

# EAGLET'S SOJOURN

[Tarot card: Judgment]

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The youngest eaglet and his siblings pecked at each other. They were hungry and cranky. How the youngest eaglet longed for the independence that would get him away from his bigger brothers and sisters who ate most of the food. He could hardly wait to hunt for his own food and eat until he was satisfied. However, he had a little growing to do before his wings would be strong enough to fly. Spring, his father promised.

When his mother flung the pieces of fish at the eaglets' hungry beaks, they fought mercilessly for the biggest and best chunks. The youngest eaglet struggled to eat enough to satisfy his hunger. He squawked and crowed his discomfort at his mother and his siblings, but to no avail.

The youngest eaglet's father taught the eaglet and his siblings about the eagles' system of survival. He explained how to confront the unpredictable, such as earthquakes, forest fires, and changes in the weather. The youngest eaglet's mother taught them about the origins of eagle consciousness:

*At one time, all living things understood their interconnectedness and how they fit in the greater scheme. Species by species, generation after generation, this understanding slowly diminished until each species experienced the half-death. The half-death meant losing the ability to communicate and connect outside one's own species. After a species emerged from the grief of the half-death, it sought out new ways of communicating and connecting with*

*the other living things. We have learned to respect and accept one another, even the ones we eat.*

He'd heard it a thousand times before. He and his siblings grew impatient with the lesson until his mother squawked. Mother eagle continued:

*Humans underwent not only the half-death, but a secondary half-death. I learned this from a human who lived in the wood when I was an eaglet. Direct communication was impossible, but his dreams told me a great deal about humans. His dreams told me how the half-death of humans had confused all the other species because in their half-death, humans became conscious. From the little I understand, I figured this consciousness is a kind of self-awareness -- not like I am aware I am hungry -- but something else we cannot understand because we are eagles and therefore, don't need to understand. However, the humans' secondary half-death also damaged their empathic understanding with one another within their species. Humans are complicated and worth avoiding.*

The eaglets stopped the lesson with their squawking protests. How could a species ignore the interconnectedness of all living things and fail to see the importance of the greater scheme? How could they co-exist with other species? Mother eagle continued:

*I only know what the human's dream told me. As eagles, we know each other's minds. Humans don't. Or maybe they forgot. Anything else I learned from the human's dreams was beyond my comprehension. Avoid them, young ones.*

This story made the youngest eaglet sad, each time his mother told it.

Spring finally arrived. Mother and father eagle agreed it was time to teach the excited eaglets to fly. By this time, the youngest eaglet was hungry and irritated by his siblings and sick of the lessons of his parents. He was tempted to teach himself to fly, but he was an eagle. Therefore, he followed the lead of his parents.

Despite his frail body compared to those of his siblings, the youngest eaglet had an easier time taking to the air. With each day he got braver and braver as he dared himself into riskier situations. His cocky attitude did not go over well. One day, his smugness and games of one-upmanship got to be too much for his siblings and they pushed the youngest eaglet out of the nest. Yes, he could fly, but he was so astonished by his predicament he forgot to flap his wings. He fell on his head with a thump in a lightly cushioned pile of pine needles.

Rising, he looked over his body for bruises. Looked? Hadn't he always sensed if something was wrong? He felt all right except for the dull aching in his head. How stupid of me, he thought. Thought? What was that? Why was he thinking? How did he know how? Why was he asking questions when he had always simply known. Or had he? Why would his brothers and sisters push him out of the nest? Why didn't he just fly back and peck at them his rage? Would his mother get mad at him if he did? Would his father? What if they punished him? What would punishment entail? What the hell was he doing? Why was he thinking, worrying, anticipating? What were these strange feelings that surged through him? He reached out to connect with his mother the way he always had, but it was like reaching into a black hole. The further he reached out the more disoriented he became. He waited for her to reach out to him, but she didn't. He

was alone -- a concept he'd never known existed, let alone experienced. He was afraid and the fear paralyzed him.

He remained frozen, shivering with fright, until he heard wings flapping overhead. A large bird landed on a branch in the pine tree above. The eaglet looked up hoping to see his mother but found he stared into the wide blinking eyes of an owl.

"Who?" asked the owl, addressing herself more than anyone else.

"Who?" repeated the eaglet, his fear overrun by curiosity. He had never met an owl before.

"Why do you ask?" the owl queried the eaglet.

"What?" he replied.

"Where?" the owl tried a different approach.

"Who?" the eaglet replied confused.

"You," whooped the owl.

"I? I think I don't know."

"Why don't you know?"

The eaglet was less afraid and more angry. "I don't think I know because I am no longer what I was. I can reflect on what I don't have which is more than what I knew I had before and even though I have forgotten how to know, I think I knew very little based on what I think now."

"I see."

"But I think that owls cannot see."

"We have limited sight, unlimited vision."

"I see."

"See what?"

The eaglet thought a moment. "That what I don't see is larger and more extraordinary than what I do see. Will I ever be able to see what I don't know?"

"What does what you don't know look like, eaglet?"

"It looks like -- like -- like the sky."

"Good, good," the owl praised. "You have vision, dear Eaglet. It may be limited at present, but if you keep looking you'll eventually see." And with that, the owl flew off.

The eaglet realized that he must have undergone some strange half-death. The lessons his parents taught him were fuzzy in his mind. This reminded him of how much he longed for contact with another eagle. He set that thought aside before it took him over. He wasn't sure what the owl meant by vision, but if could learn perhaps anything was possible. His body vibrated with excitement. "I can do anything," he exclaimed, jumping onto a large rock in preparation for flight.

"Nope, dope."

The eaglet looked but could not see from where the sound emanated. It resonated and rumbled rather than spoke. "Here, dear." The eaglet looked between his feet. "I'm at your feet, eaglet tweet."

"Was that you, rock?"

"How absurd. The bird heard. We've tried talking to you for years, but you're the first bird who hears."

"I didn't know rocks were alive."

"We're slow, but we grow."

"That's nothing. I can fly and I have vision."

"Careful, grandiosity colors reality and makes it blue. Your arrogance could be the end of you. You've got much to learn, my little one. So far your only claim is you survive the game. With consciousness comes a fear of death and grief over the time that came and went. It's fine to idealize, but at some point you realize, that life will come and go, for reasons you cannot know, and it's okay to say, that you've had your day."

The eaglet didn't quite understand what the rock was telling him, but he did feel fear erupt throughout his body, making his feathers quiver. Maybe a life with consciousness wouldn't be so easy. What about all the dangers out there he knew nothing about? Would he be able to protect himself? For how long? Then what?

"You're looking bleak and you're grinding your beak. I see that to begin and to end is something you now comprehend. In your reflection, you see imperfection. You're regal, dear eagle, and able cope if you're not a dope. So take to the sky, so long, good bye."

"But Rock-- Rock?" The eaglet scampered all over the boulder but got no response. I wonder if rocks ever die, he pondered. Mortality. What a scary thought. Too scary to think about, so I won't. I'll build a fortress around my fear. Only then will I feel safe. Enough thinking. It's dangerous. Time to see the world.

The sky looked ominous, but the eaglet found comfort in flying through its vastness, confident that while he was afraid and lonely, all was right with the world. He headed towards the sea. He still had his eagle instincts and followed the salt scented air. It was time to learn to feed himself.

He landed atop a high tree overlooking the shore. Looking down into the vast blue, he noticed the multitudes of fish just below the surface. He dove clumsily and

came up empty. Without hesitation, he refocused and tried again. The wriggling fish hadn't a chance as the eaglet gorged. He dove and ate and dove and ate until he had enough. His belly was full for the first time, but he hungered for something he could not name.

Looking down from the tree he could barely make out the fountain of spray and the grey body diving beneath the surface. Skimming the water, the eaglet noticed a large log floating close to where the giant fish swam. He landed awkwardly on the log. He waited, rocking uncomfortably. Minutes later, the grey mass briefly surfaced, and the eaglet could see the large eye wink at him. The eaglet was so surprised he almost lost his footing. The whale surfaced again and smiled at the astonished the eaglet.

"Hiya, featherbrain. Like, you don't look old enough to flap, let alone feed your own face. What's pecking?"

"What are you?"

"What am I? Like your genetic memory sucks canal water. But that's no excuse for forgetting we exist, you brainless lump of feathers. Maybe someday you slime molds will catch up with us on the evolutionary scale. I double doubt it. You're a bird brain. Like, stupidity blows me away. Know what I mean?"

"Maybe."

The stream of water bursting from the whale's blowhole barely missed the eaglet, but he maintained his precarious balance, nonetheless.

"Ever been to the ocean before, kid?"

"No."

"What do you think?"

"It's so big. Does it drop off at the end?"

"You sure ask a lot of questions for a half-witted harpy. I always thought you eagles were tunnel-visioned narrow-minded self-involved boneheads."

"I'm the exception not the rule. The way the water hugs the land -- the way it goes as far as my eagle eye can see -- it's so vast -- so infinite -- so--"

"Relax, beaknose. I never knew eagles to have an imagination let alone the ability to think. Try this one on. It's the land that hugs the water -- not the other way around. It has to do with proportional distributions, although I imagine that's a concept way over your bald little head." The eaglet listened intently. "The earth is shaped like a sphere and--"

"A sphere? You mean it's round?"

"Impossible to imagine, eh? Check this out. See that big glowy thing in the sky? That's the sun. This humungous sphere on which we live moves around the sun, along with a bunch of other spheres. We call that a galaxy and all the different galaxies revolve around each other."

"Where does it end?"

"It doesn't."

"It doesn't?"

"It's infinite."

"I see."

"You do? Maybe you're not so stupid for a winged wacko. And I didn't think anyone besides humans could think past the end of their noses. And they don't even try to look much farther than that. Me and my cronies were just going to indulge in few



tunes. Care to harmonize? I'm sorry, I forgot about your lung limitation -- not enough hot air. Pity. Music soothes all ills."

"What's music?"

"I guess I was wrong. You are as stupid as you look. Chow, bozo bird." The whale dove under the water before the eaglet could ask any more questions. In truth, the eaglet was relieved to be by himself. The whale was mean, even if he did have some interesting things to say. The world was round. What a concept! The eaglet was anxious to leave the rocking piece of wood that floated on the water and go somewhere where he could think. He alighted on a tall tree and tried to think, but his brain ached.

"Nice birdy birdy, nice birdy birdy." The eaglet looked around but could not place the strange voice. It seemed to speak in the wind. "Sweetie, tweetie, sweetie tweetie."

"Hello," the eaglet called, "Where are you?"

"Guess, tweetie, sweetie, wordy birdy. I'll help you figure it out. It's not every day I meet a bird who is capable of the important things I have to say. Now. Who have you already met?"

"I've met owl, rock and whale."

"Avian, mineral and mammal."

"No way. Bird, rock and fish."

"All right, bird rock and-- how long was your 'fish' out of water speaking to tweetie birdy face? Could gills manage such a feat?"

"A mammal in water? Amazing. That's why they have a blow hole."

"And that's how they can sing."

"Sing. What's that?"

"Never mind. Now. Given your story follows something resembling although not quite approaching logic, and given that you have talked to: a) another bird -- an owl; b) a compact collection of minerals -- a rock; and c) a water bound mammal -- a whale; what other life form would you logically think is left for you to learn from?"

"An elephant?"

"Up here?"

"A fish?"

"Fish don't talk, silly eaglet."

"A spider?"

"Leave insects out of this."

"Why?"

"They bug me. Get it?"

"No."

"I guess humor is still beyond an eaglet. Now. Tell me who I must be?"

"A worm?"

"Never, ever mention those evil destructive wastes of life again, you ungrateful fowl."

"How about a squirrel?"

"You're not thinking, eaglet. You've already talked to a mammal."

"I have? Oh, yes, the fish -- I mean whale. Maybe I am as stupid as whale said. I haven't a clue who you could be. Ouch, where did this pinecone come from? Stupid tree."

"Speak for yourself. There is nothing stupid about me."

"Of course. I apologize tree. I guess I've always taken you for granted."

"You and everyone else. Now. Let's talk about what you've learned. What has each of your acquaintances taught you?"

"Owl taught me how to see what I don't know but imagine could be."

"He taught you to have vision. Go on."

"Rock taught me about mortality."

"He taught you about death. Continue."

"Whale taught me about the shape of the world. Did you know it was round?"

"Of course, Eaglet."

"And he taught me about infinity."

"Good. Now. What have you learned from me?"

"I don't know."

"Eaglet, don't shut down on me. Keep thinking."

"My brain hurts."

"If you make it hurt just a little more, the hurt will go away. In fact, you'll feel better than you've ever felt."

"Really?"

"Yes. Now think. Go over again what you've learned"

"Okay. There's what I know and what I don't know. I'm a living thing, so someday I'll die. Whatever that means. I mean, where will I go after I die?"

"Go on."

"Maybe I'll go to infinity. Not that I don't already feel small and insignificant."

"Excellent. Keep going."

"Head hurts."

"You're almost there."

"No, I'm not. I'm nowhere, I'm nothing."

"How can something be nothing. You are something, aren't you?"

"Why won't you tell me what happens to me when I die?"

"Your body will decay and break down to rejoin the earth."

"But what about the essence that is me?"

"What about it, eaglet?"

"Where will it go?"

"Where is it now?"

"Here."

"Where is here?"

"I don't know."

"Maybe that is as it should be. I don't know either. But I keep searching for an answer. We are forever searching. You have learned well. Now. It's time to give away everything you've learned."

"But it's mine and I'm going to keep it," Eaglet defended.

"That's what you think. Now. Look in the meadow and tell me what you see."

The boy sat studying a rock, turning it over in his hands. He seemed harmless enough. The boy must have sensed something, however, because at that very moment he turned his eyes to the tree where the eaglet perched. They stared at one another. Eaglet felt the connection he had only shared with his fellow eagles. Except this wasn't an eagle.

Without asking, Eaglet knew that the boy had tended the meadow for many years. The boy had kicked every stone, crushed every blossom, and had stomped through the mossy growth. Eaglet sensed the boy chased all creatures away from the meadow. Who did this boy think he was? Eaglet pondered, forgetting his thoughts were being transmitted directly to the boy. The boy threw a rock in his direction. This made Eaglet very angry.

Eaglet flew down to face this silly creature who, despite being a featherless biped with small ugly red and white bumps on his face, reminded him of his siblings. The boy communicated as much rage and loathing as Eaglet felt. Silently, and with no more than a twitch here and there, their minds transmitted and received each of their penned-up frustration until nothing but fear remained.

"I'm sorry," Eaglet feebly apologized. "I had no idea I felt those things."

"Me neither," the boy nodded almost shyly, "about me, that is. How is it we can communicate, Eaglet?"

"I'm not sure I'd classify what we just did as communicating," Eaglet assessed.

"Not before, but we are now. I've never talked to an eagle before. And in between your yelling at me, I learned a whole lot about you and about what you learned after getting bonked on the head. Whale seemed pretty cool."

Eaglet sighed. "And now I know more about humans than I ever wanted to know."

"What's that supposed to mean?" the boy challenged, pushing for round two.

"It means that your species is responsible for destroying the forests; poisoning the air, the water, the soil; killing off entire species and that doesn't even begin to address your ability to destroy every living thing a hundred times over."

"Yeah. So?"

"So? You make little or no attempt to communicate except on your terms, you refuse to recognize the interconnectedness of all living things, and you've barely begun to even try and find out how you fit into the greater scheme."

"You mean religion? I hate religion. I get it stuffed down my throat by my parents: 'Don't do that, it's a sin, Michael,' 'God is making sure you are good, Michael,' 'If you touch that part of your body you'll go to hell, Michael.' What difference does it make? I'm already living in hell."

"What are you talking about?" the incredulous Eaglet asked dumbfounded.

"Religion -- our place in the greater scheme. You know."

"I still don't see what one has to do with the other. You are the strangest beings."

"No stranger than you, Eaglet. Did you know you're on your way to extinction?"

"Not by any fault of ours, Michael."

They sat in a disturbed silence for a long time. Stars twinkled in the sky.

"I guess we fucked up," Michael lamented.

"You guess?" snapped Eaglet.

"What do you want from me?" asked Michael, anger only lightly covering the understanding he had gleaned during their silence. "It's not my fault. There's got to be a better way."

"For you, maybe," Eaglet whined. "I'm all alone."

"Me, me, me. Is that all you can think about?"

"No, but it's all I can think about right now." Eaglet did not like the strange understandings he'd come to during their silence. "I guess I'm scared."

"You guess?" mocked the boy. Their tentative truce came to an abrupt halt as the rage beneath the fear beneath the rage surfaced and they exchanged more hurtful thoughts. Without thinking, Michael picked up a small stone and flung it at Eaglet. It struck him squarely on the skull. Their connection ceased instantly. The eaglet took to the sky.

"Don't go," Michael cried, shocked at what he'd done. The eaglet squawked and flew away.

The boy sat alone. A great sadness replaced all other feelings. "I never got a chance to sing for you, Eaglet. Music is the only thing I really understand. And there's so much more I wanted to know. I meant it when I said I thought there had to be a better way."

During the darkest time of night, Michael cried until he ran out of tears. Dawn cast colorful shadows on the meadow. Creatures cautiously awoke to scavenge for breakfast. The boy did not chase them away because he knew they had as much a right to this meadow as he. He smiled to himself. The knowledge of the eaglet had built inroads into his mind -- a mind he'd previously kept buried beneath his rage. Walls of fear crumbled to reveal a new way of looking at the world. For the first time for as long as he could remember, Michael felt a sense of belonging. Yes. There was a place for him in this world.

He stood and stretched the cramps out of his muscles, luxuriating in his physicalness. His peace was disturbed by a squawking overhead. The sky was filled with eagles.

"Yes, yes, yes," he exclaimed as he danced around the meadow. He thought he recognized the eaglet and waved frantically. The eaglet swooped towards him, squawked and flew off with the others.

Michael joyfully ran for home, singing a wordless song. I belong here, he mused. I can do anything, and I will.