanding of an explanation and a reason for him to consider this claim legitimate, somewhere in the deeper parts of his mind he already knew, that if this *clearly dead* yet still walking boy was here, that whatever was spurring on his barely working heart was reason enough. That he was here for a reason, and that reason was that he was meant to be King.

So he was not surprised when the Dragon Guardians told him exactly this, that the boy Hiccup was the new king.

And so the new King was crowned, without further incident, to the horrified dismay of the man Alvin and his handful of loyal supporters.

And maybe, just *maybe*, the old man could hear that small half-dead heart beating a tiny bit more steadily.

***

Alvin almost didn't feel like doing his usual scowling and jeering at his arch nemesis because, honestly, something about him had started to creep him out. He caught the boy's gaze once since he showed up and the experience sent involuntary shivers up the man's spine.

Now, this was a slight problem because Alvin was not afraid of Hiccup, or he would never admit it if he was, not to anyone, not even himself. But something about the eyes that met him wasn't right.

Of course, there were a lot of things wrong about the brat, he was still somehow alive for one, even though they thought they'd killed him yesterday (tricksy little rat, Alvin knew he couldn't trust it without a tangible body), but even other than that he looked even worse, more bedraggled than he did when the man saw him last, like a chariot had run him over, and then a pack of winterfleshers descended upon him for a minute.

If he were not standing up and talking he could have been mistaken for a corpse, that's how bad he looked.

Something in those barely open glassy eyes told Alvin that maybe he was too hasty with dismissing his ghost theory, and the boy really was a spirit that came back to haunt Alvin as revenge for killing him.

He couldn't think like that. The boy wasn't a revenant, he was a nuisance. He was standing in Alvin's way to becoming King of the Wilderwest, and he had to be dealt with, not that the man knew how just yet.

But judging by that conversation he was half overhearing, something about how they hadn't found the real dragon jewel, he might not have had to deal with the boy himself.

If he didn't have the real jewel, then the boy would perish in Single Combat with the dragon Furious, and then Alvin would surely get his kingdom. His mother seemed to think so.

He was almost giddy at the thought. Two birds with one stone. Kill the boy and get what he'd always wanted. Perfect.

This was only soured by the fact that without the real jewel the dragon Furious and his army might kill them all by the end of the day.

That was a problem too.

His mother was in a gloom yet cheery mood. She awaited something.

He would bide his time and see when he could strike.

That’s what he would do.

***

Toothless really didn’t know what to feel.

He was so happy his master was back, and he was King now! Toothless always knew he had royal blood in him, so he was not surprised this would turn out like this, however unlikely it seemed just a few hours ago.

But again, he was just so happy that his master was there, and alive, and with Toothless again, that he could almost overlook the odd coldness and clamminess of his skin. It definitely wasn’t like that before, Toothless would know. His master was wounded and battered and ice cold, but he tickled Toothless under the chin in just the right way so the little dragon overlooked all of this for now in his ecstatic mood.

The old dragon Wodensfang, when he woke up, was less accepting of the changes, and more worried about, though he didn’t say much of it, for there were bigger problems at the time, namely the dragon jewel, or rather the absence of one.

So he too let it go for the moment.

…

Dragon Furious knew too, like the old man at the coronation had known, like the terrible dragon guardians of Tomorrow knew. He could see to the depth of the little boy's soul, he could see it barely attached to the body it was in.

And he could see, when he looked into that small creature's, into Hiccup the 3rd's eyes, the thing that was not letting him go. Like Grimbeard the Ghastly's prophecy itself was staring back at him through that boy, not letting the small, frail body collapse under the weight of its injuries.

He could see the fiery energy behind those dull eyes. It sputtered and staggered but held itself together. Like two halves of a broken heart holding themselves together.

How laughable it all was, how fate came around in a circle like this.

And it was laughable how he was brought down, in the end, by this half-dead little specter of a child who resembled another child, half-forgotten but still loved by the great beast.

Maybe that was the point.

Maybe it was the point for him to do what he'd meant to do 100 years ago.

Maybe it was artistic that both leaders, one of humans, another of dragons, were half dead.

Two halves of a whole, two lives barely holding on, yet burning with a determination.

Determination to save both their peoples.

One actively dying.

One clinging to life like a particularly annoying gnat, kept alive by a fiery energy, no longer sputtering but burning brightly in his eyes, as if they never became dull and lifeless in the first place, buzzing loudly in his soul with a maddening intensity.

A dragon doomed. And a boy refusing to die.

And the boy promised, and he made a plan, a wonderfully mad plan, like he always did, that the dragon liked.

And the mountainous beast that was Furious was content, as he swam out to sea, never to be seen again.

And the little battered boy Hiccup, saddened by so many tragedies in a row, led his people back to the castle of Tomorrow, and his heart beat steadily, as if it’d never stopped.

End Notes

Title and summary from "Birds Falling Out Of The Sky" by Lauren Bousfield

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!