

Marty's Story – February 11, 2003

The sun was setting and the layered clouds glowed eerily in soft hues of pink, purple, and red. The leaves rustled as the soft wind blew through the trees. There was an owl calling it's mate with a clear hooting sound. The man stood and admired God's creation in this scene that had occurred countless times since the beginning of time.

He thought of all the blessings he had received. All the wonderful experiences he had had. And pondered what was yet to come. The past few years had been a hectic and eventful period. He was tired but satisfied in his accomplishments and wanted to take some time to recharge his batteries and get in touch with his dreams again. He hadn't had much time over the last few months to do that.

Now he found himself alone in the mountains . . . no one else around for miles and miles. He had come here for the solitude, the beauty, and the river. The river symbolized many important things for him. The headwaters of the river began in a spring just a miles or two upstream. There the river is nothing more than a small trickle welling up from the side of a low, rocky hillside. After a short run it combines with other small rivulets to form a teaming stream cascading down the mountainside into the valley below. The sound of the water trickling, then splashing, then pouring over the rocky falls made such a beautiful sound – like the voices of angels in a hymn of joy. That, with the sound of the wind in the trees and the song of the nightingale, seemed to the man to be more beautiful than any sound he'd ever heard.

He slowly walked along the stream letting his mind wander. The flood of thought included memories of times long past, of dreams of his youth, of accomplishments and failures, and of people who he'd met along the way. It occurred to him that his life's journey was a lot like this river he was so fond of. It began slowly gaining strength and energy as it passed over the rocks of challenge and trial. It got stronger too as other streams joined together – the others who helped him along his way, who shared their talents and interests. Each bend and falls was an opportunity for new direction, a new view of the world. The river also provided nourishment for the life in and around it – like the way in which he had nurtured so many others. He wondered if he had taken advantage of all the river had to offer him.

As the sun began to set he found a clearing on the river bank to camp for the night. The air was getting cool and damp and he began to realize just how far he had hiked and how hungry he had become. He made a small fire and pitched his tent. After a plain but satisfying meal he slipped into his sleeping bag.

He fell asleep to the gentle song of the water rippling over the river stones and soon drifted into a peaceful dream. Many of the people who had influenced him during his life came to him in the dream. Each spoke of their times with him and how they were proud of how he had lived and the choices he'd made. The also spoke of the future and the challenges ahead and the great accomplishments that were yet to come.

Soon the sun began to show over the edge of the mountain and bathed the valley in light. As he looked at the daylight breaking over the ridge he saw the figure of a woman, at least he thought it was a woman. But a moment later she spread wings and took flight. He couldn't make out any details. All he could see was her outline backlit by the rays of the rising sun. She arced back and forth across the cloud streaked sky, slowly descending into his valley – he now considered the valley and the river running through it to be his. She continued to drift lower and lower. He could almost make out some of the details of her appearance. But just before he would be able to see whether she was an eagle or something more, she disappeared behind a copse of trees a short distance away.

A feeling of excitement and anxiousness came over him. He so wanted to find the spot where she landed. Perhaps the beautiful creature had something to tell him.

As a child he had heard the story told by the Indians of the Eagle Princess. She was a powerful spirit for the tribe and had the magical power to change from a beautiful maiden to a powerful eagle. Deep in his soul he wished that the legend were true and that the creature he had seen was the Eagle Princess.

The Indian legend spoke of her as having great knowledge and power. If she were real and if he could find her perhaps she would answer his questions about which path he should take and what the future held.

He thought he saw a grassy clearing over the line of trees where she appeared to land. He left his camp and followed the path toward the clearing. As he approached the clearing he stopped when he thought he heard the voice of a young girl singing. The sound was very faint and he had to listen very hard but could not understand the words. He took a few more steps and a twig snapped under his boot. The sound of the breaking twig must have been loud enough to startle the girl. The singing stopped and he froze, not making another sound, hoping he hadn't frightened the singer of the beautiful mysterious song.

The next sound he heard was like the flapping of bird's wings. He instantly broke into a run to get to the clearing as fast as he could. As he broke free from the trees into the clearing he saw a fleeting glimpse of a graceful golden eagle disappearing over the tree tops on the far side of the clearing. A rush of anger and then disappointment went through him and he let out a cry of frustration – SHIT!

He continued to look up into the small circle of sky that was visible above the trees ringing the clearing. There was no sign of the eagle or of the girl. He looked upward for a long time hoping to catch sight of the magnificent bird. A sadness came over him as he realized that he had frightened the eagle and singer away. Then he thought perhaps the girl had not gone too far – but in which direction did she go. He began to search the ground in the clearing. He saw no sign of the girl or anyone else except for some footprints of what looked like moccasins in the very center. There was no sign of a path into or out of the clearing. Beside the footprints there were marks made by the talons of the great eagle and a short distance away there were three large feathers. The man stood

in wonder and pondered what could have happened here. After a while he sat down and cried – not knowing why.

After what seemed like a long time the man stood up, picked up the three eagle feathers and slowly walked back to his camp.