



The Sagittarian Fool

To keep his mind right, a man should look toward the horizon at least once a day. This was told to me by a Sagittarian co-worker, who'd heard it from an elder with some Navajo blood in him. And it strikes me as an especially fine practice for Sagittarius: "Daily send your eyes, Sagittarius, beyond the web of your own thoughts and into that intriguing distance, the space unknown, where you are unknown... Link your heart to this unseen territory, and against that far-flung line, your present will come into perspective; your thighs will strain for adventure."

Do this practice for Sun in Sagittarius to strengthen the fires of self-will. Do it for Mercury in Sagittarius to stay free of mental brambles and give thought its proper wing. Do it for Venus in Sagittarius to remember how truly vast and open is love. Do it... I could go on, but astrology formulas make me squeamish. Especially for horizon watching. It's not about squeezing life into neat cupboards and drawers. Rather, like the best astrology, it's for keeping life wide and full of possibility.

We all need such freedom. And the zodiac is wise in this respect: it gives all births a Sagittarian house. If you haven't connected to yours lately, try the following experiment. Consider the area of life ruled by Sagittarius in your chart; there, for the next thirty days, commit to a daily horizon practice. If Sagittarius rules your fifth house, horizon-watch with children or paint what you see. If Sagittarius rules your sixth house, take your coffee breaks at a window with a distant view. If Sagittarius rules your seventh house, watch a month of sunsets with your partner. If Sagittarius... well, you get the idea. Let your inner centaur lead and your spirit will soar.

But I should warn you. Stare at the horizon too long and a curious thing starts to happen. The cares of the world settle down like silt. Soon enough, they roll into a meaningless pebble, which carelessly, inadvertently, you kick away. Your mind lifts and soars. Like a runaway birthday balloon! Up there: You see it all! You know it all! Your heart brims to overflowing. You feel so positive, so exuberant, so magnanimous, you want to share your Truth with everyone! Cue Rod Serling music. *You've just crossed over: into the deep outer reaches of the Sagittarius Zone.*

In the Zone, you'll discover that the world outside the Zone is not nearly so charmed as the one in your thoughts. Your friends, the very ones you hoped to inspire, will look at you in horror. They'll cry that you're brash and insensitive. Your centaur hooves will stumble over the insignificant details they keep throwing in your path. The arrows you shoot will scatter and keep missing their target. Out your front door, a drudgery of duties will threaten like a field of land mines, and projects that once enticed will too soon lose their luster. You push the thought away, but it keeps coming back: Maybe you're the problem after all, not the rest of the world. Could it be? With your wild ideas, are you simply a fool?

There's a short answer to that: Yes! I can say this (I do say this) because I've got Sun in Sagittarius. And I've had plenty Sagittarius-rich friends: with at least Sun, Moon or Ascendant; or even Jupiter, Mars or South Node in this sign; not to mention all those with strong 9th houses, Sagittarius' natural home. As we clippity-clop along on four legs, we are often quite boldly, quite foolishly, out of synch with the two-legged ones around us.

We can appear crude as the centaurs of classical mythology, carousers, prone to intoxication and prophesizing. Or annoying as the forest creatures in Harry Potter's world: "Never," says the gamekeeper Hagrid irritably, "try an' get a straight answer out of a centaur. Ruddy stargazers. Not interested in anythin' closer than the moon."¹

When you've got serious work to do, Sagittarians are probably not the first ones you'll call. However, call them you will, at some point. Consider where Sagittarius falls in the zodiac wheel. It's sandwiched between Scorpio and Capricorn, the two most ambitious (and grimmest) signs in the zodiac. Against that backdrop, it's easy to advance an argument about which I'm quite serious: The world dearly needs its pie-eyed, star-gazing fools. That's why I've selected Jack of the Beanstalk fame as our fairy tale poster boy for Sagittarius. To understand the necessity of fools, we should study his story.



¹ J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (New York: Scholastic Press, 1998), p. 254

Of course you can't say much for Jack's focus. He and his widowed mother are in a desperate state: their cow (their only source of income) has stopped giving milk. Jack must now go to market and sell the cow for a price good enough to bankroll some new family business. It's a straightforward mission. But as often happens in fairy tales, our hero meets a strange little man along the way. The encounter changes everything.

"Well, Jack, and where are you off to?" says the man.

"I'm going to market to sell our cow here."

"Oh, you look the proper sort of chap to sell cows," says the man; "I wonder if you know how many beans make five."

"Two in each hand and one in your mouth," says Jack, sharp as a needle.

"Right you are," says the man, "and here they are, the very beans themselves," he went on, pulling out of his pocket a number of strange-looking beans. "As you are so sharp," says he, "I don't mind doing a swap with you – your cow for these beans."

"Go along, says Jack; "wouldn't you like it?"

"Ah! You don't know what these beans are," says the man; "if you plant them overnight, by morning they grow right up to the sky."

"Really?" says Jack. "You don't say so."

"Yes, that is so, and if it doesn't turn out to be true you can have your cow back."²

² Joseph Jacobs, "Jack and the Beanstalk" in *European Fairy Tales*, compiled by Dagmar Sekorova (New York: Lothrop, Lee and Shepard Company, 1971), pp.98 – 104.

Jack isn't stupid. And he cares about his mother. But like a typical Sagittarian, he's perhaps a little naïve about others' motives and a little too intrigued by commodities like magic beans. What else happens in this encounter?

Fairy tales work, suggests psychologist Bruno Bettelheim, because they offer encouragement and guidance to a child's developing psyche. Mom sending Jack to market represents a common childhood scenario: a parent is saying "C'mon kid, it's time to grow up!" Says Bettelheim, Jack's milkless cow signals the loss of infancy, with its endless supplies of nourishment and love.³ A child must progressively break with mother-dependencies and practice venturing into the world, making do with what it realistically offers. Of course this doesn't happen overnight. It takes time to develop the initiative and daring it requires to succeed. But initially a kid has little means beyond making up fantasies; hence this story's presentation of fantastic beans leading to magical supplies.

Eventually a Capricorn kid will move beyond fantasy and set up a real lemonade stand. Leo will organize the neighborhood into a pageant (giving itself the starring role, of course). Cancer will practice the tasks of nesting and making itself secure. But Sagittarius is different. Instead of outgrowing the belief in magic solutions, it builds upon it -- proof, some would say, that Sagittarius is a perpetual child. I prefer to call it "skill in positive naivete."

Naivete is the totally unfounded expectation that good things will happen. It looks childish, but has a purpose. While cynicism protects us from foolhardiness, it also stops the action. What if Jack, focused and suspicious as Scorpio, had simply brushed the little guy off? There would have been no vine to the giant's world and its treasures. Jack and Mom

³ Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment* (New York: Vintage Books), 1977, p. 187

might have worked forever as peasants, with nary a Rolls Royce parked in their driveway.

Naivete may be a foolish state of mind, but it's also expansive and generative, much like Zeus himself, Sagittarius' ruling deity. There's an optimism in naivete that's different from hope (wishing for a particular outcome) or faith (expecting divine assistance will appear). Naivete arises from an inability to imagine the bad that can come. One is therefore open to everything.

Court an attitude of naivete in your Sagittarius house and you'll enjoy endless adventure in a world of surprise. Like a child caught by new baubles, every one a magic bean, you'll find yourself perpetually intrigued. Which is why you'll find many Sagittarians with a string of careers to their name, middle-aged and still wondering which one to settle into. Or they are the only ones in their crowd not yet married. It's not just their fear of commitment. Their legendary independence may be secondary to that inner voice which keeps whispering "Something even more exciting might be 'round the next corner..." Sagittarius burns for the quest.

"These beans," assures the little man, "will grow straight to the sky." This is where all Sagittarian quests end: at sky-god Zeus' home. Whether it's the Sag who loves foreign travel, the athlete Sag, the lawyer Sag, the publisher Sag, their real pursuit is for that unseen, boundaryless commodity, beyond our earthly atmosphere. Theirs is a quest for spirit. Always Sagittarius seeks this higher ground (even if it's just the two feet higher of its soapbox). Sag so craves the mountaintop view, it won't even bother to climb; it just flies up the trail with its mind. And so an intrigued Jack hands over the family cow. He hurries home to give his mother the great news: They have magic beans now!

"What!" says Jack's mother, "have you been such a fool, such a dolt, such an idiot, as to give away my Milky-white, the best milker in the

parish, and prime beef to boot, for a set of paltry beans? Take that! Take that! Take that! And as for your precious beans here they go out of the window. And now off with you to bed. Not a sup shall you drink, and not a bit shall you swallow this very night.”

It had to happen. As sure as Zeus has his termagant Hera, as the centaur’s human top has its horse below, spirit-loving Sagittarius cannot escape its other half: the world of form. If the man with magic beans trades in spirit, Jack’s mother brings in the sharp realities of the earthy world. Sag cannot live on spirit alone. It’s why many a wandering, youthful Sag will mate with a dour and practical partner. Or why some happy Sagittarians are hard-luck magnets. It’s just nature’s way of keeping Sag balanced and productive.

If Sagittarian archers were not half-horse, they would likely have no legs at all. Spirit needs the hooves of reality, philandering Zeus needs his nagging Hera, naivete requires a disappointed mother. It’s this combination that fertilizes spirit and ensures its productivity in the material world. After all, it’s Jack’s mother, not Jack, who makes the beanstalk grow. The more developed expression of Sag will hold both halves in one body, instead of waiting for balance in the outer world. Mutable signs bring multiple selves. In our Sagittarius house, we need at least two: a happy fool and a grounding mother.

Happy-go-lucky Jack is driven forward by his mother’s anger. But after that, the achievements are all his. The next morning, undaunted by his supperless night, he climbs. In the story, he takes three trips up and down the vine, bringing back something wonderful each time: a bag of money, a golden-egg-laying hen, a singing harp. These stolen treasures represent Jack’s emerging insight into the world of form. With the moneybag, he recognizes the need for means; with the gold-laying hen, that funds can run out and so must be regularly supplied; with the magic harp, he sees the necessity for art once survival is assured. Jack’s final act of integration is to kill the giant.

The giant represents all the worst qualities our Sagittarian nature might become. The giant is big and gullible and denies his body's instincts. Each time he smells the blood of an Englishman, his wife claims it's just a cow or a crow and he believes her, no questions asked. He's also profligate, sitting on a pile of fabulous resources and putting none of them to good use. He dreams too much, losing all his wealth while he dozes. And worst of all he climbs *down* the stalk, a move against spirit, that leads to his demise. Jack takes his earth-hard axe and chops down the vine, sending the giant plummeting to his death.

Most Sagittarians have more than one beanstalk story. The most foolishly Sagittarian thing I've ever done was become a professional astrologer. Of course many non-Sagittarians might say the same. But I entered this profession by quitting a good-paying, full-time job when I had not a single client. Looking back, I'm awed by my naivete. How this plan got past my usual practical and cautious Virgo Ascendant I'll never know. But at the time, I worried more about the ethics of what I was doing: I'd heard you were supposed to study ten years before practicing professionally and I'd only studied two. It never occurred to me to wonder how I was going to pay my bills.

On Day One of my new career I suddenly understood my situation. The world of form possessed me: I stayed in bed with a freaked-out migraine for an entire month. Then the beanstalk started to grow out my window and I began to climb. No clients showed up. But a surprising adventure unfolded. I began writing for *The Mountain Astrologer*; I laid the groundwork for my "Moonprints" report. Both are labors of love I continue to enjoy and work with years later. They were the magic harp and golden hen that I brought down from the giant's world.

As for the giant's moneybag, I got that by returning to my day job six months later, with a raise I never would have gotten had I stayed. My role changed too; soon, I discovered I liked working there. When I finally had enough clients to justify quitting my corporate job, I didn't want to.

Like Jack, I'd been a fool, and when the giant started to "Fee Fie Fo Fum," I used my wits. But the real prize in this (or any other beanstalk) story was discovering the truth.

Climb enough beanstalks in search of spirit and you'll keep finding truth at journey's end. Truth is the pot of gold beyond one's idealism or expectations. Sometimes truth glitters so brightly, getting to it is easy and exhilarating. Other times, one has to cook in it first, small and frightened as Jack, listening and hiding in the giant's oven.

A child reading Jack's story will recognize the giant's kingdom as the parent world, where kids are easily overpowered and so (like Sagittarius) must develop mental skill -- strategies of pretending, conspiring, and nimbly seizing opportunities. Adults will also recognize the giant's kingdom: It's how reality looks when you discover it's not what you thought it would be. Truth is not always pretty. Sometimes it's crude and downright dangerous, sniffing us out and like the giant, ready to eat us up. At such times we can take heart from courageous Sagittarian fools.

Jack travels up and down the vine. And so must Sagittarius. The air is thin at the top of the mountain; you can't stay there forever. If truth's home is the heights, its enduring gift is perspective. After a mountaintop view, you can return to the city with new insight and skill. Turning round this corner and down that alley, you remember how the whole looked from above. You know more now than the streets alone can tell.

A word belonging in the company of "spirit" and "truth" is "wisdom." It's what Sagittarius can't resist and what naivete inevitably invites. Mistakes, life's ups and downs, bring wisdom. After the hurts are soothed, Sag canters toward the lesson in its experience. So remember: this is why Sagittarius doesn't like planning its path. It wants to be shaped by the one that unfolds. Discovering truth in life experiences is

the ultimate lemonade recipe, mixing the sour and the sweet. Drinking deeply, Sagittarius keeps itself inspired, and inspires others in turn. It's why the world dearly loves its pie-eyed, star-gazing fools.

Whatever your chart, know that you've got the same gift behind your Sagittarian doorway, although encouraging it is not always easy. It's normal to want to make intelligent, reasonable deals; it takes a quirky naivete to trade a cow for some beans. And without the balancing act of form, an optimist is just gullible; a visionary is only a gambler; unrealistic but overly confident. There's a thin line between the adventurer and someone just restlessly reckless.

This duality makes it tricky for the parent guiding a Sagittarian child. In cautioning Sag against its weaknesses, one runs the risk of crushing its strength. The young dreamer in Sagittarius is fragile and early truths are hard: disappointments and failures can overwhelm a Sagittarius child. Many simply throw in the towel by the age of twelve (on their first Jupiter return), giving up on themselves or spirit's bright solutions. As adults these Sagittarians may still be preaching optimism and positive thinking to everyone around them, but when it comes to their own lives, you might be surprised how cynical and hopeless some Sagittarians feel.

Perhaps this occurred in your own Sagittarius house. I've heard it even happened to Jack. It's not a well-known story and may not even be true. Scholars disagree over what really happened after Jack cut that beanstalk down. Some say he got his doctorate in philosophy and taught at the university. Others claim he started a magic bean religion and became a fanatical preacher. Still others swear that he sold out. They say that when Jack's oldest son traded the Rolls for a pair of magic shoes, Jack beat him senseless.

I'm suspicious though. I'd rather think that Jack understood if you love the truth, you've got to keep wandering (metaphorically at least).

Fanatics, hypocrites, and know-it-alls have stayed in one place too long. Stand still in your Sagittarius house and the truth you know will harden to stone. Without a quest, your naivete, once so fruitful, will wither and disappear.

I do believe Jack lived happily ever after. Although I'm intrigued by rumors that Jack had a few very dark years. Some say he invested everything in a cryogenics lab, even kept his mother there after she died; a power failure destroyed it all. He left town in the deepest funk his friends had ever seen. Sometimes depression is how the body grounds spirit back into reality. But it's a hard journey. Five years later Jack returned. Was he a full-blown cynic, armored against any future risk? Happily, no. He was foolish as ever.

What happened while he wandered? What cured his despair? I've pondered this often – especially this year. At work, I found myself in an awful situation; three once-good employees, all friends, turned my workplace into a battlefield. I tried but couldn't make lemonade from it, even after the battle had ended. For months I searched in vain for some lesson. I searched for new magic beans to get me going; but no one was selling. For the first time in years, I hated my job again.

I once heard that on leaving your house each morning, you should take the first thing you see as a spiritual guide. One morning during my depression, I saw a hawk, perched in the eucalyptus tree outside my door. It swooped over my head. I watched it soar over my house, then go higher and higher, until it disappeared. I let my spirit go with it, so solitary, so free. When I got into my car I was laughing. I don't know why, but my depression had gone with the hawk. Maybe that's how it happened for Jack too. All I know is that I'm a Sagittarian fool once again. And deeply grateful for it.

