

Lady Garland Tames Her Dragons and Brings Peace to the Kingdom

Jane Garland

Growing Garlands (May 13, 2022)

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Lady Garland Tames Her Dragons and Brings Peace to the Kingdom is a memoir about the substantial challenges that got in the way of a woman's dreams.

Professor Jane Garland's unconventional memoir peels back layers of privilege to show the hidden traumas beneath her otherwise perfect life.

Though this self-deprecating tale bemoans the social expectations placed upon women, it begins with the recognition that Garland herself nonetheless had become a "caricature" of white women's privilege: a professor at a liberal arts college who was married to a doctor, with children in private schools. But this idyllic life was all upended by a medical emergency that left Garland's husband lying in a pool of blood on their bathroom floor.

That event, coupled with her young daughter's illness, pushed Garland toward a more reflective frame of mind. She began to invite her inner "dragons" (suppressed, painful memories) forward in an effort to better understand herself. Doing so required revisiting her roots: she grew up poor in Canada and struggled to fit in. She was abused by her peers without help from her teachers. To move forward, Garland determined that she had to reconcile herself to the career choices that she made, to the challenges of parenting a sick child, and to the toxic messes of white privilege and endemic racism.

Indeed, midtext, the book switches from considerations of Garland's personal struggles into more contextualized explorations of her place in the world. Thus, it treats her work with special education students in Charleston in broader critical terms, addressing the roles of white teachers in schools with primarily Black student bodies. Garland's work on environmental projects is similarly contextualized in discussions of what needs to be done to combat global warming. As these larger topics are tackled, Garland's dreams for the future begin to overtake her indecision and doubts, resulting in transformation.

Ultimately representing Garland's extended, honest conversation with herself, the book mines her deep periods of reflection for dimensional revelations about her family history, work life, biases, and emotional inner workings. Garland adopts a stream-of-consciousness style as she moves between her ideas, working to draw revelations from her subconscious. Slang and pop culture references help to make this ranging work more approachable. Garland's memories fold into secondary explorations, as of the complexities of the human brain, how memories are formed, and how thoughts become fixed in a person's mind. The book uses Garland's intrusive, negative self-talk as an example. At last, it wends toward the hope of emotional freedom: Garland pursues a chaos-loving, change-inspiring, world-altering "unicorn" in place of her previous, limiting "dragons."

Deploying fairy tale imagery in service of its story of self-examination, *Lady Garland Tames Her Dragons and Brings Peace to the Kingdom* is a memoir that reveals the fearsome challenges that got in the way of a woman's dreams.

JEREMIAH ROOD (September 18, 2022)

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