

The Burden Bearer
by Scott Stahlecker ©1983

Part I

The savage blackness of the country night began to fade
with the approaching sun of summer.
I lay still, though hardly fast in sleep
with thoughts and questions I'd adorned before
that never seem to wear away.

As merry-go-rounds turned within their time
they burned as friction heats to a fire.
Who brought this searching quest to me?
my mind thought eagerly though angrily
and will they ever settle still
as sand that borders 'round the sea?

Now, while the cool deep blue morning began to creep
the quest of life;
that's what I am
to do
and to be
rose meditatively as incense goes heavenly.
And I, crippled in thought wept,
but for reasons which I didn't know.

Suddenly, before the warmth of yellow rays had come
I heard a song composed in spiritual form.
Far above the starry planes it came
I'm told that's where blest creature's roam.
And thinking it was all a dream
I closed my searching eyes to rest,
but yonder, louder drew the sound
and fearful lest my mind be spent
I deeply clutched the sheets below.

The song lingered for some time
just beyond the glass,
a solemn song of dignity, not a ghostly chant.
With it I heard the flutter of swishing eagle's wings
and straining I failed to comprehend
the heavenly voices from another land.

There came seeping through the outside wall,
filling all the room,
a brightness that could cut through hell.
It caked molten, heavy, over my eyes
a fresh white balm of righteous oil.
I turned my head both left and right
its origin I could not tell.

Painfully I rose to sit
knees sucked to my chest
my heart crashed suddenly to death
two creatures stood before me!
And the joyful song I'd heard before
faded in the air
while the brightness, white-as-lightning returned
to lodge deep within their breasts.

Gracefully they came to rest
standing monuments of brilliant gold!
With hair and beards hanging frosted
like wintry powder capping mountain domes.
Their eyes were flames of roaring fire
with feet of bronze and twice-like man's.

Solemn.
Mighty!
Their countenance bore a sacred hue.
Visitors from a holy land!
From a place I thought existed
only in the minds of sorely, religious men
and I
born with spiritual bent believed,
but not with deed, but because I had seen.

Suddenly,
one moved around my wooden nest,
towards my right he came to rest.
Those eyes once red with flaming zeal
now turned a settling, compassionate hue.
My heart too, seem strangely warmed inside.

The other angel's eyes yet blazed.
His form so awfully strong I gazed
till his body spun and his back I faced
while his right hand rose above his head
and there wrote words
diamond laced which read....,

A LAMB HUNG PIERCED TO SET MEN FREE
AS A LION CONQUERS SO SHALL HE,
TO REVEAL A KINGDOM THAT IS SPIRITUALLY SEEN.
AND TARRY NOT TO FIND THESE THREE
FOR THEIR TRUTH SHALL REIGN ETERNALLY.

Now when he etched "ETERNALLY,"
he cupped his hands beneath the lines
and gently fell the words he'd rhymed
into his copper hands like silvery edged glass
before placing them in a pearly vase.

Then upward though the roof he went
as water runs which has no bounds.
I cast my smoldering covers aside
and sprang quickly towards the eastern gate—too late!
Up into the blackish-blue
a fading brilliant one did go.

I rushed back to meet the angel left
what do the laced letters mean I cried!
as though they bore eternal weight.
Then weakened by my pain and grief
I fell upon my knees and face.

There came a voice in mellow deep
tones of music he did speak.
Each word round and meter sharp
to break a sinful, breathless heart,
"arise," he said.
"Arise!"

"In morning hours your burden's wept
in search of what your life's to be
and reasons for the things you see.
As incense goes with prayers groaned
your struggling quest has been heard and known."

(For will anyone who dares to turn his mind
towards heaven's beckoning, joyous bliss
be cast aside by his Creator?
Who made all with but a touch of this;
a consciousness that calls and calls
until all man be reconciled.)

With that
he reached inside his dazzling robe
and brought forth a fragile frosted book.
"You will hold it securely close," he said.
"Look into it when the path grows dark,
when weariness comes
when courage fails
for it will guide you through to the journey's end."

So,
I floating rose
above the bedroom floor.
We then,
slipped through the roof as spirit's soar.
Far away into the universe blue
My home surrounded by lake-front trees
faded
falling
like pointed, spinning willow leaves.
My home where I'd always found rest;
a soothing, comforting, cozy nest.

I was certain we were traveling back towards ages past
when Roman's brandished metals cast.
When all nations dwelt within an eastern net
and traded goods not far beyond a sojourner's step.
But no man walked that I could see
when we alighted upon an arid shore.
and for a moment we strolled along the breaking surf
beside a rolling sea.

Pale and sandy, light brown and dusty;
the beach stretched and curved onwards
pulled by the north-western horizon.
Then impatiently it shifted east,
the distance to it
much further than I could easily see.
Not a living creature crawled about,
nor an impression dug by one which might have passed
on the sleeping beach,
in the mirror smooth sands.

My thoughts turned inward
in the lifeless still....

I'm tired..., tired of the endless cycle of life;
the slow processional turning of days in grooves.
Surely, there must be a more meaningful purpose
to this life which so mournfully moves?

Said my host,
"From a spinning world I've brought you in haste
into a dimension of life from which no man can run.
For it's here where reality takes place.
When God finds man and they two become one.
Not far beyond that hill which bubbles with stones of gold
you'll find a valley long and wide.
That's where your destiny shall rise.

Then he carried me up to the valley's edge
contained within the sunlit ledge
and there I was to begin my search alone.
For he faded into the brightening sky,
but not without a parting cry...

"When the kingdom dwells within your heart;
when it's treasures pass from you
as jewels to a needy soul,
then I will take you home to share
the message which you've come to know
to peoples;
near
far
and everywhere."

Part II

The mid-morning fog rolled
through the valley before me.
Here and there the tops of trees and hills rose,
penetrating the misty-white layer
and revealing a forest covered valley floor.

In the distance
I saw its tail
being pushed by a clear breeze.
It was slowly rising
and as I descended the fog whipped around me,
poured over the edge behind me
and moved out towards the sea.

From leafy towers great drops of moisture fell
which slapped the earth and slipped underground.
Others, hung sparkling in the penetrating rays of the sun.
I entered the lighted forest
with little hesitancy
and quickly found a well worn path
that ceremoniously pointed the way.
It sliced its way both down and 'round
some hidden bends and over some flowing brooks
in a serene and amiable way.

Within one of those friendly, open bends
protruding high above the valley floor
I sat to rest.

Soon the green grass welcomed still
and I fell backwards until I lay
resting
with face portrayed against an open sky.

Cedars and pines stretched tall in my sight
where birds were flying from limb to limb
singing carefree, cheerful hymns.
One flew down and perched nearby
before moving towards the lip-on-edge
and disappeared beyond the ledge.

So I crept with head cocked eagerly to see
just how far the fall might be.
When there, slightly below the base of the mountain,
opposite the side from which I lie viewing, was a city.

Not like the ones I'd left behind
where buildings scaled to immortal heights
and danced to shimmering neon lights,
but one that sprawled some distance within the sunken forest floor.

With streets paved in the dirt of old.
its buildings earthly, low and made of stone.
Each one crude through sharp in line
and bore the mark of ancient times
as when Romans brandished metal's cast.

There loomed a spirit over the place;
a death like dirge swirled all about.
The inhabitants moved with lazy pace
upon their feet with hanging face
and not a dog's bark or a child's laugh was heard.

Where here the breeze around me cooled
with fresh fragrance of pine and blooming colors bold,
there it swayed as though weak with age
and spun the faded leaves
which hung above the length and width of the city.

Have I left a world much like I see?
Does their lack of fulfillment resemble that of my own?
Because, all I really own or know
is what the mores of the urbane have imposed upon me.
I felt defeated, deceived,
and exposed.

For I've never experienced the deep calming,
as the surface of a smooth lake
after an advancing storm has passed.
Nor have I ever felt forgiveness;
the release from words and actions of yesterdays
which burn at times with such intensity
that I feel every eye on earth
and in the heavens
is upon me.

Indeed, I'm like the hunter:
a man of my own destiny,
having the power to choose
and to carve my own existence in history.

I'm like the hunted;
born into a world through a divine act.
Although pressured by a code of values and norms
I'm called by and compelled to return
back to the One who created me.

Entering the mountain path again
I sensed that heaven watched me;
involving themselves in my struggle for life.

An albino sun beamed on high
stinging my eyes as it blinked between advancing trees.
Gradually, the descent became less steep,
eventually meeting the gate of the city
some three hundred yards down a thoroughly worn path.

Moments later, I stepped into its shadow
hesitant and uncertain.
Split between, the gate parted up its center.
A thick iron brace ran vertical along its sides
and firmly established the hinges on each door.

Like decapitated pines,
logs the width of a hand breadth wide
rose together, forming the massive structure.
A crusty latch polished by handling

urged a formal invitation.
As I lifted the latch the gate gently opened.
As I slipped inside it closed.

I stood motionless for a short while
introducing myself to the scene before me.
Across the road an ancient produce market
formed the corner shop of a squatty row of buildings.

I watched the villagers pound the fine, powdery dust
as they marched towards me,
around the corner
and down the narrowing road with its shrinking shops.
Many didn't acknowledge those they confronted.
Most, with the exception of a few,
didn't acknowledge me.

To my left and somewhat distant
a group of four men stood.
The tall one was the first to stare
before three more pair of eyes did glare
that I might take notice and beware.
My body lurched forward with this uncomfortable sight
and fell behind another group
before my mind could willfully choose
to pursue a more courageous move.

When I was sure the danger had all passed
I slowed to a more relaxed and common step
which I'd done so many times before
when people swirled both in and out
much closer than a verbal shout
of my breath, my heat, my time.

I continued by the merchant's shops
and tradesmen working their coveted crafts.
Past homes where peasants sat to cool
in retreats dividing the long hot days.
There were mansions too!
but only few.

And sat behind a travelled road
with back pressed to a knotty trunk of a tree.
Its bark thick and crusty, deep with age;
roots crawling characteristically in search
of water upon and within the earth.

As the moments went by in the tinkling leaves above
the book upon which I sat grew hard.
So I rolled that it might easily slip
out of my denim pocket
and looked at it with deepening interest.

For as much as I tried to forget my thoughts
in the gloom cast from this deadly place,
I couldn't.
Nor, if the gloom could but subside
there were still the rumbling thoughts inside
which follow man from his joyous birth
reminding him that his breath shall one day pass away.
So I opened the book to an ivory page
to words alive and glowing brilliant red
and transfixed my mind upon a verse which said...,

"NOW THIS IS ETERNAL LIFE;
THAT THEY MAY KNOW YOU,
THE ONLY TRUE GOD
AND JESUS CHRIST WHOM YOU HAVE SENT."

Who wouldn't want to live I thought
in a world in which they measure not
by ages torn with windy strife
or endless sinister starry nights,
which hardly refresh anyone at dawn?

For I know,
I've flipped the pages counting time

and many a morning awoke with alarm
to hail another lifeless day
where memorable, pleasurable moments are few.

And God;
yes man tell me He's the One
who breeds disaster in earth and sky
and curls the hands and minds of men.
Who like a child builds towers of the living things
only to strike them with an angry boyish blow,
but is it so?

Part III

Suddenly, a mummer of voices
cut through the air
and broke 'round a corner with awful despair.
With it the arrival of a furious crowd!

Those shuffling by me looked toward the screams
and pushed towards the edge now fully alert
to make way for the parading display.
As for myself, like a stranger,
I scurried behind the brownish-barked pillar,
and with hand and cheek pressed against its surface
I watched and waited, alarmed and afraid.

Soldier's led a multitude on.
They as mercenaries walked mindful of pay
with downcast eyes and face with disinterest.
With feet woven in sandals of antiquated leather
they walked as armor clashed about
over linen skirts hung high to cool.
In each of their hands an iron spear was grasped;
sufficient enough to pacify disorder.

Behind them followed a wooden cross.
Upon a wounded, weary shoulder it lay
bound in a tee with a braided scratchy rope.
Thick and crude, far from smooth,
my fingers crept through the jagged bark in front of me
and I wondered how that cross would feel.

Both the cross and its bearer
bobbed apathetically
portrayed against the riled mob
marching behind the soldier's helmeted heads.

Then unexpectedly it dropped
stopped by its leading edge,
before falling on its side with a solid thump.
Those who once closed in to mock its bearer
scrambled for the weight was great,
but quickly returned as minnow's dash
as if to tear apart the bearer of that cross.
And in the short interval of time
when the crowd fell back,
I beheld the One who stumbled.

Under the instrument which He bore, He lay
with cheek askew in sun-baked grit.
Upon His head a woven crown of thistles bent
against His ear now pressed against the earth.

Mourner's wailed while He in stillness lay
with hearts pinned and crushed in anguish too.
I thought, they must be those who knew Him best
for through the clamor I thought I heard one of them say...

"Jesus, under this cross of guilt you lie.
I know it's for my life you soon shall die.
From this day forth I will proclaim,
my sins are gone and their future stain."

All this she whispered in His ear
with a sobbing smile and grateful tears,
as she hands gently stroked His blood soaked hair
mindful that His death was near.

I watched her rise as one with honor
and walk through the crowd aloof of danger,
with a countenance radiating vivacious praise
as she searched the sky in a thoughtful gaze.
She saw more than the sky's crystal hue,
more than the darker blue;
it was the presence of One which I couldn't see.

A moment passed, perhaps a few,
while the angry growling voices grew
until it burst into my mind now fully aware
that the procession continued along the thoroughfare.

I stepped into the dusty path
feeling heavy
hunched and in need;
and I followed the burden bearer
like a lost, lonely child.

They took Him to a lofty knoll
high above the village tail.
The mood was solemn, somewhat Holy, and still,
and the presence which the woman saw
was there!

Then above the crowd now swelled in size
the burden bearer did slowly rise.
With arms outstretched and bosom seen
as to gather a world under his wings;
even those whose voices now sought to take his life.

I watched His muscles tightly pull;
lips parting wide to fill a quaking chest.
Aside from this all else was still except...,
where they nailed his hands to the beams above
blood cooling, swelled into tears that dropped.

I watched His breath
like the wind that whistles,
yet loud because suspense was deep:
Here a solitary man, with an apparent suspended power,
and a generation, now quiet and restrained by fear.

Above His dry and twisted thorny crown hung a board,
there several silvery lines of letters danced which said...,
"LOOK AND WONDER, WEEP AND WAIL!
THE TREASURE OF HEAVENS TRUTHFUL TAIL
BOWS AS A LAMB TO FORGIVE ALL WHO'LL BELIEVE"!

And I said, "I believe."
Before the doubt came crashing in,
before the cares of life pressed from within,
if you will save me from my sins
then I'll believe, "I'LL BELIEVE"!

His chin then dropped upon His chest.
Eyes glassed and slowly fading dim.
His fingers now curling to less than painful spread.
His body limp in sudden soundlessness.
I did not expect
Him to die....

I mean,
I know it's how the story goes;
how every sacrifice unfolds,
but this one...,
should
have
been
different.

Part IV

From the north
a rolling flank of cumulus clouds approached
and from the south the same.
They marched as mighty armies in battle array,
neither willing to give the right of way.
They were like a curtain pulled by omniscient arms.

Then came screams of terror
from surrounding hills
as the multitude scattered in fear
towards the mountains,
the caves,
and the stones.

But there were others like I
standing firm in the wonder;
a crowd of which I couldn't number.
While the fronts continued to build and draw closer;
the shadows growing thicker,
and the floods pouring under.

Then with a blast of noise and flash
they met above the wooden cross sashed.
For a moment of appropriate wrath
a plague of empty, dark nothingness passed.
But then as quick as the clouds converged
they rolled back,
and I saw in the midst of the heavens
He who had conquered death.

He rode on a horse, white for victory,
wearing a crown as a king;
with a sky full of angels
surrounding Him like a rainbow's glory ring!
I reached for my Savior.
I stretched high on my toes.
I cried out true praises expecting to go,
but someone detained me,
and prevented my escape.

It was my guide, the angel,
who now held me back.
"From the day of reunion," he explained,
"which hasn't taken place yet."

"Jonathan", he said, calling my name.
"You remember this morning
when we came to this place?
It's a spiritual journey
which men and women everywhere must take.
To reveal the future when He shall appear
and come to redeem those
who by faith believe what's here."

Yet, I gathered courage
before we departed in the sky,
you remember the others

who stood as expectant as I?
Well, they too had angels much like my guide
and they too were strangers
who had survived the passage as I.
And we with the kingdom alive in our hearts
returned with the message of salvation to impart.