

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

### PART VII - Installment 26: Rainbow Principle **Violet**

"The color violet reminds us to value the relationship we have with the earth and all living things "

*We affirm and promote respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.*

*Our story thus far ...*

Two children, Jared and Delia, are on a quest to bring peace and prosperity to the world. An ancient prophecy set before them the task of befriending seven magical dragons: so far, they have met and won the support of Krasnova, the Red Dragon, Yantarov, the Amber Dragon, Zheltizna, the Yellow Dragon, Zolotov, the Green Dragon, Golubnaya, the Blue Dragon, and Lazyurov, the Indigo Dragon. They are currently seeking the lair of Bagranka, the Violet Dragon. With the help of a linguistically gifted spider who speaks human as well as the languages of all the plants and animals in the jungle, they are hoping to find Bagranka and win her friendship as well. They have only two more days to complete this task. If they fail, their entire year-long quest will have been for nothing.

*Our story continues ...*

When Jared and Delia woke up the next morning, they were amazed to see an enormous spider web stretching out into the jungle before disappearing from view. "Ummm, Mr. Spider?" called Delia tentatively at first, and then a little louder, "*Mr. Spider!* Are you there?"

Finally a sleepy voice mumbled, "You don't have to shout. And what's with the Mr. Spider? I know I didn't give you my proper name, but, Jeez, can't you tell a male from a female?"

"Oh!" Delia blushed. "Sorry, but no we can't tell the difference. Mrs. Spider? Ms?"

"Why don't you just call me Annie," said the spider.

"Okay. Annie. Did you weave this web?"

"Of course I did! Why do you think I'm so tired this morning! One of you will have to carry me across the web. I'm exhausted!"

"Annie," piped up Jared, "We're a lot heavier than you. I don't think your web is strong enough to support us."

"Of course it isn't," answered the spider. "Listen, let me explain what I've done. There's a web, an invisible web that stretches the world round, connecting every living thing with every other living thing. My web is fragile, but it's simply meant to be a visible map to the invisible web - or the interdependent web - and that web is a lot stronger. It *is* strong enough to support your weight."

"Great," said Jared, and headed toward the web.

"Wait! Not so fast!" said the spider, just a moment too late. Jared took a first step, only to have the first silken thread break and drift gently to the ground. Jared spun around to listen more carefully to the spider.

"Hand me down so I can re-weave that spot, will you?" said the spider a little grumpily. "As I was saying, or as I was about to say, the interdependent web is strong enough to hold you, *but* (and it's a *big* but) you have to really understand and respect it. Every step you take, your attention needs to be on the particular connection between you and both of the anchoring points. It's not easy, but given your success with learning plant language the other day, I am cautiously optimistic that you'll be able to do it."

"We'll do our best," said Delia. "Tell us how to start."

"Do you see the tree that the web touches first?"

"Yes."

"How are you connected to that tree?" asked Annie.

"What do you mean?" asked Jared.

"What are the ways in which your life and the life of that tree intersect? How are you related to it?"

"How can I know that?" snapped Jared, confused. "I don't even know what kind of tree it is!"

"Exactly," said Annie. "That's why you can't walk on my web yet. Look closely. You don't need to know the scientific name of the tree or anything. You just need to observe the tree, you need to think about its tree-ness, and the way you need the tree, and it needs you. You need to understand this tree, talk to it, connect yourself to it. You can do it! Start with the breathing trick I taught you."

Jared and Delia closed their eyes, and began to breathe, in and out. Soon they found themselves realizing that the tree, like the plants, exhaled as they inhaled, and inhaled as they exhaled. The tree breathed in carbon dioxide, and turned it into oxygen. The children breathed in oxygen, and breathed out carbon dioxide. They thought about the tree's roots, extending down into soil where ages old plant and animal matter had broken down and become part of the soil. Perhaps an early ancestor had walked here, hundreds of thousands of years ago. This tree could be pulling in nutrients that once were a part of a human!

Holding the connection firmly in their minds, Jared and Delia took one step, and then another, until they reached the tall tree. Spontaneously, Delia wrapped her arms around the trunk of the tree, and whispered, "Thank you, tree!"

Next they turned and saw the web led to a huge, lush fern. Breathing deeply, the two tried to learn the language of ferns. The fern told them about burrowing safe and warm under the ground; about poking up curled, tender spears in the spring, about opening up and catching the rain as it falls in lush, soft fronds. It showed them the different insects that laid their eggs on the fern, and the small mammals that used it as a hiding place. It showed them burrowing worms and bugs that loosened the soil near its roots.

Jared and Delia walked the web to the fern, touched it gently, and whispered, "Thank you, fern."

From tree to fern to bush to flowering plant to patch of moss to mushroom to hanging vine they proceeded slowly but steadily, learning from each living thing, walking with more confidence, and also more gentleness as they went along. They learned how the different plants and fungi were born, what animals they depended on for survival, what animals depended on them as a food source or as shelter. Though both Jared and Delia had always loved spending time outside in the forest, they'd never realized quite how miraculous and complex the living web really was.

Sometime around noon, they came to the edge of the web. "Annie," asked Jared, "What do we do now? The web you wove doesn't go any further."

"Of course not," said Annie the spider, who had been dozing. "You can't expect all the living creatures to hold still for the whole day! Plants are one thing; they are used to staying in one place. Animals, now, they need to move around. So, you'll need to call to an animal nearby, ask it to hold still for a moment, and then I'll connect it to the web. Look around. Who do you see?"

Jared and Delia looked around, and then looked around again. "I don't see any animals," said Jared.

"Look again," said Annie the spider, "Lots of animals are camouflaged, so they're hard to see, but believe me, they're there!"

"Do bugs count?" asked Jared.

"Of course they do," answered Annie.

"Then I think I see a moth there, on that branch, with green wings. It looks like a leaf, only it's moving. There! Do you see it?" asked Jared.

"I do!" said Delia.

"Me, too," said Annie, and she leapt to the branch next to the moth, her silk trailing behind her.

"I guess we're on our own on this one," said Delia, turning to Jared.

"Let's see ..." Jared began to answer. "Moths eat leaves. Birds eat moths. Without birds to carry seeds from trees and berry bushes, we wouldn't have any fruit or vegetables. Those moths are an important part of the interdependent web." Focusing on this knowledge, they walked, carefully, along the invisible line, listening to the moth's story of being born, of eating leaves and getting fat, of the surprising urge to spin a cocoon, of the amazing moment when the cocoon bursts open, and the moth emerged. The moth described fluttering from bush to bush, trying to avoid predators, drinking nectar from the flowers, water from gently curving leaves.

By the time Delia and Jared reached the moth, Annie the spider had already spun the next section of web, leading them to a woodpecker, perched on a dead tree, pecking away in search of lunch.

From the woodpecker to a rabbit, from the rabbit to an owl, from the owl to a fox, from the fox to a partridge, they traveled from animal to animal, learning how the forest accommodated so many diverse forms of life, and learning how all of the animals and plants were balanced, interdependent.

They learned that bats were able to hunt at night because they used radar to locate the insects they liked to eat, and that owls had developed better night-seeing eyes instead. They learned that wolves mated for life, and ate mostly rodents. They learned and learned and learned, and in learning, they felt a feeling of gratitude and love building in their hearts.

"It's amazing!" said Jared to Annie the spider, at one point. "When something changes for one of these species, there's a ripple effect, and the whole forest changes in response, to keep the balance. I never realized how many different creatures there were!"

As the sun began to set, they came within sight of a large cave, the entrance almost completely covered by vines. "This is as far as I can take you," said Annie the spider. "That's the place where Bagranka lives. Be careful of her. She's not that fond of humans. You'll need to show her that you're a different sort than the kind we usually see around here, who see the forest as a source for free wood and food rather than the home for all these different animals."

"How will we do that?" asked Delia.

"Hopefully, it will help that you walked the web to move through the forest. Make sure that she sees that. But that's about all I can think of to do."

"Les came to see me, Delia, when you and Lazyurov had left for the day. He said I'd need to show her what's inside, what I value most. I wonder if that means the other dragons' tokens? Or, I guess it might mean my treasure box."

"That would make sense," said Delia.

"He also said we have to treat her like a person, because animals are people too. Man, we've sure learned that lesson! We have to keep our eyes on her, and we have to try not to get scared. Delia, we're almost finished, and we only have one more day to finish this quest."

"One more day or not, I wouldn't try to approach Bagranka right now," said Annie the spider. "She sleeps during the day, and hunts at night. If I were you, I'd find someplace safe and out of her way. She's grumpy when she's hungry."

"I certainly could use some rest," agreed Delia. "Thank you, Annie, for helping us find our way through the forest, and for teaching us about the interdependent web."

"It was my pleasure. Take our stories back out into the human world, will you? Maybe people will think twice before destroying our homes if they know who we are and why we need to live there."

"Perhaps," said Delia. "It can't hurt, anyway. Farewell, little friend!"

"See you around," said Jared. "It's been nice traveling with you. Say, do you speak dragon? Maybe you could translate for us with Bagranka?"

"Sorry, kiddos. Dragon is a very complex language, and I was never able to wrap my vocal cords around it. I'm afraid that from here, you're on your own. You'll manage, though. You're wiser than you think. It's really been a privilege to get to know you. Take good care," and with that, Annie headed back into the forest, pausing once to wave one of her legs at them.

"And to think, you wanted me to squash her at first!" Jared teased Delia.

"Oh, hush," said Delia. "Let's get some rest." And so they settled down for one last night's rest, safely tucked away beneath the roots of a giant cedar tree. They didn't even notice when the dark, gigantic dragon leapt silently into the air, to begin her hunt. It was not yet dawn when something woke Delia from a sound sleep. Stretching, she peered out of their shelter, and came face to face with the Violet Dragon herself!

"Jared! Jared! Wake up! The violet dragon's back!"

***Dragon Task:*** *Talk about what your family is already doing to help the environment. Pick one thing more to do as a family.*