

THE QUEST OF THE RAINBOW DRAGONS: A UU Hero's Story

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Part VI Installment twenty-three - Rainbow Principle 6: Indigo

"Insist on freedom, justice and peace for all people"

We affirm and promote the goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all.

Our story thus far ...

Delia and Jared are nearing the end of their quest to bring peace and prosperity to the world, according to the ancient prophecy. Currently in the company of the Indigo Dragon, Lazyurov, they are carrying a peace-making message from Lord Stephen, commander of some troops who are besieging a castle, to his cousin, Lord Richard, who, in Stephen's absence, had assumed the Lordship and then, unfortunately, refused to give it up.

Our story continues ...

Lazyurov flew them to an open window in the highest tower of the castle. Through it, they could see a man tossing and turning in a large, canopied bed.

"WELL," said Lazyurov, "IN YOU GO!"

"Um, Lazyurov, we don't have wings. We can't fly in the window!"

"CHILDREN, WHERE IS YOUR FAITH?!"

Remembering the leap of faith they had to make in search of the Blue Dragon, the children released their grip and prepared to jump off Lazyurov's back. However, he beat his wings, once, twice, three times, and they felt themselves rise gently on the updraft to the window.

"WHEN YOU ARE READY, CALL FOR ME AND I WILL RETURN," said Lazyurov when the children had clambered inside, hearts pounding.

They approached the bed, and Jared reached out and touched the shoulder of the tortured looking man. He woke with a start. "Who are you? How did you get in here?"

"We're messengers of peace," said Jared quickly. "You have nothing to fear. Tell me, are you as tired of this fighting as your cousin is?"

Wiping sleep from his eyes, the man sat up in bed, and said, "I must be dreaming. Yes, yes, I am tired of this fighting. But I am in the right. That man cannot prove he is my cousin, nor can I trust him to care for this place and these people. I have been here for six years, working, learning, becoming familiar with all that must be done. The previous lord named me his heir and taught me all that he knew. I cannot simply yield to some unknown stranger who claims right of birth.

"And yet, we cannot keep on like this. The forces are too evenly matched and the supplies are running low. I fear no one will win this dreadful fight, and with no one to plant the fields, we will all starve come the fall."

"Exactly," said Delia. "Jared, show him the note."

Rummaging in his backpack, Jared handed over the sheet of parchment with the message from Lord Stephen. In it, he recounted the story of King Solomon's response to the two mothers fighting over a single child. "Just as the true mother chose to give up her claim rather than see her child cleaved in two, so I give up my claim on this land so that it might survive. I call on our old bonds of friendship and love, and beg you to forgive me, and to allow me to help you in undoing some of the terrible damage that has been done in our names. Please, Rusty (this was the childhood name which family members had given Lord Richard), let's stop this madness."

Recognizing the truth of the message, and the likely authenticity of the one who had written it, Lord Richard paled and reached for a drink of water. "Could it be I was wrong, all this time? All this damage, for nothing? You, child, can you get a message back to my cousin for me?"

"Of course," said Jared confidently, feeling very good about this night's work.

They waited while Richard, still in his nightshirt, scratched a hasty note and sealed it with wax. Then he handed it to them. "My hopes for peace go with you tonight," he said, shaking their hands in farewell.

At the window, Delia called out to Lazyurov, who appeared immediately, and hovered about eight feet below. Climbing to the window ledge, the two children jumped together, and breathed twin sighs of relief when the wind from Lazyurov's beating wings guided them gently to his back once more.

"YOU HAVE DONE WELL, CHILDREN," Lazyurov said to them as they glided back down to the camp of Lord Stephen. "FROM WHAT I CAN SEE OF THE FUTURE (NOT MUCH, AND A BIT CLOUDY, I MUST ADMIT,) THIS CONFLICT IS NEARING A PEACEFUL RESOLUTION. THE TWO LEADERS AND THEIR PEOPLE WILL STILL FACE MANY CHALLENGES TO REPAIR THE DAMAGE, BUT I BELIEVE THEY WILL RISE TO THE CHALLENGE. DROP OFF THE MESSAGE AND RETURN TO ME QUICKLY, I HAVE MORE WORK FOR YOU TO DO TONIGHT."

When they had accomplished their mission and were once again on Lazyurov's back, Delia yawned and asked sleepily, "How far do we have to go? I'm feeling really, really tired."

"REST, CHILD. I WILL KEEP YOU SAFE."

Both Jared and Delia, then, dozed fitfully while they flew a terribly long way. Finally, they woke up, looking down on territory that was at once wildly different from anyplace they'd visited so far, and sadly familiar in that the same devastation had left it black and bleak.

"THIS WAR HAS BEEN GOING ON MUCH LONGER, AND SO ITS ROOTS ARE MUCH DEEPER. I MUST WARN YOU, YOU WILL NOT BE ABLE TO ACCOMPLISH SO MUCH WITH SO LITTLE HERE. BUT EVERY SMALL CHANGE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE. IF EVEN A SINGLE HEART IS SWAYED TO THE CAUSE OF PEACE, I COUNT THAT A VICTORY. THERE IS A BOY, HERE, WHO NEEDS A FRIEND. HE HAS LIVED THROUGH HORRORS NO CHILD SHOULD BE SUBJECTED TO. HE HAS WITNESSED THINGS THAT HAVE SCARRED HIS SOUL, AND THOUGH HE DOESN'T KNOW IT, HE IS IN DANGER OF LOSING HIS COMPASSION, HIS HUMANITY. TOMORROW, HIS COURAGE WILL BE

TESTED, AND IF HE FAILS, HE WILL BE LOST TO US. YOU MUST HELP HIM REMEMBER WHO HE IS."

Jared and Delia slid from Lazyurov's back and shouldered their packs. "Where is he, and what's his name?"

"YOU WILL KNOW HIM WHEN YOU FIND HIM," said Lazyurov, fading from view.

For lack of a better idea, they headed toward the nearest campfire. They were only partway there when they heard a rough voice say, "One more step and I'll shoot you through the heart."

"I think *he* may have found *us*," whispered Delia, raising her hands into the air to show they were empty. Jared followed suit.

"Who are you? What are you doing here?" the voice continued.

"I'm Delia, and that's Jared," she answered. Then, she decided to improvise. "We lost our way and we're looking for someone to show us the way back to the main road. Can you help us?"

"Which road?" the soldier asked suspiciously.

"Is there more than one?" asked Delia, feeling a little panicked.

"What kind of idiot are you?" asked the voice.

"A *terrified* idiot at the moment," answered Delia. "Do you think we could put our hands down?"

"Slowly," came the answer. So they did. "What are you doing wandering around in the dark? Don't you know there's a war going on?"

"Yes, yes, we know. We sort of wound up here by accident. We're not spies or soldiers or anything, just a couple of kids, like you."

"I'm not a kid, not anymore. I'm a soldier," the boy said in a blustery voice. In fact, he didn't look any older than Jared.

"No kidding?" said Jared, remembering what Lazyurov had said. "How did you get them to let you in? And why did you want to become a soldier in the first place?"

The boy must have decided to trust them, because he lowered his bow. "I wanted to avenge my family," said the boy. "My name's Theodore. What's yours?"

"I'm Jared, and this is Delia. We're not from here. What happened to your family?"

"The Picts raided our farmhouse, burned our fields and spread them with salt so that nothing would grow there anymore. They slaughtered our animals and torched our house. Now my parents live in poverty in the city. My father was injured in the attack, and so he just sits around. My mother takes in laundry. They live with my brothers and sisters in a shack, barely keeping body and soul together.

"Before the Picts came, we had a good life. We had to work hard, but there was plenty of food, and at night, after the chores were done, we could sit around the fire and tell stories and sing songs. My house was full of joy. Now, my family's life is full of misery. I left as soon as I could, and I send back every penny I make, but still, my younger sister died last year of illness and hunger, because it wasn't enough to buy medicine. "It's all the fault of the monsters who raided our little farm, the Picts. I hate them!"

"Wow! What a sad story," said Jared sympathetically. Then he pulled an apple out of his knapsack. "Would you like an apple?"

"Sure," said the boy, and he relaxed a little more. Jared and Delia sat with their backs against two trees, and motioned to Theodore, who waited just a moment before laying down his bow and joining them on the ground.

"Tomorrow, we're going raiding. There's a farm over that ridge, and we'll burn *their* fields. See how they like it. Actually, it's my first raid. I'm a little nervous," he confessed between bites.

"You mean you're going to do to someone else the same thing the Picts did to your family?" burst out Delia.

Looking at her a bit strangely, Theodore answered, "They're Picts. They deserve it, and more!"

"They're people," she said hotly, but Jared glared at her and she tried to calm down.

"I don't blame you for wanting to hurt them," he said carefully. "I think I would want to hurt somebody too if I'd been hurt as badly as you have. But are you sure it's the right thing to do?"

"What's right and what's wrong? I don't even care anymore. My unit is my family now. I need to follow orders. It's easier, you know, than figuring out what to do on my own."

"I'm sure it is, Theodore," said Jared. They sat quietly for a minute. "Would you really hurt other families, though? Even babies? Women? They're farmers, not soldiers. They're not the ones who attacked your family."

"Look, it's not like I want to do it," said Theodore impatiently. "My commander says that attacking families is an important strategy. It's demoralizing, and weakens the enemy."

"That sure isn't what happened in your case," said Jared. "It made you stronger, and angrier, and more willing to fight."

"I guess I hadn't thought of it that way," said Theodore thoughtfully. "Well, it was nice talking to you, and thanks for the apple. If you head straight northwest, you should cross a main road in about a mile. I'm not sure it's the right one, but it'll take you to a village where they can help you get reoriented. Travel carefully, though. The next person you meet might shoot first and ask questions later." He stood and headed off into the dark.

"We blew it," said Delia.

"YOU CAN'T KNOW THAT," boomed Lazyurov, who landed behind her soundlessly and nudged her back with his snout.

"I WILL GIVE YOU MY TOKEN NOW AND YOU CAN BE ON YOUR WAY."

He blinked his eyes, and on the ground in front of them appeared a dove carved from lapis.

"Wait a second, don't we get to see what happens?" asked Jared.

"DAYBREAK IS COMING. I CANNOT PROTECT YOU ONCE THE LIGHT COMES. IF YOU STAY, YOU WILL BE IN DANGER."

"No way!" said Delia. "I'm not staying. Jared, come on."

Jared hesitated. His brain told him one thing, but his heart told him something else altogether. "I, I think I *have* to stay, Delia."

"What!?!? No you don't. Come on, Jared, we've come too far to take crazy risks now." She climbed onto Lazyurov's back.

"I don't think it's a crazy risk," said Jared. "I think it's something a friend needs to do. Delia, I'm sorry. I'll see you tonight." He waved as the dragon launched into the air.

Delia looked both perplexed and upset.

For the first time in a very long time, Jared was truly on his own. He shouldered his pack and headed off in the direction Theodore had gone. He paused for just a minute at the rock where they'd sat and sent up a little prayer: *Please, let Theodore do the right thing. Oh, and God, if you're up there, please keep me safe so that I can finish my quest. Amen.*"

Dragon Task: *Visit a war memorial, either virtually (by reading a book or surfing the internet), or in person (there are several local war memorials). How does it make you feel?*