

The Dragon's Orb

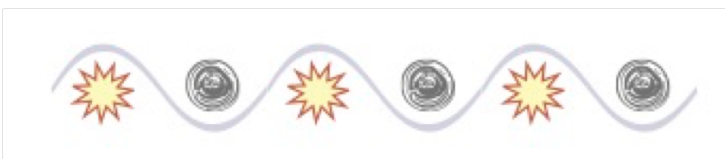


Entry 1

A braided moment July 5 ~ 3pm



- ◆ Raye looks to the sky
- ◆ Garik is en route
- ◆ Josephine gets a messenger



◆ Raye looks to the sky



Raye

closed her book, rolled onto her back, and put the smooth light soles of her bare black feet up on the trunk of the tree. She gazed through the branches, toward the sky, that color of blue... the spaciousness.

The stars are out there even though I can't see them, she thought.

Her fingers combed blades of grass at her side.

Maybe even more stars than there are leaves in this tree.

Ever since she had seen Jupiter and its moons through a telescope, Raye could not stop wondering about the sky, space, the solar system, the universe, and life on Earth.

The leaves fluttered gently in the breeze creating a dance of greens and blues.

*So many stars. So many leaves. So many people.
What makes one stand out among the rest?
Does anything?*

Raye pulled her phone from her pocket and took a picture.



Sometimes the photos were for herself. Other times she shared them. Sometimes it felt to her like the photos framed themselves before her eyes and she just had to take a picture. Other times, she snapped photos on a whim. She loved to capture beauty or ugliness, images with feeling or meaning. The images seemed to speak better than words. When she saw a special image while she didn't have a camera handy, she had a little ritual of pretending to click the shot - capturing it in her mind's eye, then storing it away in her heart.

She looked at the image of the tree on the screen of her phone.

This picture will remind me of how much I love this tree... and looking up... and the sky.

Then she noticed the time: 3:17

Oh jeez. Better get to my chores before Mom gets home.

Raye slid the phone back into her pocket, grabbed her book, hopped to her feet, and twirled toward the door sending the multitude of thin braids flying behind her head like a flowing black mane.

"C'mon Luna," she called as she deftly dodged a heap of dog poop. The fluffy little white dog bounded after her.

◆ Garik is en route



Garik's

head fell forward with a jerk, waking him to the sound of screeching tires.

He sat himself up and squinted his eyes. He was disoriented but everything seemed fine. His mom was still driving. The car was on the road.

For an instant he was still faintly inside the dream he had been having.

“Crazy driver!” exclaimed Patrice banging her hand against the top of the steering wheel. Her heart pounded in her chest as the scene of the near-accident disappeared in the rear-view mirror.

Garik turned to look out the side window.

Sure hope she doesn't start crying, he thought.

His thick auburn hair was flattened and a pink line dented his freckled cheek on one side from sleeping

against the car door. He touched the outside of his pocket and felt the edge of the card.

Patrice spoke again, this time in a calmer voice, "Hmmm. I think I may have missed our turnoff... I'm going to stop at this gas station and figure out where we are."

Garik jolted up in his seat.

Where's my phone?

His hands searched. He knew it was important he keep track of the new valuable. He liked the new freedom and responsibility, but what he liked most of all were the games.

His body relaxed as his fingers grasped the device down the crack beside his seat. As quickly as his fingers could bring the phone front and center, he was playing again. He paused for an instant as he got a flash of his dream:

I was flying in circles.

Patrice pulled into the gas station and stopped the car next to a pump. "Will you please make yourself useful by cleaning the windshield?" She stepped out of the tightly packed car without waiting for an answer.

"Oh joy, I get to clean bug guts."

He was pretty sure his mother had not heard his words.

“Can we get something to eat? I’m starving!”

This time he made sure she could hear him.

Picking up a squeegee, Garik started washing. His 12-year-old body had a slightly gangly not-yet-comfortable-in-his-size way of moving.

“We still have some food in the cooler,” she replied.

Garik groaned.

She too had grown tired of the carrots, celery and cheese sandwiches she had packed what seemed like eons before. Her stained sweatshirt, wrinkled jeans and disheveled hair were all signs of the long hours spent behind the wheel of the car. The dark circles under her eyes, pale complexion, and economy of motion reflected a layer of fatigue predating the roadtrip by weeks.

“Well, I guess so... Here.” She handed him some money. Garik gave the windshield a final wipe, then trotted off toward the mini-mart.

As Patrice filled the gas tank, a rusty white sedan pulled up to the other side of the pump; and a heavy-

set balding man stepped out. Patrice wiped the stray hairs from her face, gave a shy smile and tried to make eye contact. "Pardon me, do you happen to know if the turn-off to County Road 52 is nearby?"

"Oh, yeah, it's down that way a spell..." The man motioned back down the road as he opened his gas cap. "just past the old beat-up barn." Clearly comfortable carrying the conversation, the man continued talking. "That barn is fixing to collapse one of these days." He pulled a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped sweat from his glistening forehead. "Doubt there's even a sign marking the road anymore. Not much down that way since the batty old lady died. I heard she and her loony sister lived to be over a hundred." He chuckled softly and stuffed the handkerchief back in his pocket. He looked into the distance.

"Nutty buncha folks back there."

Patrice thanked him and got back into the car. She sighed heavily. *"I wonder if Great-grandma Lila was the 'batty old lady' or her 'loony sister.'"* She looked up and was startled to see Garik on the passenger side of the car. *"Either way, I sure hope Garik didn't hear any of that."*

Garik opened the car door and plopped the food down onto the seat: a big bag of chips, a box of animal

crackers, and 4 candy bars.

Patrice looked at the pile and groaned.

“It’s the best I could do. I promise... There’s nothing better in there.”

She rolled her eyes, started the engine and shifted into gear.

“Can I open the chips?” asked Garik. “I’m starving.”

“Yes, you may, as long as you hand me a piece of that chocolate.”

Garik opened the chips and stuffed a handful in his mouth. Then he unwrapped the chocolate, broke off a corner and reached toward his mom. She opened her mouth, and he dropped the square on her tongue.

“Tane-gyu,” she managed.

“No problem,” he said smiling.

He had known she would want the chocolate.

◆ Josephine gets a messenger



Josephine

placed her cane against the ground bringing the swaying motion of her rocking-chair to a stop. In the same instant, the big-headed dog next to her opened his eyes and perked his ears toward the nearby tree.

A red tailed hawk settled and looked directly at Josephine.



She whispered,
“Hello, Hawk.”
Then she added,
“You appear so boldly.”
After a long pause she continued,
“Your call to attention is plain as day.”
Talons shifted slightly on the branch.

“Yes, I was starting to drift off.”

“Both the dragon and I have been a bit hazy lately.”

Josephine leaned forward.

“What message...?”

Then, as suddenly as the bird had appeared, the hawk took off.



Puzzled, Josephine cocked her head to one side.

Hmm. These are troublesome times... There will be further signs.

She sat up straighter.

Best bring myself to my senses.

Josephine moved her tongue against the top of her mouth. She tasted then relaxed.

Drawing several slow attentive breaths in through her nose, she smelled dust and the sweet subtle scents of wildflowers and pine needles.

Not even the faintest whiff of dragon fumes.

The ponderosa pine trees in front of the porch were still.



Then, Josephine raised her gaze to take in the closest of the Fire Mountain caves, the openings blazoned with claw marks from past dragon turmoil.



Blackness cloaked the depths.

Hmm, not even a whisper of smoke up there.

Josephine listened intently. She heard nearby birds chirping. She could just make out the sound of water from the stream to the north.

Can't hear Fuego Mateo snoring.

Better keep my wits about me.

She knew vigilant awareness was vital with a dragon and other wild critters around.

She continued to explore her senses.

Air is cool.

Maybe I should send out an orb or two for good measure.

Just then, Josephine's empty stomach growled.

Hmm. Better find something to eat first.

She curled her scarred fingers around her walking stick exposing a maze of tan wrinkles and bumpy veins on top of her hand.

The dog got up, stretched and then shook his head vigorously flapping his ears against his head.

Josephine scooted to the front of the rocking chair and slowly conducted her body to a stooped over position, leaning into the cane.

Oh my.

Dizzy.

Oof, and stiff.

What these old bones wouldn't do for a good hot soak.

She stood still for a moment.

“What duty can be called of this old body now dear hawk?” she asked aloud though the hawk was nowhere to be seen. Then she muttered in a much softer voice, *“If something is to happen, it best happen soon.”*

Still standing, she steadied herself on the hand rail, then eased her head upward while inching her hips forward. Together these actions caused her to straighten up just a bit.

Now where was I?

Oh yeah... food.

She picked up a basket and a worn string bag.

“Shall we walk to the garden Prince?”

The dog excitedly bounded ahead, then turned and looked back.



“Nice of you to wait for me. You are a dear...
Ha, ha — Well, a dog of course but a dear dog. ”

Josephine’s long thick braid swayed across her back
as they made their way down the path together.