

The Quest of the Rainbow Dragons: Part V

Installment 17: Blue: Believe in our ideas and act on them.

We affirm and promote the right of conscience and the use of the democratic process in our congregations and in society at large.

Our story thus far...

Two ordinary children, Jared and Delia, have been attempting to fulfill an ancient prophecy called The Quest of the Rainbow Dragons. The prophecy consists of seven tasks, that, if completed successfully, will lead to a new dawn of peace and prosperity for all people. They are being helped in their quest by a furry, funny looking little guy named Lou. They are about to begin the fifth task.

Continued...

“The next task is a real doozy,” said Lou. “What do you remember about it, Jared?”

“Dis...something...I know...Disillusioned by the hypocrisy and weakness of humanity, Golubnaya, the blue dragon, has fled beyond the ends of the earth. There she dwells, waiting for those who are true to the core.”

“The chosen one and the companion...”

“That’s you and me,” interrupted Delia.

“Yes, you and me,” continued Jared. “Through trials and tribulations, must prove themselves worthy of utopia. Lou, what does utopia mean?”

“A utopia is a place where everything is perfect. Different people have different versions of utopia, but in general, there’s no fighting, no sickness or suffering, no growing old or dying. That’s it in a nutshell.”

“Thanks,” said Jared. He chewed on his lower lip, and then said, “There’s more to it, too. Temptation will be strong, but accept the invitation and the quest will fail. Shatter her dreams, break her heart, and call her back to life. Then shall the blue dragon add her might to the quest.”

“Disillusioned by the hypocrisy and weakness of humanity, Golubnaya, the blue dragon has fled beyond the ends of the earth. There she dwells, waiting for those who are true to the core. The chosen one and the companion, through trials and tribulations, must prove themselves worth of utopia. Temptation will be strong, but accept he invitation and the quest will fail. Shatter her dreams, break her heart, and call her back to life.” Jared repeated it all, smoothly this time.

“But what does it mean?” asked Delia. “To be honest, it sounds pretty horrible. I don’t want to help shatter anyone’s dreams or break their heart! Especially not if this dragon is anything like the other dragons we’ve met.”

“Don’t get ahead of yourselves! One day at a time. The first part of this quest is tricky enough. We have to go beyond the ends of the earth to find her. Frankly, I’m a little stumped on this one. I have no idea how to get you to her safely.”

Delia and Jared looked at Lou with their mouths wide open.

“Stop gaping at me. You remind me of fish.” Lou’s stomach growled loudly.

“You’re the guide!” said Jared. “It’s your job to get us to where we need to go!”

“Of course it is,” snapped Lou. “But there are rules, you know, as to what I can or can’t do. If I help you too much, this whole quest thing won’t work. In the past, I’ve been able to get you close enough so that you could meet the dragon under your own steam. But Golubnaya’s lair, well, there’s simply no safe approach. You have to walk down the Road of Good Intentions...and it’s way too dangerous for a couple of kids.”

“Can’t you come with us?” asked Delia quietly.

“Nope. The minute I set foot on that road, she’ll know I’m there, and the gig’s up.” He sighed loudly.

“Well, then,” said Jared, “No matter how dangerous it is, we’ll have to walk it.”

“You don’t understand,” said Lou. “This isn’t a normal road. If you make a single misstep...”

“If we make a misstep, what? We...die?”

“Worse,” said Lou. “You lose your soul.”

Jared swallowed hard, then said, “Lou, would it break the rules if you told me what you know about the Road of Good Intentions? Ahead of time? I’d like to prepare myself if I can.”

“Well,” said Lou, “I know a lot of very fine people who tried to walk the road. I hope some of them made it, but I suspect most didn’t, and in any event, none of them have been heard from again. Ever.”

“Still, I guess I can tell you what the stories say about the Road, and I think I know where to find it.”

“Well, then,” said Delia. “Lead on.”

They slung their packs on their backs and started walking. “The Road of Good Intentions leads to one of two places. One is utopia, and the other is hell,” said Lou.

“Hell is a real place?” asked Delia.

“No,” said Lou, “not really. Not a physical place, like London or Greece. It’s...hard to describe. Our soul is the part of us that is most connected to the world. It’s what makes it possible for us to love, and to learn, and to grow. We need our minds and our bodies to do those things, too, but it’s like...the mind and the body are tools that the soul uses to do its work of being connected. Are you with me so far?”

“I’m...not sure,” said Delia. Jared was more blunt. “Nope. You completely lost me there.”

Lou sighed. “Let me try again. Being alive, you get to meet people, and care about them. You get to see the world, the beautiful places and things, and the not-so-beautiful as well. You learn and you grow and you become somebody who matters.”

“You mean, somebody important, like a king or a sorceress or something like that?”

“No. You don’t have to be important to matter. You just have to...well, you have to love. Love is the most powerful thing in the world, and when you love, you change things. You matter. Get it?”

“I think I’m getting closer,” nodded Delia.

“Me, too,” said Jared.

“Okay. So, hell. Hell happens when you wall yourself away from people and places and other things that are beautiful and true. It’s like being trapped in a deep, dark well, all by yourself. Some people react by pulling other people down with them, hurting them and making them miserable, so that the dark place isn’t so lonely. Others just sort of...fade away.”

“So it is a place then. Hell is a well,” Jared offered tentatively.

“No...I said it’s LIKE a well. Oh...imagine what it would feel like if nobody loved you, and you didn’t love anybody. That’s hell.”

They walked in silence for a while, trying to imagine a world without love. Finally, Delia said, simply, “I can’t.”

“I...almost can,” said Jared, “but it’s really hard.”

“Well, maybe it’ll help that you’re so innocent,” said Lou. But he still sounded worried.

After two solid months of travel, some of it by boat, they arrived at a flat-topped hill that Lou called a “mesa.” From the top, they could see for miles...except that for miles, there was nothing to see but rocks and dirt.

“Well,” said Lou, “This is it. This is the End of the Earth. This is as far as I can take you. You need to go...beyond it.”

“I don’t understand,” said Jared. “Which direction do I need to go in?”

“It doesn’t really matter,” said Lou quietly. “You have to...step off.”

“WHAT!! We’ll fall! And die!” said Jared. Delia just looked scared.

“I’m sorry, kids. It takes a leap of faith. I wish...I can’t tell you how much I wish...I could do it for you, but I can’t. You’ve got to just...go.”

It got very quiet for a while. Lou shifted back and forth uncomfortably. Finally, Delia spoke. “Okay. I don’t see that we have a choice. Maybe if we close our eyes...”

“No,” said Lou. “I’m afraid you can’t even do that. You’ve got to make the leap...with your eyes wide open.”

“Figures,” said Jared. Then he turned to Delia. “Well, if I have to jump off a cliff into thin air and fall thousands of feet, I can’t think of anyone I’d rather be smashed to bits with.”

“Oh!” said Lou. “I know what I can do! I’ve got to go. Give me like...fifteen minutes. Then leap. If it doesn’t work, if you do fall, I’ll catch you.” He smiled proudly.

Jared looked at Delia and his expression said, “This guy is completely nuts.” She smiled back.

“Okay, we’ll wait,” Jared said to Lou, who promptly vanished.

“Jared,” said Delia, while they waited, “You know, strange as it is, I think I trust Lou. I don’t think he’d let us fall.”

“Delia, how on earth could he stop us? He’s half my height!”

“But remember how he changed, when he needed to carry that little boy we rescued? He got tall...I bet he could do it again.”

“You think he can change shape? You know, I’ve been wondering, you know that turtle that carried us across the water to Atlantis during the third task? It only showed up after

Lou left, and its eyes...well, they were the same sort of swirling, multicolored eyes that Lou has. Do you think he could have turned into...the turtle?"

"I don't know. I suppose it's possible. It was pretty lucky that the giant turtle showed up just when we needed something to get all three of us across that lake."

They sat down then, and had a little snack and a drink of water. Finally, Jared stood up, brushed the crumbs off his pants legs, and held out a hand to Delia. "Well, let's do this."

She grabbed hold, and he pulled her to his feet. He started to let go, but she said, "Jared, wait. Do you think...could we hold hands while we jump? It'd make me feel better."

Jared blushed a little, but said, "Sure. Why not?"

Together, they turned and faced the wasteland that stretched as far as their eyes could see. "One...two...three..." said Jared, and they began to run toward the edge of the Mesa.

Faster and faster they went, breathing hard, eyes focused on the horizon, hands clasped together. When they reached the edge they LEAPED...high into the air. For a moment, it felt as if they were flying, and then they began to fall. Plummeting toward the earth, they both screamed in terror. They looked down...underneath them, they saw...a dragon? Unlike the other dragons they'd met on their quest, this one wasn't one solid color, but many different colors, one running into the next, like a rainbow. It was rising to meet them, its powerful wings sending such powerful currents of air that they felt themselves slow down a little.

Then suddenly, they landed with a thump on a grassy meadow. The mesa, the wasteland, and the amazing rainbow colored dragon were all gone, as if they'd never existed. Here in this new place, the sun shone, the birds sang, and a cool breeze dried the fear-sweat from their faces and hands.

"I guess we made it," said Jared.

"I guess we did," answered Delia. She pointed to their left, where a cobblestone pathway stretched into the distance. "That must be the Road of Good Intentions. Shall we begin walking?"

"Let's go," said Jared.

With hearts full of hope and determination, they started on their way.

Dragon Task: Have you ever tried something new and different, that took a lot of courage...for example, singing a solo or jumping off the high dive? Who was there to support you and cheer you on? Say thank you to them.

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Our story thus far...

Two children, named Jared and Delia, are on a great quest to bring peace and prosperity to the world. The quest, described in an ancient book called The Quest of the Rainbow Dragons, consists of seven tasks. Having completed four, Jared and Delia are now attempting to complete the fifth task, which is to follow the Road of Good Intentions to the place beyond the ends of the Earth where the blue Dragon Golubnaya has created a utopia (a perfect place, with no war, suffering, sickness or death) for those who are “true to the core.” The children don’t know much about their task, but they do know that a single misstep on the Road of Good Intentions might cause them to lose their soul.

Continued...

The cobblestone road that Delia and Jared walked along went up a little hill and around a corner. As they walked ‘round the bend, they caught sight of a little village off in the distance.

Thatched huts surrounded a central square. Beyond the village proper, green, rolling meadows dotted with fluffy white sheep stretched into the distance. Delia and Jared started down the hill toward the village.

Strangely, they saw no one as they entered the town. No one peeked out a window. No one called out a greeting, or even a warning. Though there were signs hanging from some of the buildings that indicated they were shops...butcher, shoemaker, baker, even a tavern...their doors were shut, the shelves empty, no one behind the counter or sweeping the floor.

“This is very weird,” said Delia. “Where are the people?”

The road led right into the center of the square. Jared and Delia walked slowly and cautiously along, half expecting some ghost or other scary monster to jump out and say, “BOO!”

At the center of the square, the road simply ended. Jared and Delia walked to the very edge. “Now what do we do?” asked Jared.

“Hello???” called Delia. “Is anyone there?”

Suddenly, they heard a loud “pop” behind them. Whirling, they were surprised to see Olga, the head cook from Lord Sigismund’s castle...They hadn’t seen her since the day they left their home to begin this quest.

“Olga!” shouted Delia joyfully, and she began to run toward her, but as soon as her feet left the road, it was as if she’d run right smack into an invisible wall. She was so shocked, she was caught off guard and wound up falling to the ground.

“Child,” said Olga, “When the two of you ran off, you left me short handed. I’m tired down to the bone, all of the time, now. My feet hurt, my back aches, I never get enough sleep...you come home right this instant. I’ve got plenty of pots that need scrubbing.”

“Oh, Olga,” said Delia, “You have no idea how much I miss home—and I miss you! I even miss the darn pots. Jared and I have a job to do here, though, and if we don’t do it, well, things will keep getting worse and worse in the world. Can you forgive us? We’ll come home as soon as we can...”

“Taking off like you’re so high and mighty! Boy, you’ve been so full of yourself, ever since you first picked up that pearl. I bet you wouldn’t care a whit if you never saw old Olga ever again. You’re off to important adventures.”

“Don’t say that!” said Jared. “You’ve been like a second mother to me. I can’t wait to get home to tell you and our other friends all about our adventures. I miss you, Olga, and everyone else at the castle. About the only thing I DON’T miss are the pots!”

Olga winked, and then vanished, with another ‘pop’.

Next, Lady Marita, the sorceress, appeared. Tall and dignified, she held a long, bright staff, and magical power surrounded her like electricity. “The fate of the world rests on your shoulders,” she boomed out, and her voice echoed off the surrounding houses.

“You must give up everything, everyone you know, everything you do, everything you are, for the sake of the quest. Do not give up, even if you face death!”

“We are doing our best,” said Jared, a little confused. Marita didn’t sound at all like she had back at the castle. Then, she had been warm and kind. Now, she was bossy and a bit mean.

Another ‘pop’ from behind them, and whirling, Jared saw one of the forest creatures who had guarded the cave of the first dragon they had met, the Red dragon, Krasnova. Lady Marita raised her staff and began to shoot lightening bolts at the terrified reptilian forest guardian. “NO!” shouted Delia, who launched herself in between the sorceress and her intended victim.

“STOP!” shouted Jared, running toward Marita. Just like Delia, he bounced off an invisible wall and wound up sitting on the ground. He looked up at Marita, thought he saw, just for an instant, an approving gleam in her eye, and then she and the forest guardian both vanished, with another pop.

Next to appear was the cruel Lord Benedict the Brutal, who had captured the children and threatened to torture them! He looked quite helpless at the moment, though, stripped of

his chain mail, his head shaved, hands tied behind his back. Bruises covered his face, and his lip had split. He looked at them, and a trace of his normal arrogance came back. A stone arced, seemingly flying out of nowhere, to hit the man on the shoulder. He grunted in pain.

Jared's hand itched to pick up a stone himself. He remembered the downtrodden, hopeless people of the village, robbed and hurt by the man cowering helplessly only a few feet away. He remembered the two children they had helped, whose parents had been rounded up and dragged off to work in Lord Benedict's mines. But he said out loud, "No. I won't hurt you anymore than you've already been hurt. You can't cause any more trouble like that, so there's no reason to be cruel. Please," he looked around, hoping to see the person who had thrown the stone, "No more. Leave him be."

Lord Benedict vanished, and this time, a clear tone, like a bell, rang out. A deep, resonant voice announced, "You may pass."

Jared and Delia looked at the road. It was growing before their eyes, stone by stone, leading them out of the silent, abandoned village. A little confused, they talked it over and decided to keep going along the path.

Up a hill, around a corner, down a hill, and up another, and they could see in the distance, this time, a great shining city. As they entered, they saw that once again, the city was deserted. They walked along, and the road led them, this time, to a large stone building with the words, "Courthouse" written over the door.

Walking up the steps, they entered a large room with benches extending on either side of a wide central aisle. Way up in the front, they saw a man with a white wig, holding a gavel. "Come on, come on," he called them. "We haven't got all day! Up you go, into the jury box."

Nervous and a bit disoriented, they did as they were told, and then turned to look at the courthouse. One side was filled with people who all looked strange or disreputable in one way or another. Some were filthy. Some were bent over, or covered in sores. Many were thin, almost skeletal. A few were very fat. All looked trapped and miserable.

On the other side of the aisle were people dressed in clean flowing robes, each one more beautiful than the last. Men, women, and children, they were all lovely to look at, with shiny faces and warm smiles.

"Well?" boomed the man with the wig. "Who's to be allowed into this city? The best and the brightest, to my left? Or the poor and the downtrodden, the lonely, the misfits, here on my right?"

Jared whispered to Delia, "How did we get to be the one to choose who gets in and who doesn't? I don't want to choose."

“Neither do I,” Delia whispered back. “But I don’t think that we have a choice.”

“Can I know more about them?” Jared asked, and Delia nodded, also wanting more information.

“NO!” boomed the judge. “You must choose.”

Jared looked at Delia, who shrugged helplessly. Jared turned back to the judge. “We can’t choose. We don’t have enough information. But...it seems to me that everyone should at least have a chance to live here if they want to.”

“Right answer,” a bell-like voice declared, and in an instant, the courtroom vanished, and they stood on the road again. They followed it for a time, arriving after night fell at a field- and another dead end. Above their head stretched a sky that looked as soft as black velvet, dotted with more stars than they could even begin to count.

“I wonder what’s coming next,” Delia wondered aloud, even as she enjoyed the beautiful sight. The answer came as the stars began to shimmer, and then danced their way down and becoming a spiral staircase that ended just next to where Delia and Jared stood. “Are we supposed to climb it, do you think?” Delia wondered aloud.

“I have no idea,” answered Jared. “I guess we should try.” But as he headed toward the stairs, he felt the ground begin to tremble. With a loud crack, the earth split open. Delia, on the far side of the rapidly widening chasm, screamed in terror as the earth beneath her began to give way. Scrambling backward, she yelled to Jared, “Help me!”

He turned and looked at the starry staircase. It was trembling, and the lower steps were beginning to dissolve. Jared knew he had a choice to make. If he went to Delia’s rescue, he’d miss his chance to climb to the sky. But if he didn’t...

In the end, it wasn’t much of a dilemma at all. Running full tilt, he leaped across to the other side of the chasm and ran over to where Delia was hanging from the edge. Throwing himself down on his belly, he grabbed a hold of her wrists and began to wriggle backward. When they were safe, the shaking stopped, and everything was quiet again. The crack in the ground closed, and the stars returned to their normal places.

“This is really weird,” said Jared.

Exhausted, Delia answered, “You said it. Do you think we’re allowed to take a break? I really need some sleep, and food wouldn’t hurt either.”

“Of course,” said the bell-like voice. “We’ll resume the tests tomorrow. Sleep well.”

As the children turned around, looking for the source of the voice, they noticed a little hut that hadn’t been there before. Upon entering, they saw two comfortable beds, a warm

fire, and a clean kitchen table filled with hearty food. They ate their fill, and tumbled into their beds, exhausted.

Dragon Task: What do you look for in a friend? What does loyalty mean to you?

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Our story thus far...

Two children, a boy named Jared and a girl named Delia, are trying to fulfill an ancient prophecy found in a book titled The Quest of the Rainbow Dragons. They need to complete seven tasks, each involving a different dragon. Right now, they're working on the fifth task, trying to find the blue dragon, Golubnaya. They've had to jump off a cliff to arrive at the magical Road of Good Intentions, beyond the end of the world. Strange things have happened so far on this road. Golubnaya seems to be testing them to see if they are worthy of living in her utopia—a place she's created that's completely perfect.

Continued...

Jared and Delia woke up with the sun, washed up, ate the steaming hot breakfast that sat waiting for them on the table, and then headed back outside. They had taken only a few steps when they heard another “pop” sound behind them. Spinning around, they saw that the hut where they had spent the night had vanished.

Feeling a little nervous, they made their way back to the cobblestone path. “Good morning,” said Delia tentatively.

“Good morning,” the voice that had spoken the day before boomed back. Then another voice, more familiar, chimed in.

“Golubnaya, they are children, and your next set of tests are quite dangerous. Are you really prepared to hold them to the same standards as adults?” It sounded like Krasnova, the red dragon who they'd met on their very first quest!

“They knew the stakes when they began this journey. They must pass my tests to enter utopia!”

“I know. I'm just suggesting that you take it a little easy on them, my sister,” said Krasnova. “You were a child once, too...though it was so long ago you may have forgotten. I haven't. You were a real brat!”

“Krasnova!” said Golubnaya's voice indignantly. Jared and Delia couldn't keep from giggling.

“Oh, all right,” Golubnaya's voice continued. “Are you ready, children, for your next set of tests?”

“I guess so,” said Delia. “But...before we begin, may I ask why you are testing us this way?”

“Of course,” answered Golubnaya. “Like my brother and sister dragons, I once walked among human people, encouraging them to live in accord with their deeply held values. I believed that once people knew the right thing to do, they should and would do it! Only it didn’t work out that way. Over and over again, I watched people say one thing, and act another. It broke my heart.”

“So I left the world of humans, and came here, using my magic to create a place outside of time and space where those who are worthy can live. I only allow into my utopia people who always, without fail, do the right thing.”

“How many people live there, then?” asked Delia.

“Sadly,” said Golubnaya, “At the moment, none. A few have passed my tests and lived there for a while, but they always do...something wrong. They make mistakes. They forget things. They have days where they’re lazy or distracted. Frankly, over the years, I’ve become convinced that no one will ever be good enough to deserve the beautiful place I’ve created.”

“Actually, having you children try to get in...well, I’m hoping again, for the first time in a long time. You are young, so maybe I can teach you properly, train you to be perfect.”

Delia swallowed hard. “With all due respect, Golubnaya, I’m not sure I would want to live in a place where I had to be perfect. I’d be so scared, I wouldn’t have any fun.”

“What?” asked the dragon.

“I have to agree with Delia,” said Jared. “Besides,” he continued, “We’re not really here because we want to live in your utopia. We’re here on a quest, hoping to bring peace and prosperity back to the real world, the world you left.”

“Oh,” said Golubnaya, clearly disappointed. “Are you sure you don’t want to live in a place where everything is perfect? Where no one suffers or gets sick or is mean or angry? It’s really quite lovely, you’ll see. How about I show you around? Maybe you’ll change your mind?”

Well, this sounded like a great idea to Delia and Jared. Anything but more strange, scary tests! “Okay,” said Delia. “Show us around.”

“Wonderful!” said Golubnaya. She appeared before them with a ‘pop’, a sweet looking woman wearing a blue dress and a crisp white apron. Her gray hair was pulled back into a tidy bun, and her cheeks were round and rosy. Her blue eyes sparkled, and she would have looked like a friendly and warm person, except that her lips were pursed tight, as if she’d just eaten something sour, and her hands were clasped primly together, rather than extended in greeting.

“Let’s go back to the city,” and with another ‘pop’ their surroundings changed. Tall, beautiful building surrounded them, made of gleaming white marble, with fountains and trees out front and lots of windows.

“If you like music,” and Delia and Jared both nodded, “all you have to do is call it out, and it is played, perfectly, for you. Watch! I would like to hear Beethoven’s fifth symphony.” Immediately, they were surrounded by the booming chords...bah-da-dum-DAH...

“Or perhaps you’d prefer the theater?” with another pop, the music stopped and their surroundings changed to resemble a darkened theater, with three soft, red, plush seats set just above the stage, less than six feet away. “Take a seat!” said Golubnaya, and then she clapped her hands and performers appeared on stage. They remembered every line, every cue, every stage direction. They made no mistakes, but moved flawlessly through a scene from a play by William Shakespeare. Delia and Jared watched with their mouths open. When the scene was over, the players simply vanished, leaving Delia and Jared clapping awkwardly for an empty stage.

“Are you hungry? The best food in the world is yours for the taking, perfectly prepared. All you have to do is name what you want. For example, ask for a slice of chocolate cake. Go on! Ask!”

“Okay,” said Jared. “May I please have a slice of chocolate cake?”

Two thick slices of gooey chocolate cake, on small white plates, complete with forks and napkins, appeared in Jared and Delia’s hands. They each took a bite, and sure enough, it tasted wonderful.

“When you tire of the city, you can go to the country simply by saying you’d like to go to the country!” With another pop, the walls of the theater vanished and they were back in the grassy meadow. “Or, if you’d prefer village life,” and pop, they were in the village.

Jared and Delia felt confused and overwhelmed. Their heads were spinning! When you’re used to your surroundings staying pretty solid, it’d quite disconcerting to have things pop in and out of existence around you.

Delia placed her plate of cake on the ground, where it promptly vanished. “Yes, I see, it’s all quite lovely, but Golubnaya, the people we see seem to vanish with a ‘pop’ before our eyes. And...I hate to say it, but it’s kind of creepy, how everything is perfect but also completely deserted. I’m also wondering what would happen to the rest of the world while we were here? Would the Quest we are on fail? And what about my friends and family? How will I know what’s happened to the people I care about? Can I write letters and things?”

“Well,” said Golubnaya, “No. It didn’t occur to me that anyone might want to have contact with the outside world. It’s so messy, and unpleasant. And dangerous! I’ve seen

some of what happens up there...robbers, and bullies, and sneaky murderers even. It's simply horrible. And wars! Don't even get me started. Oh, no, if we let anything happening on the outside into this utopia, we'd be worried, and scared. Here it's safe, and peaceful, but only because I don't let anything bad come in."

"Here in my utopia, no one ever says or does anything hurtful! Nothing ever causes you pain, or even discomfort. Anything you want, anything your heart desires, I can make happen. If you're lonely, I'll magic you up some friends, and they'll be perfect friends, always happy and kind and fun to be with."

"Would they be like the actors?" asked Delia. "Because it felt like they were...I don't know. Hollow, somehow. They made the motions, said all the right things, but there were no...people...inside of them. It was like watching a fancy, life-sized puppet show."

Golubnaya's eyes filled with tears. "They were so pretty. None of them forgot their lines. Why wouldn't you like them? What wasn't to like? They were perfect!"

"Too perfect," said Jared. "and they didn't really see us. It's like we didn't exist to them. Part of being a friend is letting the other person know that they matter to you. Then there's the fact that they vanished at the end of the scene. Where are they now, anyway?"

"Well, they really only exist in my mind."

"They exist only in your mind? What's the difference, then, between talking to them and talking to you directly? Besides, we don't want to talk to just any old imaginary people. We want to talk to the people we love...to our families and our friends."

"That's just not possible," said Golubnaya sadly. Then, perking up a bit, she said, "I know! I could use my magic to make it seem as if your friends and family were here, too."

"Yes," said Jared, "But it's not really them, is it?"

"Not...exactly," said Golubnaya. "It would look just like them, though."

"Would they...vanish...like the other people we've seen here?"

"Yes, when you don't want them anymore. They'll be here, they'll say just what you want them to say...or what I want them to say. Then they'll go away when you don't need them anymore. They'll be perfect."

"That's just it," said Delia. "The people we love aren't perfect. It wouldn't feel like them. Sometimes what makes a person less than perfect is what makes them interesting, even what makes them lovable. So...if it were up to me, I don't think I want to stay here in utopia, though it's very nice, and so are you." She smiled at Golubnaya, and then looked at Jared with a question in her eyes.

“No, me neither. I’m sorry Golubnaya,” he agreed.

At first, Golubnaya looked sad, but then she looked at them again, and they could see a growing anger in her eyes. Though she still looked like a sweet little old lady, the voice that came out of her mouth sounded huge and terrible.

“THEN YOU HAVE FAILED, AND YOUR FATE IS SEALED. YOU WILL NOT FIND YOUR WAY TO UTOPIA, NOR SHALL YOU RETURN TO YOUR LIVES.”

With another ‘pop’ (and oh, how Jared and Delia were coming to really dislike that sound) everything went dark.

“Delia?” asked Jared. He got no response. He couldn’t see or hear or smell or taste anything. Only darkness.

“Jared?” asked Delia. She, too, was trapped in a dark place, separated from her friend by Golubnaya’s magic.

In their separate silent cells, both Jared and Delia began to cry.

Dragon Task: List some of your favorite people. Think of the things you like about them. Then think about the things they’ve done that you haven’t liked as much. Is there such a thing as a perfect person? A perfect friend?

Installment 20: Blue: Believe in our ideas and act on them.

We affirm and promote the right of conscience and the use of the democratic process in our congregations and in society at large.

Our story thus far...

Two ordinary children, Jared and Delia, are on a quest to bring peace and prosperity to the world. Helped by a funny, furry little guy named Lou, they are attempting to complete seven tasks described in a book called The Quest of the Rainbow Dragons. They are in the middle of the fifth task. After jumping off a mesa at the end of the world, they found themselves on the magical “Road of Good Intentions,” a strange, unsettling place created by the blue dragon, Golubnaya. They were subjected to a series of tests, which they passed, but then they decided in a conversation with Golubnaya that they didn’t want to enter her utopia, the place she’d created where everything was perfect. Hurt and angry, Golubnaya has used her magic against them, imprisoning them separately in a place where they can’t see, hear, taste, smell, or touch anything.

Continued...

After a while, both Delia and Jared stopped crying. They had both begged Golubnaya to let them free, to give them another chance, but the blue dragon hadn’t even responded. Suspended in this dark place, they had no choice but to let go of hope.

Neither of them knew how long their imprisonment had lasted. They had no way of measuring time. It might have been years, or it might have been only a few moments when they found themselves released, standing on the rock-strewn ground at the foot of the mesa.

They sat, curled up with their knees below their chins, in the shadow of a large boulder. After a few minutes, Jared finally forced himself to speak. “That was horrible.”

“Oh, yes. The worst. I think that must have been hell,” said Delia. “I pray we never have to go back.”

“Delia, what do you think we’re supposed to do next? Should we just wait here for Lou? Should we try to find the dragon?”

“I don’t know, Jared. I don’t know.”

They sat quietly for just a moment more. Then, a beautiful moth with pearly, iridescent wings appeared nearby. Inexplicably, just seeing it, so lovely, so light, they began to feel better.

The moth fluttered around them a bit, and then landed, gently, first on Delia’s hand, and then on Jared’s shoulder. With its touch came a sense of peace and the beginnings of happiness.

As their hearts began to lighten and their faces began to brighten with new smiles, the moth danced in front of them, away, and then back, away, and then back.

“Jared,” said Delia, “I think this lovely moth wants us...to follow it. Shall we try?”

Because he didn't want to lose this new feeling, this good feeling that he had been missing so very much during his time in the darkness, Jared nodded, and the two children began to follow the moth. Surprisingly, it led them back up the side of the mesa. When they arrived at the top, they understood why.

Curled up, looking almost like a giant statue, the blue dragon, Golubnaya, lay looking at the sky. Unlike her human form, her true dragon form was huge, and beautiful, and somehow very, very sad.

“Golubnaya? Is that you?” asked Delia. The dragon didn't respond, didn't so much as sigh or turn her head. She stayed completely still. Jared and Delia walked around her gigantic body to the place where her head loomed over them, her eyes fixed on a distant point, far away.

“Golubnaya?” asked Jared. Again, no response.

The moth which had led them up the mesa flitted around the great dragon's head...and then, gently, landed RIGHT on the tip of her nose. Golubnaya twitched her nose, once, and then AAAH-CHOO! she sneezed, sending the moth fluttering away into the distance.

A single tear drop, made out of a blue sapphire, fell from the dragon's huge, blue eyes.

“Golubnaya, please don't cry,” said Delia, touching an enormous claw gently. It was the only part of the dragon she could reach. “Tell us, what is wrong? Please, can we help you somehow?”

“Oh, children, you already have. More than you know. But now, I must make amends for my mistakes, and no one can help me. I have decided to punish myself as I wrongly punished you. I have constructed a prison, here in my own mind, where I cannot see, hear, touch, or taste. Only...I felt something, just now, on my nose. And...I'm talking to you? And you hear me?”

“Yes,” said Jared. “We certainly do,” and fearing that she would not allow them to continue talking for long, Jared jumped right in. “Golubnaya, I don't think imprisoning yourself is the right way to make amends. What you did was horrible, and wrong, but it's wrong even when you do it to yourself. Surely, with all your magic, you can find better ways to make it up to us.”

“Like what?” the dragon asked.

Delia chimed in then, saying, “You could start by apologizing. I know I’d feel a lot better if you said you were sorry.”

“Oh, child, of course I am sorry!” and another sapphire tear fell at their feet. Golubnaya’s head bent, just a bit, and they could see her eyes, brimming with even more tears.

“Golubnaya, if you don’t mind my asking, what made you see that what you were doing was wrong?” asked Jared.

“After I banished the two of you, I just felt so...lonely, and hopeless, and sad. I thought about what you had said, about how sometimes the things that made your friends imperfect also made them lovable. I remembered the way you kept insisting that my illusions were not the same as real people, the way you responded so bravely and honestly to everything I threw at you, and I found myself admiring the courage you showed in refusing to even try to get into my utopia, my perfect world.”

“Do you know why I wanted everything to be perfect? Because it hurts so much. It hurts every single time I see hypocrisy in the world, every single time someone lets me down. If I can’t make a place where everything is perfect all the time, maybe I need to...to stop feeling. Then I won’t hurt so much.”

“I don’t think it works that way,” said Delia. “If you stop feeling hurt, you also stop feeling joy, and wonder, and even love. We need our feelings. Otherwise we’re not really alive.”

“I’m not sure I deserve to be really alive, after what I did,” said Golubnaya.

“It’s not something you have to deserve,” said Jared. “But feeling, well, you have to choose to let yourself feel. I think you are still looking for an easy way out, when what you need to do is to find a way to be in. In the world, in life, in the messiness that upsets you so much.”

“Yes,” said Delia. “If you want to make it up to us, and to all the people who tried to find you and find their way into utopia, is to help us now. You have a lot of magic. Use it for good!”

“I’m not sure I know how,” said Golubnaya, giving up any pretense of stillness, and beginning to pace back and forth from one end of the mesa to another. “I thought what I was doing was good.”

“In a way, it was,” said Delia. “But a utopia separate from the world doesn’t do anyone much good. Are there things you can do, ways you can help make the real world more like a utopia?”

“I suppose, perhaps,” the dragon stopped pacing, and looked into the distance again, thoughtfully.

“You could help us on our quest...”said Jared, a little bit sneaky. Golubnaya began to laugh.

“Oh, children, if you only knew how beautiful you are, inside and out! I...I missed you. Somehow, in just the brief time we spent together, you taught this crusty old heart to love again.”

“Golubnaya,” said Delia gently, “love works best if it goes both ways. Will you let us...love you, too?”

“How!?!” asked Golubnaya passionately, and this time, her head did turn, fully, to face the children. “How could you possibly love me, after I trapped you that way, just for being honest? How could you possibly...forgive...me?”

“How could we not?” asked Jared, simply.

And the dragon, the great blue dragon bowed down, and laid her head at the feet of these two ordinary children, saying, “Then of course, I will help you, and I will love you, and I will let you...teach me...how to do good again, in the real world rather than in my own mind. Here is my token, for you to carry always.”

When she lifted her head, a single sapphire, in the shape of a tear drop, rested on the ground at Jared’s feet. Full of amazement, he picked it up reverently and said, “Thank you.”

He and Delia walked over to Golubnaya and rested their hands on her head for just a moment. Suddenly, they heard the sound of flapping wings, and felt a strong breeze almost sweeping them off their feet. Turning, they saw Yantarov, the amber dragon, flying toward the mesa. He landed with a thump, to the left of Golubnaya.

“Sister,” he said, gently touching Golubnaya with his snout. “Children,” he added, nodding in their direction.

“Hello, Yantarov,” said Jared, a little nervous. The piece of amber he still wore around his neck felt suddenly warm, almost to the point of burning his skin.

In his first encounter with Yantarov, the amber dragon, Jared had seen in the Mirror of Justice the ways in which he had fallen short, the ways in which he had been less than fair and kind to the people he knew. Yantarov had almost let him fall through the clouds to his death! At the last minute, he had been given a chance to prove himself, and Yantarov had insisted he would watch from a distance while they continued on their quest.

Perhaps he had come, now, because he thought they should have allowed Golubnaya to punish herself! Would it have been fairer? Did crime need a punishment? Was that what justice was about?

The amber dragon spoke: “As my younger sister bows to you, children, so, then, do I.” He, too, lowered his great head in front of Delia and Jared.

“You have shown yourself time and again to be kind, and merciful, and to have more wisdom than I would expect in one so young. You have heeded the cries of justice, and tempered your actions with mercy. You have taught me, just as you have taught my sister, and I have decided. When you call, I will come.”

A sense of triumph bloomed in Jared and Delia’s hearts. They looked at one another and smiled.

“Now, sister, let us fly together, back into the world. Much has changed during your long absence, and nothing would please me more than to show you around.”

“Thank you, Yantarov. If Delia and Jared think it’s okay?”

“We think it’s perfect,” said Jared with a grin. “As long as you come when we call, when the time is right.”

“We will, for sure!” said Golubnaya. Yantarov nodded his agreement. Then the two dragons launched themselves into the air, and trumpeting their farewells, flew off into the distance.

Delia and Jared sat down once more, wondering what to do now. “Nice job,” said a familiar voice behind them. They turned to see Lou, already starting on their dinner. “Very nice job, indeed.”

Dragon Task: Think about a time when a friend has done something to hurt you, either by accident or on purpose. How did you respond? What do you think the best way to respond would have been?