

FLIPSIDE

By Byron W. Scott

Life is a gift

What do you do with it?

Do you increase your inventory?

Add to your stress and worry?

Accumulate possessions

Along your road?

But it's so hard to climb the mountain

With such a heavy load

It will weigh you down

And wear you out

And turn you from your goal

--from the Songs from Long Road

By C. L. Walker—

1 Flipside

Mighty peculiar.

He had raised his head from his paperwork and discovered an unusually large number of people milling about the bookstore. Each and every individual was dirty, ragged and unkempt. It looked like a convention for the homeless. He had no idea there were so many destitute people in such a small town.

Equally puzzling was the fact that everyone had managed to slip past him without being noticed. His desk faced the entranceway. Had he been that absorbed in his work?

He watched for several minutes as they very quietly and unobtrusively perused the stacks and racks of books, and finding no reason to hassle anyone, he soon returned to his deskwork.

A moment later a slight commotion caused him to lift his head once again. He was shocked. The number of people had increased tenfold and had become a menagerie of all social classes. Women in expensive fur coats mingled with the poor. Booths, stalls, and tables had been set up in the aisles, causing the bookstore to resemble a flea-market.

A sickness developed in his stomach. He had been the one left in charge, and things had gone to hell-in-a-hand-basket in no time at all. How had it been possible?

A young couple began to set up a booth next to his desk. The man worked vigorously while the woman tried to contain two restless children.

It was the last straw. In one swift motion he pushed himself away from his desk and stood up.

“Y’all are gonna have to leave,” he sternly announced, although he knew full well that the situation had already grown out of control. “I’ve got work to do, and I can’t do it with all of this going on!” He waved his arms in frustration.

The young man working beside him calmly lifted his head. “Arrangements have already been made,” he said in a slow drawl.

“Nobody said anything to me!”

“That’s the way it goes. Management.”

Credit fumed. Surely the manager would have mentioned something of this magnitude, wouldn’t she? Damn! As much as he hated walking out on the job, one thing was certain—he couldn’t work in the middle of a flaming circus!

He nimbly avoided the burgeoning crowd as he stomped through the room and then stepped outside onto the sidewalk. He wasn’t surprised when he discovered that there wasn’t a soul in sight.

“Everybody in town is already in the damn bookstore,” he sarcastically asserted to himself as he gazed up and down the lifeless street.

He watched with interest as a gust of wind picked up some curb-side litter. It was lifted high into the air in slow, lazy swirls. Suddenly taking note of the background, Credit realized with a sudden jolt that he wasn’t where he had thought he was at. This was not his quiet home town in the East Texas Pineywoods, but a run-down, northern industrial city!

He searched for an explanation and like a revelation the answer immediately came to him. It originated from a source that was deep inside himself, and the

conclusion was undeniable. *This was all a dream.* It was the only feasible explanation. Not only did it explain the number of homeless people, but also how they had gathered so quickly. Not to mention the fact that he had never worked at a bookstore before in his life.

A sudden urging overcame him and he decided to take advantage of the situation. Spontaneously, he took a few running steps and then leapt high into the air with reckless abandon. Miraculously, instead of dropping back to earth, he defied gravity and continued to rise into the air with increasing velocity. It was as if he was being pulled through the sky like a kite, with strings attached to his pelvic bones and shoulders. His arms and legs dangled behind him as he raced along. His stomach was relentless in its pleas for him to stop.

The next moment he was hovering motionless in mid air, observing the city below. The hilly topography reminded him of Syracuse, New York, although he had never before seen it from the air. He wondered if his dream had actually transported himself to that locale. For some reason it did not feel right. His conviction was not absolute like it had been when he had realized that he was dreaming. He suddenly itched to be on the ground once more.

He spotted a clearing in the trees below and then pulled himself toward it, landing light as a feather. As he familiarized himself with his new surroundings, he noted that while the field where he had landed was treeless, it was far from being an

empty lot. Amongst overgrown weeds were barrels of waste products and stacks of rusty, steel I-beams.

A group of men were standing beneath the trees on one edge of the clearing. One of the men noticed Credit watching them and pointed him out to his friends.

While they were too far away to be heard, Credit watched with keen interest as they conversed with exaggerated animation before scattering along the tree-line. Their movements did not appear friendly.

The gang surrounded him at a distance and then began to advance towards him, silently communicating with hand signals. Some of the men sported knives. Steel blades glistened in the sunlight.

With his escape route cut off, Credit decided to make his way for the central slag heap. Under different circumstances, he would have been quite alarmed at such a situation, perhaps even terrified. But he knew he had an ace up his sleeve, and it made him feel confident to the point of becoming smug. He decided to have some fun by taunting his pursuers.

“Hey, amigos!” he gleefully shouted. “Are you sure there are enough of you? Perhaps you should bring your sisters to help you, no!?”

He cackled loudly as he leapt atop the tallest stack of steel girders. Even then, he was barely out of reach from the ground below.

His remarks brought scowls from the young men and caused them to quicken their pace. They gathered below him in a circle, seething with resentment but confident they would soon get their just revenge. The leader of the gang stepped forward with a smirk upon his face.

“You have nothing to fear from us, gringo,” he whined. “We even forgive you your insults. All we want is your money. Our fair share. So you come down and we split it up, OK? We even let you keep some. OK?”

The gang members shuffled their feet as they gloated.

“I don’t believe you are macho enough to take my money,” Credit shouted back.

“Even your sisters are no help.” He smiled wickedly as he motioned towards several of the men. “Perhaps you should send your madres to rob me!”

The jest made most of the men madder than hell. They lost patience. When he saw a revolver being drawn, Credit quickly leapt into the air, hooting with laughter at their dumbfounded looks of despair when he continued to rise into the sky.

He followed a parabolic path of flight until he landed in a residential back yard.

His new setting felt exceedingly familiar, although it eluded his actual recall. As he scanned the area for a clue to jar his memory, he spotted Mark and David talking to each other near the back fence. Apparently, they had been tossing horseshoes.

The incongruity of the situation did not elude him. While they were two of his best friends, they were from different times and places. They did not know each other. And yet each of them loved to challenge his goal in life—his quest for total freedom. Their contention was that it was both an undesirable and an unattainable goal. His contention was that he would never be able to view the world as it really is unless he freed himself from the strong cultural distortion and bias that was taught to everyone as they grew up. But because total freedom was such an abstract concept; since there were no maps that delineated the way and certainly no lists quantifying the possible rewards, Credit was never able to adequately define his position and rationale. Sometimes not even to himself.

But now an opportunity had presented itself. He would give Mark and David a demonstration of what could be accomplished if one did not get caught up in the pursuit of land, money, and material items; what was possible for every man if the constraints of society were loosened. He would perform a grand leap into the sky and then return! They would be impressed.

“Hey, guys!” he shouted. “Get a load of this!”

When they turned to look he leapt confidently into the air.

To his sudden consternation, he rose only fifteen feet before losing his balance.

With no physical control over the situation, he watched wide-eyed as his feet swung out in front of him. He turned a backwards somersault and then landed

awkwardly, though softly, on his hands and knees. As he struggled to regain his feet, he could hear the snickering coming from his friend's direction.

Silently cursing them, he reassured himself of his ability and then once again attempted to walk the sky.

And once again he turned a backwards somersault before returning to earth, this time landing lightly on his back. This time his mounting embarrassment was too much to overcome, and he continued to lie on the ground.

Shit, he mused, now these guys are going to think I'm flakier than ever.

"What's he doing?" he heard David ask.

"I don't know. But whatever he's up to, he's not hurting himself," Mark replied.

"I noticed that, too. He's on to something, but I don't know what."

"He looked like a fish flopping around out of water."

"Hey, Credit, try it one more time!"

"Yeah. Once more! You can do it."

"You gotta knock on wood."

"Yeah. Knock on wood!"

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