

The Quest of the Rainbow Dragons
by the Rev. Liz Stevens

Installment six: Orange: Offer fair and kind treatment to all people
We affirm and promote justice, equity and compassion in human relations

Our Story Thus Far...

A young boy named Jared, his best friend Delia, and their odd-looking guide (a furry, fat little creature named Lou) are on a quest to fulfill “The Prophecy of the Rainbow Dragons.” The prophecy predicts a new era of peace and prosperity...but only if seven tasks are successfully completed so that “...the Rainbow Dragons fly again.” Jared and Delia have earned the friendship of Krasnova, the Great Red Dragon, and so completed the first task. They are on their way, now, to attempt the second.

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At the end of a long day of walking, Delia, Jared and Lou sat around a campfire, munching on bread, freshly caught fish, and wild berries for desert. With full bellies and tired feet, they rested companionably close to the warmth of the fire.

“So, Lou,” asked Delia, “Where are we going next?”

“Jared?” said Lou, expectantly.

Jared closed his eyes and brought to mind the page of the prophecy that described the second task. “Travel to the land of dreams and face the Mirror of Justice. If wrong is right and right is wrong, the passage to the waking world will hold your weight.”

“But what does it mean?” asked Delia, looking baffled. “Where is the land of dreams? I’ve certainly never heard of it.”

“Well, Lady Marita, the sorceress who studied the prophecy most carefully, thought she might have found a clue in an old fairy tale,” said Jared. “It went something like this. Once upon a time, an apprentice blacksmith who had a cruel and abusive master had a dream that showed a peaceful kingdom high in the mountains where all people were treated fairly. He hated his life and he hated his master, and so he ran away one night in hopes of finding this beautiful place. Along the way, he saw many people whose lives were even worse and more miserable than his had been. Many of them pleaded for his help, and asked if they could go with him when they heard about his dream.”

“He always said no, thinking either that there might not be space for everyone in the kingdom, or that extra people would slow him down, or that their struggles weren’t any business of his. But when he arrived at the gates of the kingdom, high in the clouds, the gatekeeper had him step over to where a magical mirror stood. In it, he saw the faces of all the people he had ignored and left behind. Their pain weighed heavy on his heart, and

his feet began to sink further and further into the clouds, until he fell through and plummeted to his death.”

“What a sad story!” said Delia. “So maybe we’re supposed to go on that same journey? But how do we know which way to go? I haven’t seen the way in my dreams. Have you?”

“No,” said Jared. The two children looked at one another, thinking hard.

Lou, meanwhile, began to chuckle. “What’s a guide for, then? Come on. It’s a long way to the Cloud Kingdom.”

And so they traveled for many days, continuing to stay with friends or camping out in the forest at night. They left the land where people spoke their language, and entered into stranger and stranger places, where people looked, spoke, and acted quite differently. Lou acted as translator, and still they were able to find sanctuary with people of good heart.

But after nearly a month of hard travel, they came to a place that made them very nervous. Even Lou seemed on edge. The people they saw were desperately poor, and horribly frightened. No one dared be seen speaking to the strange children and their even stranger guide. When they entered towns, people would run away and hide, peeking out at them through the windows but refusing to answer the doors.

“Why are these people so frightened, Lou?” asked Delia. “Surely they can see that we mean no harm.”

“It’s not us they’re frightened of,” answered Lou. “The lord here is one of the meanest and most greedy around. He’s made it illegal to have guests, or to celebrate as a family, or even to smile. They’re not allowed any fun or frivolity. Bands of evil mercenaries patrol constantly and force the people to work all the time. They’re allowed to eat, drink and rest only enough to keep them moving, and punished cruelly if they slack off or do anything for their own benefit rather than their lord’s.”

“That’s horrible!” said Jared. “We have to do something!”

“Odds are, if you tried, you’d be arrested and forced into service like the rest of them,” said Lou blandly.

“What can we do?” asked Delia. “We’re only children. We couldn’t hope to stand up to trained mercenaries and win.”

“Hope!” said Jared. “That’s exactly it. We can’t fight, but hope always makes a difference. We can give the people hope, and I think I know how. It’ll make it easier for them to bear their burden if they know that we’re trying to change things, and if they see

the powerful magic we're working with. Lou, I need to speak to these folks. Do you know their language?"

"I do."

"Well, then, would you translate for me, in as loud a voice as you can?"

"Sure thing."

"People of this land, we pass through your village on a great quest, foretold in a prophecy, that will restore peace and kindness to the world. Our tasks are many, and our journey is long, but I promise you, the quest is real and we will see it through! The day is coming when you'll no longer be subject to brutality, when you'll be able to care for your family rather than serving the Lord's greed. The quest is real, and as proof, I show you the Pearl of Wisdom."

Jared untied the pouch at his waist and lifted the pearl high. At once, the beautiful music began to pour forth, a stronger and more dramatic than Jared had heard before. It seemed to sing not just of peace, but of justice, and strength. One by one, the people began to leave their homes and enter into the square, slack jawed with awe, and unused to the happy feelings the song put into their hearts.

The three travelers stood there as long as they dared, with Jared holding the pearl high. At last he said, "Before the year is up, if we are successful, a new era of peace and prosperity...and justice...will come to the land. I promise you, I will remember you and your plight if ever our courage begins to fail us. We must go, but keep hope alive in your hearts."

With that, he returned the pearl to its pouch, and he, Delia and Lou began to move through the village, grasping the hands of the people as they passed. They had just about reached the edge of the village when they heard thundering hoofs and loud shouts. A large party of mercenaries was bearing down on them, swords at the ready.

Lou sighed. "Well, you did a good thing back there, but I hope it was worth it. We're in a heap of trouble, now." Sure enough, the three travelers were quickly bound, thrown over the backs of horses, and carried off to the dark castle of Lord Benedict the Brutal.

Set on their feet in front of the evil lord himself, Jared, Delia and Lou all had pounding hearts and dry mouths. Lou continued to translate for the children under his breath.

"The captain of the mercenaries just told the lord that he captured trespassers who were inciting the peasants to riot. Inciting to riot, indeed! The lord says to throw us in the dungeon. The torturer will soften us up, and then we'll be put to work. Oh, my."

And with that, Lou did his disappearing act again, fading away to nothing while the ropes that bound him fell to the floor. The mercenaries were caught by surprise, but eventually

got a hold of themselves, realized that the children weren't capable of the same, and apparently decided to stick to the torture plan. Abandoned, unable to understand what was happening, and terrified beyond all belief, Jared and Delia were dragged down a steep and slippery set of stone stairs into a room only partially illuminated by a couple of foul smelling torches.

"I'm still with you, kiddo," Jared heard a voice in his ear. "This is a tight spot, no doubt about it, but we'll get through. Reassure Delia, now. She's scared as can be."

"Delia," whispered Jared, "It's going to be all right. I think...somehow...that Lou's still nearby. He says he can get us out of this mess. Be ready for anything."

"Oh, Jared, I'm not sure I can be brave just now. But I'll try. This place is awful."

"It sure is."

Jared and Delia were dragged over to a cold, slimy wall, and their hands were chained above their heads and then pulled tight, so that they were standing on their tip-toes, straining to keep just a bit of distance between themselves and the wall. There was a lot of talking, none of which they understood. Then they heard huge, heavy footfalls behind them, and then the whistle of something that must be a whip coming through the air. They both braced themselves...but nothing happened. At least, nothing happened right away.

Then they felt the manacles holding their wrists pop open, and they pulled free. Turning around, they saw Lou tying a large, very ugly man up with his own whip! Surprisingly, he sat quietly and even cooperated a bit.

"What is going on?" asked Delia.

"Well, most people have at least some good still in 'em, even if it's buried deep down. I sorta reminded this guy of his. Luckily, I did my little magic act in front of the folks upstairs, so when he says that I'm a powerful sorcerer and that I stunned him so that he...and the guards there (He motioned to two guards who were carefully keeping watch. They nodded and waved)...couldn't move. 'Course they still might be in deep trouble, but Ludo, here, has a daughter just about your age, Delia, so he's not about to torture you and hand you over to be a slave."

"Anyway, if you all are ready to go..." Lou nodded to the two guards, who came over to the wall and let Jared and Delia chain them up. "We'd better get moving. There's a way out of here. It won't be pleasant, but I found a rat who'll show us the way."

"A rat?" said Delia, who wasn't fond of them.

"Who else would be able to navigate through the sewers, kiddo? Don't worry, she's a nice enough little beast."

A few hours later, smelly, cold, wet, and exhausted, the travelers emerged on the far side of the city and scampered into the adjacent woods. They found a pond where they could wash off the worst of the smell, built a small fire, and curled up to sleep. Lou tucked them in, and then sat watch all night long.

Dragon Task: Tell someone about a cause or hopeful event that you feel strongly about. Speak up for what you believe in.