

Installments eleven and twelve: Yellow: Yearn to Learn (about ourselves, others, and the mystery)

*We affirm and promote acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations.*

*(NOTE: These two installments were collapsed into one due to inclement weather on 12/2.)*

*Our story thus far...*

Two normal children, Jared and Delia, are magically chosen to go on a quest to discover seven different dragons in order to bring peace to the world. Their guide is a furry little creature with big ears and a pot belly named Lou. As part of the third task, they've traveled to a remote, barren island in search of the lost kingdom of Atlantis, first stopping in Alexandria and acquiring another traveling companion: a library clerk named Polly. All together, the travelers hiked down a long sea cave to the edge of a vast, underground lake. With the help of a sea turtle, Jared has crossed the lake, and the turtle then continued on and spoke to the yellow dragon, who insisted that the entire party come to see her. Only Polly doesn't know how to swim and is afraid to cross the lake.

*Continued...*

"Hmm," said Lou. "This is a snag I hadn't expected. Give me a sec, kids." With that, he vanished, again. Delia and Jared were used to his sudden disappearances, but Polly wasn't, and she looked more frightened than ever. She let out a startled gasp and pointed as a gigantic turtle, big as a house, rose up out of the water in front of them.

The giant turtle didn't say a word. It merely sat still, looking at Delia, Jared, and Polly with unusual, luminescent eyes. The smaller turtle said, "He wants you to climb on his back. He will carry you. I will come, too, to show the way and to speak for him. He is too ancient to speak human."

The journey flashed by. The great grandfather turtle was able to keep them high above the water. Warmth radiated through his shell, giving all three of them a happy glow.

When they arrived at the far shore, they glided effortlessly down the river and coasted to a stop within sight of a vast city carved of glistening white limestone, all of it covered in lichen and glowing pale green. They climbed down from the giant turtle's shell, and he closed his eyes and fell asleep. The smaller sea turtle, however, crawled out of the water to proceed with them. They made their way slowly toward the towering buildings. Suddenly, a tremendous voice echoed through the immense cavern. "WHO GOES THERE?"

"Zheltizna, it's me again, but I brought them all this time," said the turtle.

“Oh,” said the dragon in a more normal voice. Out of the building closest to them came a dragon who looked...like a teacher. She wore round glasses on a chain around her neck, plain clothes with a slightly worn cardigan sweater, and sensible shoes.

“Which one of you is the librarian?”

“I...I was a clerk in the library of Alexandria,” stammered Polly. “Are...are you going to eat us?”

“Eat you? Yuck. Humans are too stringy, and you look like you’d taste especially...dusty. No, I want to hire you. Thank you, turtle, for bringing her to me.”

Then the dragon-librarian took hold of Polly’s arm, turned on her heel and marched off toward the biggest building. At the entrance, she stopped abruptly. “You, and you!” she shouted pointing at Jared and Delia. “Why are you still here? You are not librarians. You can go now.”

“Please, ma’am,” said Jared. “I’m afraid we’re on a quest. We can’t go until we’ve...” (he paused here for a minute, remembering the exact phrasing) “asked you the question that sets your heart free.”

“Hmph,” said Zheltizna. “I have no time for such foolishness. This girl and I, we have work to do.”

“Wait a minute!” said Polly. “I never said I’d take your job. I don’t even know you. I don’t like the way you’re treating my friends. I’m not going one step further unless you give me your word that at the end of the day, if I want to go home, you’ll let me.”

“Fair enough,” said the dragon, a little craftily. “I will show you the wonders that this library holds. If you still want to leave after I’ve shown you around, I will let you go. I give you my word.” Reassured, Polly entered the library with the dragon, leaving Jared, Delia, and the turtle behind to explore.

“Turtle,” said Delia as they walked through the deserted streets, “Do you know the story of Atlantis?”

“I do,” said the little sea turtle.

“Once, this was a busy city, filled with people who loved learning. Under the gentle watch of the yellow dragon, they studied and read and wrote and discussed and studied some more.”

“Then, one day, a young man asked a question that no one had an answer for-- ‘Why is there suffering in the world?’ The people in the city started debating. One group said that suffering existed to punish people for doing bad things. Another said that the purpose of suffering was to strengthen and test people, to help them grow. Another said

that suffering had no meaning, and that humanity ought to try to eliminate suffering altogether.”

“The groups became more and more hostile to each other. The group that believed suffering served as punishment decided that the other groups needed to be punished, and so they attacked, and a war started.”

“Zheltizna was so upset by the fighting that she used her magic to make the people invisible and silent, so that they couldn’t argue anymore. Then she swallowed the city and brought it here, under the earth. She searches for the answer to that question in every book ever written, past, present, and future, hoping that once she finds it, she can safely bring her people back.”

“I can’t imagine people getting so worked up about a question that they are willing to start a war,” said Delia.

“Actually,” said the turtle, “I think most wars are fought because people have different answers to questions.”

“Most wars are fought because people have different answers to the question, ‘Who should this land belong to?’ or ‘Who should be in charge?’ Religious wars are fought because people have different answers to questions about God. Often what happens when there isn’t one clear answer to a question is that people fight each other to try and prove that their answer is more right than any other.”

“Why can’t people just accept that there are different answers to the same question sometimes?” asked Jared.

“I don’t know,” said the turtle. “But the world would be a better place, I think, if someone knew the answer to YOUR question.”

Delia nodded thoughtfully. “Maybe that’s the question that will free Zheltizna’s heart.”

In their explorations, they had come full circle to the spot where the grandfather turtle still slept. They settled down to wait—but then the little turtle said “I’d like to take you to see some place special.”

He took them further downriver, through an underwater cave, to a cavern that looked as if it were made of moonbeams. Glistening, sparkling stalactites hung from the ceiling and were reflected in the water of an underground lake. Brilliant gems set into the ceiling didn’t just reflect light, they produced it...a light different than the greenish light of the lichen they had found in the sea cave on their way to Atlantis. This light was pure, and bright, and made everything look alive.

Jared found himself without any words to express his feelings. He simply reached for Delia’s hand, and the two of them sat together, holding hands, breathing in the beauty.

After quite a while, the turtle spoke again. "It is time to go. The tide has turned and the current is strong!"

They swam back and dried off. Then, mindful of their quest, Jared shifted his thoughts to Zheltizna's question. "There is no answer to 'Why is there suffering in the world,' and even if Zheltizna found one, her people would find another question to fight about."

"How about, 'What is the source of truth?'" asked Delia.

"No," said Jared. "That doesn't feel right. I'm not sure there is a single source, and so people would argue about which source is better. How about, 'How can people live in peace?'"

"There are as many opinions about that as there are about truth. Some people think the way to live in peace is to just do what you're told. Others think we'd be able to live in peace if there were no rules at all!" Delia said.

For some reason, as they talked, Jared kept thinking about the beautiful chamber they'd just visited. He remembered the way the light had played on all the different stalactites, how ripples in the water made patterns and pictures that were constantly moving and shifting.

"It's like light," he said. "Light looks different depending on the place it's shining, but it's beautiful no matter what."

"Huh?" said Delia, confused.

"People are always going to have differences of opinion. We need a question that helps people remember that things look different depending on where you stand. We need a question that teaches people to see beauty in other people's answers and in their own, that teaches there are lots of different right answers, so that no one needs to defend their answer as the only one. Maybe 'What can you learn from each other?' or 'How can you get along with each other even when you disagree?'"

Delia paused thoughtfully, then burst out "What about: 'How can we accept and love one another and all of our different ideas and opinions?'"

"Oh, I like that," said Jared. "I like it a lot."

That night, when Polly returned to the shore, she announced her decision to stay. "Zheltizna is much kinder than she seemed at first. She's been alone for a long time now. She needs someone to...well, to help her, but more than that, to care about her."

"Polly," said Delia, "We'll sure miss you, but if you feel sure this is the right thing to do, you have to trust your heart."

“Do you think...” began Jared.

“Yes?” prompted Polly.

“Do you think we could talk to Zheltizna before we leave?”

“I don’t see why not,” said Polly. Instead of calling out, she closed her eyes and concentrated. Then she opened them again. “She’s on her way.”

When the dragon arrived, they greeted one another politely. Then Delia said, “Zheltizna, the turtle told us your story, and the story of Atlantis. It is so sad.”

Zheltizna nodded in acknowledgement, but didn’t speak. Jared decided to jump in.

“We think you are searching for the answer to the wrong question, Zheltizna. You’ll never find the ‘right’ answer to ‘why is there suffering in the world.’ Even if you did, you’d never be able to get everyone to agree with you.”

“What if you looked, instead, for the answer to this question: ‘How can we accept and love one another and all of our different ideas and opinions?’ If you can find that answer, it wouldn’t matter that people had different answers to other questions.”

Zheltizna stood silent for a long time. Then she whispered, “Yes, yes, I see. I see now! Oh, I have wasted so much time!” Whirling around, she ran back into the library, calling over her shoulder, “Thank you, children! Polly, come on, I need your help now more than ever...”

Polly hugged Delia and Jared goodbye, and set off after Zheltizna. “Take care, you two. I’ll see you...when it’s all over,” she said.

Delia and Jared walked back to the water. Grandfather turtle was awake, and perhaps they imagined it, but it seemed that the massive turtle winked!

*Dragon Task:* Think about a place where people with different opinions manage to get along with each other. What makes it possible?