

Dad and I shared make-believe adventures from atop our fallen tree by the riverside. At six, our raft coursed turquoise tides straight into a dragon's den. Nine, we conquered a kraken, then rebuilt our raft from splinters. At eleven, pirates pillaged, and thirteen, Viking furs cloaked our champion shoulders.

Then, dad's brittle bones made the trek too treacherous, and the riverside stories stopped. Doctors' reports were coffee-stained coasters in unopened envelopes. His condition, already inked into paper skin.

I meant only to borrow his role as caregiver, woefully unprepared. Briny broth and peppermint tea couldn't save him. Love wasn't enough.

Three summers elapsed me alone atop that fallen tree.

Adventure belonged to make-believe before our tree hollowed. But *adventure*, hollowed too, became rich when rearranged to *escape*. I begged the river to take me, promising it a raft.

Foolish, I know.

Dad would've laughed at my jagged saw strokes through trembling trunks. Then, he would've taught me how. By day's end, sawdust would've floated from my shoulders like pixie dust when he patted my back.

His knots would've held logs together, sparing my foul tongue and tender fingers as I tried again. And again.

I finished the raft come spring.

"Time to go." I avoided goodbye, and his ashes clung to our tree's blackened bark instead of chasing the wind.

I set sail, and incredulously, greeted dad in turquoise tides and uneven oars. Foolish, I know; he'd been at my side all along.

*Vikings. Pirates. Krakens. Dragons.*

Adventure awaits.