

EAGLE

For a young bird, watching the mature ones soar about, stroking their powerful wings, pushing mightily through the air, unchecked by neither height nor depth, made the coming glory of flight well up within until it felt as though one's breast was about to burst. The strong ones, rippling with unbounded strength, would mount the stars, if that were possible. Soon he too would cut like a sword up and down the four winds.

The freedom of flight would be exuberant and wonderful, an unending stream of sweetness and richness. From sunrise to sunset these birds commanded the airways claiming their given right to rule. This right to command and patrol the heavens was at the threshold of his own experience. The grandeur and majesty of it all was flowing through his veins. Surely as the clouds moved across the sky, as he grew he would inherit his portion of it all. For certainly he was born into the most noble of all the bird species. Those before him had graced many a kingdom as a symbol of power and might. Even the special beauty of their plumage was renown throughout the ages. Many others reached for the likeness of the quality of their stature. But very few came close. His was a rare and very special breed.

But he was still young and had much growing to do. He had flapped his wings often in the nest, especially around feeding times. Often he felt very much like leaping out from the high perch. Yet, he must wait for just the right time. The older ones knew best about such things. They told him that he would know when the time came. Certainly though, waiting became more and more difficult as the big birds could be seen moving with wonderful swiftness across the sky. The instinctive fires began a slow and growing burn within him.

The waiting had to be for a special purpose! Like a curing, maturing stage for strengthening. The wait was as a seasoning, the ripening part which passes the fruit from the green to the usable best. "There was a right time for everything", it is said. How tragic it would be to come to that time with empty hands and an empty heart and mind. But the joy and fullness of meeting the opportunity alert and quick, ready and watchful would be wonderful. Quick to respond to the call; able to seize the moment as time trumpets forth! To move out, to launch out into the blue expanse of "now" rich in wealth of purpose and reason with order and harmony prevailing.

Then, one unusually bright morning, with a sudden rush of expectation, it happened! With hardly a start, with a maternal nudge, the young bird swept down from the nest among the high cliffs. The first few moments exhilarated and filled the air with breathless excitement. He was flying and soaring so easily, so effortlessly, so freely. And with but a few strokes of his wings he climbed up above the clouds screeching with the thrill of taking this first flight. He knew that this was the beginning of something with no bounds. The day had come for him to take his place among those who ruled the skies. While flying back towards the nest, he swept over the perch he had known as his home and realized that he would never return. Now he could never and would never turn back.

So, from day to day this young bird grew mighty in flight and swift in strength. He caught his prey with ease and at will. He quickly established his roost and commanded respect even from the older ones. "There certainly was something special about this one." many seemed to be saying. For the potential of growth in strength and speed and in all endurance and stamina among eagles was apparently about to be breached. And many were in awe of his command of powerful movements. This one, they felt, would soar to new heights among all birds. He would certainly in time be lifted up as an example to generations to follow. Such was the hope and glory, the promise that this young eagle had begun to taste. Unbelievable possibilities were before him.

All this was indeed supremely the case until one day, much like any other, he was moving through a distant mountain range searching for new nesting areas while exploring new heights. He spotted some strange movements below and glided down to find out what it was. Suddenly there was a loud crack from below and a sudden tearing pain in his body. Fighting with all of his strength, he kept from crashing like a rock to the earth. Yet, he did come down very hard among a stand of tall pines, toppling roughly through the branches until he landed with a thud in the snow. He lay wounded and breathing hard, racked by the terrible pain and stunned by the unbelievable happening. The mighty, young eagle, everything good within easy reach of the huge wings and talons, insurmountable heights conquered, was down on the cold crust of the earth, dying and alone!

Throughout the rest of the day and on into the long night he remained stuck in his place, unable to move. If the scavengers didn't find him, surely he would bleed to death. The darkness brought out the stars that he had once climbed. But now, as the numbness of the fall and the injury began to settle in, he numbered his remaining breaths as few. Would he last until morning? Or would the frozen darkness claim him? All he could think of was the shock of suddenly falling from so great a height to the ground, so cold and now so final. Beyond unbelief, one word throbbed louder and louder-why!

Very early the next morning sounds, strange ones, could be heard drawing near. They were none the eagle had ever heard before. It was like no animal. Then peculiar creatures came up to him. While making all kinds of awkward sounds, they gathered around him until one began moving him. Carefully, with a buzz of excitement they picked him up and began to carry him down a mountain trail. By this time the loss of blood and the numbness had about run its course and the eagle went quietly along, eye nearly closed, unable to move.

A group of young hikers had found him and, one in particular took a special interest in him. This boy brought him to his home and fought tooth and nail along with a local vet, to keep him alive. His parents were thrilled as well about the unusual opportunity to touch nature. The boy would not give up even though it seemed the eagle had. After all, the eagle knew that without the power and strength of his wings, living had little purpose. If he couldn't soar up to the mountaintops and if he couldn't sweep down low in the hunt, screeching his commands, what good was life?

Certainly he was a waste, ruined and death would be better. An eagle that couldn't fly, no matter how large, was purposeless and useless in his own eyes.

But the young human did not think so. He spent day after day after day nursing and helping him. The boy did not give up and relentlessly did all he was able to do, feeding and caring. Every bit of his effort was spent on this one special prize eagle. Numerous

medicines, ointments and surgical bandages combined with the splints. A way was devised to force the bird to eat.

Finally, after much, much time, the enormous bird came to a point of acceptance. Though he could not fly, somehow he realized maybe something else might be in store. Maybe there was some other purpose as expressed through the care of the humans. So, he finally yielded and accepted, and began to eat on his own. Maybe in all of this strange environment, these odd events, he might find the impossible answer to the why of it all.

Soon after this, the eagle began a rapid recovery. The strength returned to his great frame. Apart from his wings being permanently damaged, he felt very strong and even seemed to be growing larger, filling out with thicker muscles and finer smooth feathers, rich and full. His plumage was dramatically flowing and he became truly grand in stature.

As the days became weeks and the weeks became months, and those added up to more than a year, the eagle continued to grow in magnificent beauty and size. Then one day something even more peculiar, something marvelous happened. Some other humans came to the house and spent time examining and stroking him. After awhile they left still excitedly making their human sounds. Within a few days the great eagle was included in a special exhibition at a local bird show.

Well, this began a series of showings as the eagle was sent from city to city, and later from nation to nation! His young handler was thrilled to see countless multitudes throng to see this great eagle and to marvel at the size, shape and beauty of it. Time after time it was the rave of the showing. Long since it had dawned on the eagle that new and different heights had truly been achieved. Even though many of the early expectations would never be realized, certainly this had overwhelmingly surpassed the greatest of those early dreams.

And, if this wasn't enough, with the years of representing his kind to so much of the world including posing for numerous famous artists, something simply unbelievable happened one autumn afternoon. While perched on a log outside his handler's home, the eagle newly embraced the sunshine as it seemed unusually bright to him and the wind unusually fresh. He was recalling the events of the last showing in a far off land. Suddenly a different warmth began to flow over him. It was startling at first until he looked at his feathers and saw them all shining with a bright, clean whiteness- every one of them gleaming uniquely. Suddenly, with a quickened surge of great power his wings moved in a swift, effortless motion and lifted him up from the earth.

A deafening screech of delight poured from his throat as he climbed at a speed he knew wasn't possible, even in his younger days. But there he was, swiftly soaring and climbing higher and higher. And now marvelously, countless other birds were joining him all clothed in the same shiny whiteness and all shrieking, screeching, chirping and singing in their own personal delight. All were rushing together out among the heavenly stars with an ever- increasing speed and beauty of flight!