

## “Both Sides Now” by MJ Floreno

*Photo – Both Sides Now*

She sat in her chair, ramrod straight, with her intertwined fingers resting in her lap. Looking out of the expansive window of her twenty-fifth floor hotel suite, she once again marveled at the beautiful mountain peak in the distance. Every day of the three weeks she had occupied this room she had watched the puffy white clouds drift past, using her imagination to change their formations. For the last two weeks she had begun to wonder what lie on the other side of that mountain. It had begun to represent her life.

She and her parents had decided on this destination because none of them had ever ventured this far west in the past. And she had never gone anywhere in her life without them. Having been born with a medical disability that kept her in a wheelchair, she, being their only child, had never been given much independence. Yes she attended schools, but was never allowed to ride a bus with other kids. Always shuttled by parents didn't allow for much social interaction. School classes often consisted of others with disabilities and, even with great family support, she began to believe these could be her only friends. While she didn't have the ability to run on a playground or drive to the mall, God had blessed her with a warm personality and a rich sense of humor. Sadly, these weren't given much of an opportunity to grow.

The first few days the three of them had walked the streets of the small town, loving the warmth of the sun on their faces, and enjoying searching for and then buying some wonderful local art. One day while having a cold drink at an adorably decorated outside café, they discussed which family members they might send some of the pieces to. She had an aunt, her mother's only sister, she had always been very close to and when she had seen the watercolor of the carousel horse she knew it would be the perfect gift. There was never any discussion about price; she knew she had available funds for anything she wanted but had never known exactly her bank account numbers.

One evening her dad suggested they take a road trip to get closer to the mountains because they looked so beautiful from the hotel windows. She hadn't been feeling well the last couple of days so encouraged them to go on without her. Taking off early the next morning they assured her they would be in contact by phone and would text her some pictures of any amazing sites they visited. She smiled and rolled over to go back to sleep. When she awakened several hours later she checked her phone for any missed messages and was a bit puzzled that there were none. She chalked it up to what a wonderful adventure her parents must be having. Over her adult years she had figured out that they needed alone time. They had always taken such good care of her but she often felt like a burden to them. They deserved this time away from her.

After a long hot shower in the luxurious handicap equipped bathroom she decided to call room service. Perusing the menu had her realizing just how hungry she was and remembered she hadn't had dinner the night before. Calling down to the kitchen, she ordered what sounded like a delicious salad, some fruit, and even splurged on a piece of chocolate cake for dessert. They gave her a delivery time of thirty minutes so she grabbed a bottle of water from the mini frig and settled in to wait. Picking up her phone she thought she would call her mom to see how things were going. Strange, no answer. Dialing dad and getting the same result she surmised that maybe in the mountains they couldn't get cell service. Hearing the knock on the door and the shout out from room service, she wheeled over to answer. The server, an attractive man, seeing she was unable to take the tray, asked politely where she would like it placed and then accommodated her request. While arranging each plate and the cutlery, he struck up a pleasant conversation. She smiled but had a difficult time with the interaction. She, in all of her thirty years, had never been on a date. Not that she hadn't often thought about what it would be like to be wined and dined. Maybe even kissed goodnight. His pleasant voice relaxed her and when he left, telling her not to hesitate to call again if she needed something more, she felt that he might be someone who could be a good friend.

As she ate, she knew her choices had been spot on. She saved the cake to share with her mom, who was as much into chocolate as she was. Pushing away from the table, she decided to get comfortable on the couch; the kind of furniture that just molded itself around your frame and devoured you. She had already memorized the television channels and knew just what programs were on when. Flipping through the remote for a couple of minutes, she decided on a program that she had been watching for years. Getting lost in the storyline and having her hunger satisfied, she dozed off. When she awakened it was dark outside the window. She felt a moment of panic and tried to brush away the anxiety by picturing her parents having such a great time that they had lost track of time. She was happy for them.

Meanwhile, some twelve hundred miles away, her favorite aunt had received a horrible phone call. It was from a police department informing her that there had been a horrible accident on a remote mountain road. There were no survivors. The devastating news sent her into shock, but also kicked her caregiver instincts into high gear. She immediately booked a flight and then called her niece. Not knowing exactly what to say, she also knew she must keep fear from her voice. When the line connected she wished that she could be there in person to hold her niece while breaking the news. It was the hardest thing she had ever had to do. Initially there was dead silence, then a quiet whimpering. She knew there was no way her niece could wrap her mind around this tragedy; she assured her she would be there as soon as possible. The line disconnected.

She sat in her chair once again looking out at the mountain. Feeling numb, she had finally been able to control her tears. There was a soft knock at the door. Thinking it was her aunt, she flew across the room to answer it. Upon opening, she saw the man, from the day before, the one who had delivered her meal. She could feel the tears behind her eyes as he asked if everything was all right. He had noticed that she had not called the kitchen for breakfast. She wheeled back enough for him to step inside and, unsure why she began to tell him about the tragedy that had fallen her. He knelt and took her hand, offering her his handkerchief. He spoke soothingly as he stated his condolences. Asking what he might do to help she told him she was awaiting her aunt's arrival. She asked if he would like to sit down and he felt the need to stay with her. When her aunt came through the door he gave his new friend a brief hug and excused himself.

Discussing what needed to be done kept them busy for several hours. Many tears and stories were shared. Multiple phone calls later, it seemed all was in order. It would all be handled quickly to minimize their pain. All that was left to decide was where she would go from here. She knew in her heart that it was time to spread her wings and, despite the empty feeling she had, knew she would be competent to go on without the two most important people in her life.

The next morning she informed her aunt that she intended to stay where she was for now. She wanted to be around her parents' belongings for a time; it felt comforting for now. She asked her aunt to contact an attorney to straighten out all of the legal issues and then sent her home. She hoped there would not be an argument and her aunt looked at her with newfound respect, hugged her tightly and departed with a promise to be in touch very soon.

Alone, she called for room service. Secretly she was hoping for the compassionate server to arrive and he did. The look in his eyes told her that he felt she was doing better now. He asked if she would like to go for a drive when he finished his shift that afternoon. She told him she would enjoy that and asked if he could take her to see the mountain that loomed outside her window. Like her life she was hoping to be able to see both sides now.

## **“Bridge To The Future” by Joan Runkel**

*Photo - Bridge*

When I gazed upon the bridge,  
my angst, I could not hide.  
I'd traveled miles in endless hope.  
It's on the other side.

The bridge would take me forward.  
The past would be behind.  
I'd bravely change direction,  
the future in my mind.

It's a new beginning.  
Friends and family are all there.  
I'm the last to make the trek.  
The same they made last year.

I raised my hand in earnest.  
The rules I will abide.  
The bridge takes me to the future.  
It's on the other side.

## “The Cowboy” by Bill Schaumann

*Photo - Cowboy*

It was going to be a long walk home. After the fall, I was the last one out. Jimmy and the boys already had plans and took off, and Jack had just plain out left me. I was not surprised. It was just like him when he was disappointed. Seems like I disappointed him a lot lately.

It was just as well. I needed time to figure out what I was going to say, what had gone wrong in those eight seconds. The five mile hike back to the ranch would give me time to figure it out. Maybe I would have answers for Jack when I got there. Or better yet I would I find my answers. I had really hoped this would be the one. The ride that would prove I was not afraid, and good enough. Hoped too I could prove something to Jack. Instead, hope fell in the dirt tonight. It fell when Thunder took that quarter turn in his kick and flicked me off like I was nothing more than a small annoyance.

As the neon lights of the rodeo faded behind me I walked down route 43 kicking the dirt and tried to figure out what went so wrong. I was so close to what I had hoped for. It was there in my grasp and then like in a flash, it was gone. What happened? Thunder is what happened.

Thunder was a black 1400 pound monster. At first I was glad I drew the gelding. He bucked strong and drove high scores for those that could command him. Successful riders placed in the 80s and 90s riding Thunder. You needed a strong Bronco that bucked and kicked the highest to create the best scores. If I had scored well I could make a name, maybe make the circuit. Hoping to show Jack something he wanted to see. Show Jack that I was determined, driven to succeed. But that didn't happen.

The road was deserted. The moon was full. It lit the fallow fields to my right. Broken corn stalks from last year's harvest jutted out of the ground forming rows stretching across the field. The fields patiently waited for the spring planting for new life. Moonlight filtered through pine trees that lined the field creating a mosaic pattern across the road in front of me. The shadows were dark, the moonlight bright. The contrast was startling. Two mirror images formed by intertwined tree branches, were the same but different.

Thunder had been restless in the shut. He pushed and banged at the gate as Jimmy rigged the cinch around his chest right behind his withers. As I lowered myself onto his back he bucked hard, banging me against the gate. I had three wraps of the leather strap across my hand, tightening it each time to make sure I could hang on when Thunder tested me.

As I walked in and out of the shadows towards the ranch I disappeared and reappeared. Moving in and out, from light to darkness, from hope to fear to nothingness. A ying and yang of thoughts swirled through my mind, flicking me between hope and despair, fear and confidence, winning and losing. As I passed the end of the field and the last of the pine trees, I crossed out of the shadows. The sky was a deep blue dotted with white sparkling stars. I walked in the moonlight which had turned bright white. It shown brightly on me just as a large dark cloud passed in front of the moon plunging me back into darkness.

When they pulled the gate, Thunder launched us out of the chute into the air. He kicked his massive legs out slamming the gate as it completed its opening arc catching Jimmy on the side of his head. I made the mark perfectly on Thunder, digging my heels in right above his shoulders on his first buck, landing it before his front legs came down. This was a perfect start, that would score me points with the judges. It was just the start Jack was hoping for. I was on my way, only seven seconds left, it was hard to believe 7 seconds could last a lifetime.

I stumbled on loose rocks on the edge of the road as I turned into Sharps lane which led to the ranch. Only a few miles left before I'd have to face Jack. Still time left. Time to find a way. A way to explain why his son didn't get it done. Didn't measure up. Couldn't you hold on for just a few more seconds? But that was Jack. Always focused on the negative side of any situation, but I wondered. Was he right? Despite my desire, my preparation, my determination, my hope, I had hit the dirt before making the 8 seconds time requirement.

In the chute, I had gotten nervous, and really scared, but it also it felt good just to be sitting on this beast. I had gotten on him. I had been determined to get on him despite my incredible fear. A fear that had kept me off and was the source of much of Jack's angst. He thought I wouldn't even get that far. But I was determined despite the fear, to beat it, and beat him.

As Thunder started his second leap I was in perfect position, high on his back. My left hand tight in the wrap, right arm held back and high, my back arched away from Thunder's head. Riders have been knocked unconscious by leaning too far forward and colliding with the horses' head during a violent buck. I knew this and was prepared. But his second thrust was incredibly strong. His massive legs tensed and stretched as he tried to throw me. I held on and as he landed, he planted his back legs and reversed in the opposite direction twisting me, my arm, my wrist and hand. That's when it happened. The cinch slipped and pulled on my hand and fingers. The leather strap around my fingers loosened. It was not much, just a bit, but it was enough.

Jack was rough. I think he always had been, but he had gotten worse since mom died. As I got older, his anger grew and the fuse on his temper grew short. He was angry at how his life had panned out, about what he missed when she had passed. It was the good times they could have had. He was bitter and he mostly directed it at me. I don't know why. Maybe because we lived together. At first it bothered me, but I knew he was hurting so after a while I learned to let it go. The more he pushed me, the more I learned to look past him. It didn't help with his outlook, but it made me more determined to succeed and not to let him down.

Five seconds had passed and I remember thinking that I was getting the hang of this, and doing pretty well. My confidence was growing. Almost there, and I'm not as scared anymore. I can ride this horse. I tightened my grip feeling my confidence growing. Then it happened. Thunder launched his last assault, pulling two of the loosened leather wraps loose. I was still hanging on but with every jerk of his massive body the slack in the wrap grew creating a jerking force that was taking a toll on my fingers and arm. He turned and kicked for the last time and I went airborne.

I kicked a rock across the road as I approached the house. Jack's truck was in the drive and the lights were on in the main house. The moonlight hit the left side of the house and cast long shadows across the drive in front of me. I strode past the shadows, and into the light of the porch knowing for the first time that Jack didn't understand me, and may never truly see the truth. He couldn't because he never looked outward to consider others. He only looked in to follow his own prejudices in life.

I hit the dirt hard landing on my shoulder catching a face full of dirt as I rolled away from Thunder and jumped up to my feet. The crowd clapped and the ring cowhand was right there to lend me a hand. He pulled me over and yelled in my ear. "That was a great looking ride until you flew off kid. Next time hold on tighter." Next time I thought? Tonight, I learned that even though I may fail and loose at times to the Thunders of my future, that I can move past them. I have the strength and determination to overcome my fears. It doesn't matter what Jack's hang ups are, and how he sees me. Those are his issues. Not mine.

I hit the front steps, grabbed the doorknob, and pushed the door open.

## **“Pop’s Bridge” by Fred Karr – Awarded Judges Choice**

*Photo - Bridge*

Alas, the bridge, so long ago . . .

When Pop and I worked the girders below.

Danger lurked most when the boss yelled, “Faster!”

Then any wrong step could spell disaster.

Pop’s been gone now for many a year,

But memories cling and I hold those dear.

I still see Pop leaning past safety point

To hit a weld on a distant joint.

Often Pop’s voice will come a calling,

“Lean too far and you’ll be falling!”

Or “Don’t get so wrapped in what you’re doin’,

That you forget where your feet are goin’!”

Alas, the bridge, so long ago . . .

When Pop and I worked the girders below.

Life throws us those times when days get more crowded,

And my dear Pop’s face becomes more clouded.

Just maybe . . . that’s life as it’s meant to be,

But my longing self says, “That’s not for me!”

For holding the special times close to my soul,

I need things like these to keep myself whole.

And just when I feel that I’ve lost track of Pop,

I’ll happen to pass by his bridge and stop.

Then turn off the car and just sit a spell,

And Pop’ll return and once more all’s well.

Alas, the bridge, so long ago . . .

When Pop and I worked the girders below.

## “Yesterday From Forever” by Joanne Roth

*Photo - Window*

My friend, sister, daughter, mother,  
mirror image of everywhere woman,  
living with trauma, surviving streets and story,  
I saw jump through the moon.

Stripped of balance with battered spring,  
she stretched for known hand, unseen.

My friend, sister, daughter, mother,  
mirror image of someday woman,  
born brainy, raised on stones and oatmeal  
no father of her own,  
grasped the slippery bar of promise  
from brave bound, sprung from years of sludge.

My friend, sister, daughter, mother,  
mirror image of sometime woman,  
survivor of assaults, and escape thrill rides,  
made the wild leap to somewhere else,  
while half-grown groaners, shooting darts of poison  
gripped ground, and sure footed sameness, furious with the flying.

My friend, sister, daughter, mother,  
mirror image of the maybe now woman  
who lived in the forest without getting lost,  
eating snow and swimming in sunshine,  
was launched into new by nature and her season.  
Brothers behind, sleep walking in dull or dangerous.

My friend, sister, daughter, mother,  
mirror image of the surviving, surmounting woman,  
dodging shadows and refusing suffocation,  
stayed trapped still, in safe shut door of walking away.  
Sprung from her retreat and tremble today,  
into a strange world of strength and slim promise beyond pain.

My friend, sister, daughter, mother,  
mirror image of the once and forever woman,  
keeper of a high promise to a dying parent,

refused the lure of the last straw's call to small,  
past threats of metal and demented snarl, broke the spell,  
bringing running self to still within shared power and will.

My friend, sister, daughter, mother,  
mirror image of the evolving, ever possible woman,  
braving the bounds, vaulting into more,  
brought background with her, the all of before,  
with us for the ride to the rarefied new,  
farther out, deeper within, to the light past the moon.

## “Things We Leave Behind” by M. D. Taverner – Awarded First Place

*Photo - Bridge*

Strange that it should surface with a flood. A medium-sized box. Turquoise. Torn corners and time-blurred marker hearts once red. It had floated along a basement wall, despite the fact that cardboard sinks, so she'd slogged through the wet mess to save it.

It hadn't been a box she'd recognized, but some small part of her heart felt buoyant. A dream fogged tug of memory had risen up.

She'd waited three days before opening it. Life had already taught her that most things were better left unopened—expectation more fulfilling than a revelation fallen flat.

But this time she was rewarded. A gift she'd thought was lost had been returned. By way of water—a disaster and a discovery all in one.

Inside was a book. *The Giving Tree*. Her favorite book in third grade and even still, twenty-five years later. The box was empty otherwise—she didn't remember placing it in the protective enclosure. The giver of the gift was a boy long gone, like her girlhood and the blushing love-crushed nine-year-old she was when she'd received it.

Errol. Even now the syllables made her feel a nervous calm—if that made sense. He'd moved to her school near Halloween and sat to her right in Mrs. Blair's class. He was polite, which she hadn't run into with boys her age, and he had a gentle smile—the kind that made her feel like she was appreciated by him—tall stature, weird humor and all. By April, he'd made her laugh until her nose ran, stood up for her when a classmate said she was carnival freak tall (which she wasn't, but boys seemed to take her height as a personal challenge to them), and once even picked her a daisy during recess.

It all flooded back as she held the book in her hand. And so did the loss, sudden and crushing, when he'd moved away in mid-May the same year. All he'd left behind was the book in her cubby and she'd taken it straight home, not having the fortitude to even open it.

What she recalled the clearest was having to look at his empty chair the remainder of the year wondering if he'd ever return. All she'd ever heard, even years after, was that his father was a writer and moved the family to another country—to England for some job or opportunity. Despite her wish that one day he'd show up as unexplained as he'd left, he never resurfaced.

She'd opened the book with a crackle of its stiff spine and turned the pages, breathing in the comforting scent of an old library, a wonderful musty perfume. A couple pages had stuck together with mildew. When she'd reached the last page, there'd been a discovery. A message:

*Sorry to leave. Hope we find each other again one day.*

*XX Errol Macy*

Her breath had caught in the back of her throat. How sorry she'd been that she hadn't ever looked inside. The kind message went blurry as melancholic tears gathered. But then an idea had come. A resolve.

A quick internet search had turned up an Errol Macy in Southwark. Another connection found an antique book shop in London by the Tower Bridge with a proprietor of the same name. Within three weeks, she'd bought a plane ticket to London, and sent a new copy of *The Giving Tree* to the bookstore with a signed reply message: *I'm sorry you left too. If you want to be found, please meet me at the Tower Bridge on May 12th at 9 pm.*

Still in shock that she traveled 3,748 miles on a memory and a message from 25 years earlier, she spent the late afternoon walking the drizzly streets and getting stunned by red double-deckers, age-old stone building facades and posh new coffee shops. She wondered if Errol had grown to love this new country, and if it felt as instant as her own affection.

The drizzle stopped and the sun began to set as she reached the Tower Bridge. It stared down at her in Victorian Gothic splendor from 213 feet above. The sign said the Cornish granite and Portland stone suspension bridge was opened for public transportation in 1894—in the time of Kipling and Queen Victoria. Her life felt tiny and inconsequential but it didn't stop the nerves from starting to tingle down her arms to her fingertips.

She stood there at least two hours, watching people come and go, not tiring of the sights and the sounds of the London evening. True, she should probably not be standing in the dark alone but she couldn't seem to get her feet to move. She probably blended in with the other stationary objects in the warm evening—a lamp post, a tree, a stone tower of the bridge standing strong and steadfast come what may.

Somewhere along the way in her reverie, she spotted a shadow in the distance. At closer range it became the silhouette. Tall, narrow, walking confidently in her direction. She swallowed and closed her eyes until the steps were too close not to be headed right for her.

When she opened them, a man stood before her. A stranger with hints of something familiar. She looked down and saw a small square book in his hand. When her eyes traveled to his face she saw the thing she'd missed terribly without being fully conscious of it.

His smile.

## **“Blue Skies” by Joan Runkel**

*Photo – Both Sides Now*

I took this picture.  
I thought we were there.  
We weren't, as we sighed  
and breathed the cold air.

The atmosphere was hopeful.  
The air was fresher,  
not quite so heavy,  
the lungs free of pressure.

We had walked many miles,  
endured many hardships.  
Our hopes kept us going.  
We treasured our friendships.

We've grown even closer  
through all of our fears.  
Too many have suffered.  
We've shed many tears.

Nothing behind us,  
Our homes were all gone.  
Our spirits were willing.  
We kept going on.

Our belongings were few,  
our food nearly eaten.  
Though tired and worn,  
we would not be beaten.

Time healed our wounds.  
We're no longer lost.  
Blue skies above,  
we've made it across.

## “The Gilded Daughter” by Terri A. Schleuder – Awarded Honorable Mention

*Photo - Walk*

I'm done! No more!

Like a bird in a gilded cage, on display-

Plumage vibrant and flowing, hiding within the trappings of glitz and glamour.

Always expected to say the right words, be the right person,

Live within tightly confined rules and roles.

Never stray, never be free, God Help Me!

I'm done! No more!

I'm leaving this place -- tonight--

Leaving these people, I've lived with my whole life-

Who only see the trappings and never me-

I want to tear off this gown of chintz and silk -

Run naked in the grass among the wild flowers and cool breezes-

Dip my toe into the cool, cleansing waters of the brook as it cascades passed rocks and willows.

What is my favorite color? Do they know?

What book fills my heart with joy? Do they care?

Always rules, expectations, fit in, don't say or do anything to make someone notice.

Be invisible in a designer gown with sparkling jewels

A golden pattern on the palace wall.

I'm done! No more!

For once I will live for me - Do what I want - Be what I want.

If they are embarrassed, so be it!

I'll Step out of this gilded cage.

Leave behind the cold, glittering world that judges an extra ounce of fat, a new wrinkle, or broken nail.

Be me, be free!

Leave, and step into the shimmering sunrise of a new day-

The warmth and glow of an authentic life-

Accepted for what is on the inside not the outside — with all my glorious imperfections.

Today I Leave it all!

The lights, the fancy cars, the mansions, the money, and the endless frivolous parties—

Where people come to preen, and gloat about how wonderful their world is.

It is not wonderful, it is empty, a jaded persona.

And so.... I'm done! No more!

I'll start fresh—begin anew-

Like a tiny babe discovering everything for the first time-

A giggle, a laugh, the wonder and beauty in the ordinary.

I'm free!

**“Axial Tilt” by Lisamarie Nash**

*Photo - Window*

Peering through  
Spiders silken web construction,  
a Lunar Body  
Captured fast in axial tilt.  
Night ever suspended in daylight.

## “Matters Of Love & Peace” by Karen. L. Hamp

Photo - Walk

Ismalia Alexander sat at her dressing table. She was painfully...slowly getting ready. She had not seen her grandchildren or son for 6 years — since just after her husband died.

"The old Ismalia would have been excited and eager" she thought. "I have missed them so. it is so far from here to the mainland." She placed her last shoe on the floor and stepped into it. "I'm tired and getting old." she complained to herself.

Her name, Ismalia, honored her Portuguese/ Hawaiian heritage. Her last name was acquired when she married George Alexander 60 some years ago. He was part of the founding family of Alexander and Baldwin, a well-known old firm dealing in commercial Hawaiian real estate.

George had been one of the less esteemed members of the company - and the family. This and her Portuguese background permitted the remaining family to mostly ignore her since his death. She lived alone in the palatial house on Oahu, and almost never had company, save the neighbors from next door.

Her son, here tonight, was Kalaheo, or Keith as he was known at his work. He had lived in California since after college.

Lately, Ismalia was feeling her 82 years of living. She now stayed out of the ocean, away from her hula group, and mostly indoors. Maybe she missed most taking the neighbor kids for shave ice. Quick memories of being at home in the waves, and dancing to ancient and traditional Hawaiian music played through her mind. "I suppose I am fortunate in many ways, but life is quite dreary lately" she thought.

She slowly worked her gown over her head, having chosen one that she could fasten herself. Her stiff fingers worked the buttons and zipper. She made her way to the mirror, and combed her long grey-black hair as best she could, fastening a plastic Plumeria blossom at one side. "My yard is full of them, but I can't even get out there anymore." She felt her own impatience and regret.

She settled in her chair. The wheelchair was new. She had reluctantly given in to it after her balance and energy became uneven and precarious, and knew it made things safer for her. "I do miss other people around" she thought. At least I won't be alone tonight. I wish ...". Her thoughts trailed off as she went out the doorway to the hall. Kalaheo and the children were waiting in the foyer, engrossed in their own memories of prior time here.

Kiani, the 20 year old, spoke to Ken, her older brother. "I am so excited to see Tutu Issie. Remember when she used to chase us around the gardens, and she could always outswim us. And she baked with us, and made yummy Portuguese food, and we got shave ice. My favorite flavor was lilikoi. What was yours, Kenny?"

"Oh I guess papaya, but I was thinking more of when we used to go to Maui or the Big Island with our grandparents, and then go upcountry and ride the horses. Wasn't Tutu something on a horse? Remember, she rode in the Aloha Day Parade?" Ken and Kiani were looking forward to seeing their grandmother. Although *kapuna* was the formal word in Hawaiian for Grandmother, nearly everyone used *tutu* as they did. They excitedly continued spilling out memories of Tutu Issie.

Their father had his own memories and uneasiness about seeing his mother again. As a child of the least regarded relative at A & B, he had not been offered a job there — not even after he went to UH and earned his degree. As a young man, he hadn't been willing to beg. His pride wouldn't even permit him to ask. He moved to the mainland, found a lovely wife, and became a success at work. He had often thought he should be seeing his mother more, especially since his father's death. He was an only child. But it took time, energy and planning to travel.

He even missed the islands at times. And though his mother had been strong-headed and opinionated, he clearly felt loved by her. His own strong headedness had sent him away to prove he could make it. And he had. He carried no bitterness anymore for the rest of the Alexanders, but neither did he care if he saw them.

Suddenly they all glanced up. Their grandmother had appeared in the dim lights at the end of the hallway and they could only see what looked like an indistinct figure gliding toward them. They anticipated her bright and cheerful "Aloha."

As she approached, a moment froze in time as all three of them saw that she was in a wheelchair. Kiani burst into tears, and Kalaheo and Ken were shocked into silence.

Kiani got up first and ran toward her grandma. "Oh tutu!!" Even the usual outspread arms were busy propelling the chair. Kiani's heart could hardly bear what she was seeing.

It was not only the chair. It was the smile that was only half there and the frail countenance.

Ken got to her before his father, and leaned down to hug her. She felt nothing like the tutu he remembered. Her back felt fragile, and as she reached for him, he noticed her gnarled fingers. She was clearly glad to see them, but this woman who they had always known as the life and strength of the family — the one whose keen mind, loving heart, and strong body they had counted on, now roused both anger and protectiveness in him. "How dare time change her like that!?" He yearned to keep her from further harm.

Kalaheo felt that same dichotomy. All his past resistance fell away as he swept her in his arms saying "Oh mom." His tears began to fall. They stood and sat halfway down the hall, yet not nearly halfway to absorbing the reality of this moment. They were a family filled with expected love, and unexpected shock, and tears. The three that hadn't known, and the one that hadn't told were struggling - not with each other of course, but with new facts. Facts that changed identities, relationships and their lives.

## “Matters Of Love & Peace” by Karen L. Hamp

There were a few weak attempts at denial and lightness. "Oh lets go get some shave ice first, or maybe a meal?" That dissipated quickly into "Mother, who fixes your meals now, and how do you get out to shop? And do you hurt much?"

As for Ismalia, she dissipated into shame, sadness, and heavy regrets. She had been the backbone, the strong one, the determined one of the family. even when George was around. And now she couldn't fill the role. Their love and support reinforced her strength, but her whole being shrank from being the one who needed help.

Kalaheo voiced a thought for all of them. "Mother, please come to the mainland. Please come live near us? Oh please"

She shrank, and then felt the immediacy and strength of their love. "How could she? This Island, this home, her friends?" On the other hand, the loneliness, emptiness, physical hardship? She had often wished ... being close to them now pulled at her.

The four separated a little after a bit, and decided to go out to dinner. "Was her favorite place still open?" It was, and they went. A saving move to prevent either instant answers, or a lack of them.

Dinner was a sweet time, and delicious. They settled into each other's hearts. And that evening after she was home and in bed, she called up that strong resolve of hers. And then she called on the ancient spirits of Hawaii and asked that they meet in council to help her decide while she slept. She knew Kalaheo would be calling Mary Ann, his wife, and speaking with her, but she also knew Mary Ann would be agreeable. She liked Mary Ann, and Mary Ann liked her. Work had kept her from making this trip.

The next morning, Ismalia awoke with a start, and her firm decision. She knew she was no longer alone. She would have help with the huge job of dismantling the house and its possessions. Perhaps her son would decide to keep it, rent out a suite to a caregiver, and use it for vacations. Whatever happened, she was not alone.

Her heart was at peace, and there were many things to do today. "It will be nice having Kiani and Ken nearby", she thought, "I am thoroughly Hawaiian, but I can be that anywhere. I carry the spirit of Aloha always and everywhere. She gave thanks, and started getting ready for breakfast.

### AFTERWORD:

Breakfast was a warm and quiet celebration for all, even with the undercurrents of all that needed to be planned and accomplished. The love was palpable, and all were at peace in this place.

## “Massive Darkness, Vibrant Light” by Lynn Vaughn

Photo – *Both Sides Now*

the moon is invisible only 3 nights  
of the month, yet the stories we tell  
echo the loss again and again: 3 days  
and nights in the belly of a whale, in  
a tomb, in a monster's lair; Solomon  
begs for wisdom in the middle of a dark  
night; Aeneas is led to the Ivory Gate of  
Sleep and permitted false dreams

are mine false dreams? to experience  
joy instead of disease and pain, to  
enjoy human pleasures like sleep, the  
taste of food, moving my body, being  
able to find and remember things, to  
savor companionship and connection?  
everything - the autoimmune diseases,  
the adrenal fatigue, the inability to get  
out of bed, the baldness, the allergies,  
the weighty loneliness—all of it is in  
my face like the stark, unwelcoming  
volcanic rockface that I lie upon;  
darkness stains my existence most of  
the days of the month like the stubborn  
tumeric streaks on my kitchen sink and  
the gray shirt I am wearing; my glasses  
are thick, tinted, shielding me from the  
light - the Light which was my safety  
and protection before

Rilke describes it as pushing through  
solid rock. “Everything is close to my  
face and everything close to my face is  
stone...this massive darkness makes me  
small;” he implores the divine, “make

yourself fierce, break in;” i, too, beseech  
for mercy, for reprieve: “please, mother-  
father God, i am lost here in darkness;  
i cannot rise from the rugged surface of  
the mountain; break in! Save me with the  
searing lightning bolt of your grace”

suddenly, singing...my voice singing..  
“you raise me up so i I can stand on  
mountains, you raise me up...” standing  
fully upright, free, amazed to see above  
me the soft, airy clouds, the pure blue  
vibrancy of the sky, the total illumination  
of the heavens beyond; standing tall, arms  
outstretched, I embrace *both sides now*  
and am overwhelmingly grateful

## **“The Cowboy” by MJ Floreno**

*Photo – Cowboy*

I've gotta get out of this place that I'm in  
Gotta rearrange my style  
I cannot continue with this life that I'm livin'  
Need to learn once again how to smile  
Even if it is just for awhile  
Change of scenery might do me some good  
Hit the city and become a gangsta  
Survive in a new kind of “hood  
Gotta get away, gotta get away

There must be a place where the future is brighter  
Where each day is not the same  
I'll find it if it takes every breath that I'm breathin'  
Take the credit as well as the blame  
Roll the dice on a brand new game  
Look for a universe yet to explore  
With a serious mind and the will to succeed  
I'll pick up my spirits from this old wooden floor  
Gotta get away, gotta get away

I'll put my boots in a closet  
Hang my hat on a rack  
Exchange my jeans for some trousers  
Face forward and never look back  
Carry a briefcase instead of a sack  
When life shows me worry or even some pain  
I'll push forward, even learn to have fun  
Knowing that with determination comes gain  
Gotta get away, gotta get away

## “Between The Crests” by Jeremy Schultz – Awarded Honorable Mention

*Photo – Both Sides Now*

Bill awoke in a cold sweat. Wet and clammy, he sat up in a daze. After a moment of finding his bearings, Bill realized he was in his drawers, and only his drawers, in the snow.

Thinking back, Bill couldn't recall how he got here, his brain throbbed in his skull and the last thing he remembered was eating mozzarella sticks in a booth at the Slippery Slope. He knew where he was, somewhere just past the reach of civilization, outside view of the ski resort, only Visible to the forests below.

Bill weighed his options, looking back and forth between the crests he was nestled betwixt until he finally chose the one on his right. He kicked away the heavy snow bank at his feet to walk around the level of the peak. Any higher and I'd have to climb, he thought to himself.

When Bill got around the base of the singular peak, the first thing he noticed was that all his toes were going numb. Once he looked around however, Bill noticed that where he expected to see the small town of Howling Heights, instead there was a plateau.

Oh no, Bill realized in horror, I'm on the wrong damn peak! His digits all numb now, Bill started to circle around, but then had the idea to turn back and walk in his own footprints.

Before he reached the other mountain top, completely prepared for the freezing trek of deeper snow on a steeper plain, Bill noticed a new set of footprints he hadn't seen before. A couple feet from the hole in which he'd woken up, the prints formed a curving line that went downhill, and were joined by an indentation. To Bill, it looked like a sign of whoever dragged him up there.

Bill leapt down to the nearest prints and hopped from them to the closest side of his own indentation in the snow, and fell flat on his face in it. Once picked back up, Bill's whole body was wet and shaking. Stepping forward carefully, Bill started to wish he'd listened to Lynn and grown a beard.

Now that Lynn crossed Bill's mind, she wouldn't cross back out. Even as he worried about hypothermia and dying alone on the mountainside, Bill reflected back to when Lynn left, and wondered what he did wrong. About a week ago, Lynn came home from church with her brother, Paul, and bugged Bill about coming with them next time while they made lunch.

The entire time the three of them prepared her grilled chicken salad, Bill uncomfortably took in the secondhand sermon from Lynn, with Paul cutting in now and then for gold nuggets of contribution. When lunch was eaten and Paul went home, Lynn started a fight, all about a year spent going out alone on Sunday mornings, before she left for good, feeling belittled.

Bill's head kept throbbing, but he had no trouble reliving that whole night; no matter where he'd gone, who he'd seen, everyone knew their entire story. A few said it was his fault, but most people who said anything felt sorry for him.

Finally, Bill made his way through the footprints down out of the snow. There still was some scattered across the area, but most of it disappeared, making way for thick trees in the height of the forest.

Bill considered his options, as each direction saw trees yield to snow eventually, until he noticed the footprints reach their destination on his right, where they made way for tire tracks. Bill realized if whoever brought him up there drove most of the way, they probably took a trail and he'd find a real road sooner or later. The faster I get to civilization, the sooner I can get help, Bill reassured himself.

After stumbling along the tire tracks, thinking more about his last breakup for a few minutes, Bill arrived at a dirt path. Bill paused for a second, then dried his feet one at a time before stepping onto the dirt path. While his feet were still freezing cold, Bill got the feeling back in them which, encouraged him of their strength. He finally stepped forward down the path home, then started to pick up speed.

Bill started running down the path, and finally felt a little nice again as his blood started pumping. He began to feel a sinking beneath him as the path grew steeper, and the running sped beyond his control. Bill got worried he'd fall on his face, or break his neck, but he leaned back, put a little more weight into his footsteps, and regained his balance while retaining an adequate momentum.

When the road came up before him and the trees faded into Bill's background, he was already covered in warm fuzzies. The pavement hurt more than the dirt had, even with its rocks and pine needles. The way his feet bounced off the concrete, Bill had less control and more speed, but with the town coming up he reached the bottom of the mountain, and knew he needn't worry about rolling to his death any longer. With all fear gone, Bill rushed into the Slippery Slope Bar and Grill at a full sprint, madly dashing through the doors where he promptly collapsed.

“Bill,” his friend Kota shouted, rushing over, “what happened?!” The bartender came over, too. “No John, just call an ambulance!” Kota took charge and wrapped Bill in his coat. Once they got Bill some coffee, he caught his breath and finally stopped shaking. He opened his eyes, and saw Paul walk in laughing with another EMT Bill didn't know.

“You! You did this to me, didn't you,” Bill shouted as he leapt to his feet.

“What, Bill? Are you the one who collapsed,” Paul stopped, appearing concerned.

“I remember everything until twelve-thirty last night, Paul. You were sitting there at the far end of the bar, and for once you weren't drinking,” Bill explained.

“Hey yeah, I thought that was weird,” John chimed in.

## **“Between The Crests” by Jeremy Schultz**

Kota stepped forward, “I’ve heard enough, you’re under arrest, Paul.”

“For what,” Paul screamed, triggering Bill.

“For drugging me, stealing my clothes, and leaving me for dead on the mountain last night!” Bill was blindingly furious now.

“I didn’t do any of that,” Paul started to panic, “Kim, tell them I didn’t do it!”

“Sorry Paul, you didn’t come back in ‘til three last night, I can’t be sure of anything.”

“I can, though,” Kota rose from restraining Paul’s hands behind his back, “after we test Bill, my captain will let me search Paul’s truck, apartment, locker, hell, even your vehicle, especially if you both have access to the drugs in his system.” Paul hung his head in tears upon hearing these implications.

“Why’d you do it, Paul? Was it really just because I wouldn’t go to church, or give Lynn the apartment?” Bill gloated, but it was still a little bittersweet for him.

“I don’t care about any of that, you jerk! Are you crazy? I did it because you drove Lynn away when she loved you so much, she just up and moved to Brooklyn! Not even a goodbye, just weeks of crying and now she’s gone, all because of you! I should have just finished the job and buried your corpse in the snow, you damned monster!” Paul’s admission shocked the crowd.

“You’re the only monster here, Lynn would never forgive you for this! You’re a sociopath, Paul-” Bill almost punched the maniac, but Kota stepped in, “and you have the right to remain silent.”

## “The Runway” by Joan Runkel – Awarded Second Place

*Photo - Walk*

I stood here before you,  
now I'm ready to go.  
I've primped and been prodded.  
Get on with the show.

My earrings are rented.  
My next gown is blue.  
The new girls are giggling.  
they don't have a clue.

People think it's so easy.  
They say we're all vain.  
I've an army of people.  
They make me look plain.

I have two more changes.  
I can't stand the scrutiny.  
The girls are upset.  
Backstage there's a mutiny.

When the clapping is silent,  
and the runway is black,  
I'm struggling with zippers.  
I can't reach my back.

This isn't as simple  
as some people may think.  
My shoulders are tired.  
My toes are all pink.

The shoes I am wearing  
are one size too small.  
My next dress is too short.  
I've been told I'm too tall.

I've smiled and walked  
while the crowd simply stared.  
Our outfits are gorgeous,  
our shoes, they are shared.

## “My Cowboy Ways” by Joan Runkel

*Photo – Cowboy*

A shine on my boots,  
with places to go,  
this pair of jeans,  
not their first rodeo.

By day we're all dirty  
with dust on our boots.  
We linger and watch as  
we sit near the chutes.

I rode a rank bull.  
Today was a thrill.  
Recalling the memory,  
it gives me a chill.

My ride gave a snort  
as I dropped to his back.  
I hoped and prayed daily,  
“Please, give me some slack.”

The bull pitched and whirled.  
The clock ticked away.  
The buzz of the timer made  
life's greatest day.

The old cowboys are limping.  
The young ones are not.  
We look to tomorrow,  
our blood running hot.

I've made it to twenty,  
some have retired.  
I've had a good day.  
Now, I'm just tired.

Bones become brittle  
with increasing days.  
My mind will remember  
my young cowboy ways.

## **“Not Even A Bridge” by Karolynn Pargo – Awarded Third Place**

*Photo - Bridge*

He's over there. My Son. He's over there on the other side. It is too dark to see the other side, but it is there. The bridge proves my point. Why would they have such a bridge unless there is an other side? But sometimes a bridge, even a magnificent one, cannot connect me with my amazing son.

His story starts with me as a young woman, beloved daughter of a preacher, as pure of heart as any person that ever walked the earth. Two weeks before my wedding my fiancé left me pregnant and afraid. My Dad collapsed in tears when I told him, but one look at my Mum's face and he knew the future of this baby would not be with me.

I left town to go live with some girlfriends. They were a committed couple way before same sex marriage was recognized. But that is another story worth telling on another day. I missed my parents and called them every week. Mum was always cheerful and full of news from back home. She would go on and on about all the details of the lives around her, but would never speak of the baby. She said she kept herself sane by believing I was staying with my friends until a tumor was removed.

When I signed the adoption papers, the judge said that under no circumstance was I ever to try to contact the child. It would be a felony. Period.

After his birth I did what all good girls do; I returned to my life. Only I was not the same girl. Everything was different. I was a childless mother.

Years passed. I married and had three babies. But not a day went by that I did not grieve for my first baby. Most folks told me to just get on with my life and be happy for what I had. I did. I was. But there was a void that could not be filled by anyone else. A constant longing and wondering. I secretly adopted a teddy bear that I would take to the park to hold while I cried. Especially on his Birthday. That poor bear got pretty messy. And even ripped up a little on the times my grief turned into rage.

On his 40th birthday a friend suggested I use the internet to try to find him. I told her the warning the judge gave me, and she said that times are different and she would look. She posted his birth date and birth town on the web. And nothing happened. For almost three years.

I did not know that he had been looking for me. After years of searching on his birth date and place, he tried changing the format of the date and whom. There was my friend's post. After some initial emails to her, he sent his first message to me.

"My dear stranger. Expect a long letter later today, but for now you need answers to some questions. Does he think of me? Does he think I loved him? Does he think I still do? Does he in some inexplicable way love me back? Did I do the right thing? The answer to all those is "Yes."

In the history of messages, that was the best first message ever.

We spent a month sending emails several times each day. I was constantly amazed at our similarities. Our views on the world, our passions, our hobbies were the same. Both of us had our lives changed by the play "The Fantastics". Dark Side Of The Moon was our favorite music. We learned about each other. We learned from each other. We fell in love. The night I was sent the results of the DNA test proving our relationship we spent 6 straight hours talking on Skype. And we Skyped every night for over a year and traveled to be together for at least five days every month. We were obsessed with each other.

He fit into the family like the missing jig saw puzzle piece that he was. He finally felt like he belonged. He was no longer punished for being artistic. His intelligence was respected and his opinions had value.

We also celebrated our differences. His actions were thoughtful and deliberate. It made him seem elegant. I always acted from gut instinct. He marveled at my spontaneity. His vision and hearing were beyond the human range. Mine were failing.

He had told me of his lifelong battles with unknown demons. Sometimes he had gotten lost in his own self just trying to make sense of himself. Trying to understand what he had done wrong to have been punished by his parents for not "acting right". He told me that sometimes the autism and depression had gripped him so completely that he was trapped in "Silence", unable to communicate. In truth, I witnessed some autistic moments when he experienced an emotional discovery of his new family. But he said that meeting me had cured him of the demons and the "Silence". I had given him life. Again.

Our bliss lasted only a few glorious years. Then he began to lose himself. Sometimes for days or weeks. Now it has been two years. I get an occasional text that says "XOXOXOXO" or "I love you". I know he does. I know he longs for me. But he is over there. On the other side. A bridge cannot help us. And it is so dark.

## “Tea Time” by Joan Runkel

*Photo – Window*

I look out my window  
and what do I see?  
My Vision is blurry.  
I've had too much tea.

My eyes are adjusting.  
The window is changing.  
It appears to be warped.  
My hands, they are aging.

I've talked to myself  
and been sympathetic.  
Myself has agreed,  
I've become quite pathetic.

I've had too much tea.  
It's always so handy,  
on a tray in the hall,  
over there by the brandy.

“Oh, now I know”,  
I proclaim to myself,  
“the craft is the culprit,  
that one on the shelf.”

I felt fine before and  
I don't have a clue.  
My stomach is churning.  
I may have the flue.

The ache is subsiding.  
I can't keep from yawning.  
I'm thirsty again.  
A new day is dawning.

I look out my window  
and what do I see?  
My vision is skewed.  
I need some more tea.

## “A Mountain of Truth” by Karen L. Hamp – Awarded Judges Choice

*Photo – Both Sides Now*

“Mom, come look out the window!! Quick!!” Benjamin shouted to his mom as she picked up the last of the breakfast dishes, and gave the baby a final bite of cereal. “Please hurry, mom, it’s important!! I don’t know..... C’mere quick!”

Benjamin was five, endlessly curious, and creative. Johanna smiled, and hurried to the window to see what her son was looking at. “Look mom. It’s a huge creature! On top of the mountain! Look, that white one, Mom. See? Sort of like an elephant, and sort of like...a ...ah I don’t know exactly... a snow monster!! it’s crawling along the top of the mountain. Look, Mom, look!”

Johanna saw the cloud through Benji’s eyes. It really did look like some kind of animal. She hesitated, believing in helping children test reality, but also strongly believing that Ben’s gifts of imagination and creativity were valuable and important. She attempted to gently resolve reality and imagination.

“Benji”, she paused and smiled at him. “it’s a cloud, but I can see that it looks like a large animal or monster. My goodness!”

“Mom, it is a snow monster! Look at it moving. Look at it reaching out to get more snow off the mountain. Look how it can change shapes. It can stay on the mountain and not fall off!! Just watch!! ”

“What do you think it’s doing?” Johanna asked. She quickly checked on the baby out of the corner of her eye as Benji excitedly spoke.

“Mom, he’s getting more snow, to take back to his babies. That’s how he keeps them healthy and feeds them. They grow bigger when there’s more snow. Like snowmen, you know? His babies grow when he takes snow home to them. Don’t you see? Hey, mom, maybe he grows too as he rolls across the top of the mountains. Maybe he’s like a giant snowball. Do you think?”

Mom, there isn’t much snow up there this year- maybe that, ah..a..um..”climachange” thing you told me about. Do you think he’s hungry? Mom, what if the snow all disappears, will he and his babies die? Mom, where do you think he lives? Where is his home? Where does he go in summer? Do you think that snow monsters have a lot of babies? Do they need vitamins like I do? How do they talk to each other? I don’t know much about snow monsters.”

The questions rolled out of Benji’s mouth just as surely as the cloud continued rolling across the ridge of the mountain. Ben’s questions set off different questions in her mind: “What will happen to this world as the climate changes? Will Benji and his children and grandchildren even have a world they can live in?”

There were no answers, of course. Not even for grown-ups, let alone for 5 year olds. No answers about what would be happening to the mountains and the earth, and no answers about snow monsters except the ones Benji created today. And hopefully, Benji, and those like him could use their creativity to create some viable answers to the world’s problems in the future. But for now, there was Benji’s snow monster, almost at the end of the mountain, helping itself to snow to take home to its babies. Indeed!!

Benjie was still absorbed in the scene but felt his mother’s momentary pause and turned around. “Mom, what’s wrong?”

“Benj, I was just thinking about this world we live in. I thought about your questions, and what might happen if the world changes. And then I thought about your wonderful imagination of the snow monster.

And then I thought about how more than one thing happens at the same time. Like my feeling sad about the future, and feeling happy about your snow monster story just now. Or me seeing a cloud, and you seeing the snow monster. Or when your kitty died, and we thought about all the good times, even while we were crying about him being gone. And you remember that at church we say how we live in two worlds at once. We live in God’s world, and breathe in His breath all the time, and at the same time we live on the earth and breathe oxygen.

Do you understand what I am saying? There are often two things, or even more, going on at the same time and in the same place. And if we pay attention, we know that both are happening. And we can choose which one to think about.”

“Yeah, mom, like just now. I was looking at a cloud and a snow monster, huh? I know it was a cloud. I believed you. But I also know it was a snow monster to me. They were both happening. You let me choose which thing to pay attention to. I like that you’re my mom, and you let me choose, you don’t boss me which one to pay attention to — well, sometimes, but most of the time I get to choose.

That was fun to have a snow monster to study for a while. But now-right now I feel sad that we are calling it a cloud and I am not pretending any more. It was real to me. And I believed it and loved it.” A hint of a tear ran down Benji’s face, as he struggled to come to terms with another part of growing up; as he grieved letting go of his snow monster story, and payed attention to a cloud and what his mom was saying Soon he turned and smiled at his mom.

Johanna hugged him, “You have such a wonderful and creative imagination. Your thinking about the snow monster was a beautiful story. And then when we talked about how the world is, you could see that it was both a snow monster and a cloud and that both were real in some ways.” She thought about how much easier it was for most children to switch focus. She thought adults were more likely to get stuck on one point of view.

She turned back to Benji. “Benji, never stop showing people the beauty and the pictures you see, even when they are really clouds. And remind others that the pictures they sometimes see may be really clouds on mountains, even when they look like snow monsters. Imagination and stories have a purpose and can help people see the world differently, and have fun, and even sometimes help invent new things in the world. But knowing that they are clouds, or what they really are, matters too. Both things are important. They both matter.”

Benji hugged her back, and went to the window to see if the creature had really completely gone from his view. It had, and he turned away from the window, and looked at his mom again.

“What’s next this day, Mom? It’s a good day.”

## “The HOLE” by Bill Schaumann

*Photo - Window*

The elevator light flickered. I didn't recognize it at the time, but the flicker was my first indication of the pending doom that lay ahead. The floor indicator lights raced up counting past the 20 subfloors to ground level. I had taken this ride hundreds of times traveling underground to the HOLE where I had been working for the past 8 years. Although I was just heading to the gym I had no way to tell that this would be my last ride.

Originally built by railroad tycoon Harold Willingford in 1898, the Acosta Mansion is a 15,000—square foot Victorian mansion. A "Painted Lady" she sports a classic five color Victorian paint scheme, 12 bedrooms, stained glass windows, and plenty of gingerbread trim on the outside. Next to the 6 bay carriage house, a large wing was added 9 years ago at the start of the project. The addition served as executive offices for the board and hosted other social and professional functions. A long hallway connects the mansion to the addition. The new wing contains office space and business center, entertainment and hospitality suites, in addition to an indoor pool and full workout facilities for the staff. The HOLE sits comfortably underneath the Acosta Mansion and is surrounded by 500 hundred acres of forest 20 miles northwest of Denver.

In 2027 James G. Falken, a leading astro physicist had discovered a method for manipulating sub atomic particles to change the molecular structures of carbon based elements. Years later Dr. Falken's research led to the establishment of the HOLE and the foundation's objective of achieving speed of light travel. The project was originally an effort sponsored by several international science agencies with private funding and very ambitious goals. We have been actively working for almost eight years and our recent progress in meeting these goals although positive also uncovered new risks that threatened both the future of the project and carbon based life on this planet.

As the elevator passed subfloor S3 the lights flickered again, noticing I looked up, then it happened again, then again and the light started pulsing in a odd but rhythmic pattern. The car slowed passing \$2 and started pulsing, marking time in sync with the lights. The more it slowed the greater the pulse pushed and pulled the car throwing my balance off. I became aware of a low rumbling noise unlike anything I have ever heard. It was like an ocean wave, low, strong, and menacing.

The Hyper Optical Light Exceleator or HOLE or is the most sophisticated lab on the planet. The HOLES's laboratory facilities consume 11 of the 20 floors covering 220,000 square ft. 200 feet underground. It is a completely self-sufficient environment which includes office and living quarters, hydroponic grow center, data center, machine shop, an ISO-14644-1 level 1 clean room, both accelerator and micro beam labs and bio hazard handling facilities. Power is generated by the same nuclear plant that powers navy aircraft carriers. The HOLE's staff is just as impressive as the facility, with a variety of PhDs in a spectrum of sciences. The center piece of the facility and our work however is beyond anything that man has ever created. The device itself is a small doughnut shaped ring. Built of many layers of electro magnates peppered with isotope injectors. The immense power generated by the nuclear plant is used to focus full spectrum light into the ring. This is the core of our research. The theory is that by compressing and accelerating light at different frequencies jumps in time and space could be achieved. Our testing consisted of compressing light at a variety of temperatures, frequencies, and pressurized isotopes.

My cell rang, I looked to see that it was a call from my colleague Janet. Janet Pelk was a brilliant and dedicated teammate. She was part of the core team and held PHD's in materials science and physics. When I left the HOLE to ascend to the surface Janet was just starting the next test cycle on the Digger.

We named our device the Ditch Digger as kind of joke around the core concept of the HOLE. The ditch digger was the focal point because in the shaping of the compression vectors, and we imagined that the digger was digging a hole through time. If all went well and we hit the right combination of test variables, we would open a port, moving through space and time. When I answered her call I instantly knew it hadn't worked, and where the awful rumble was coming from.

Before our go-forward funding was frozen we had been cycling through a finite set of test cases, running the digger through base levels of compressions and frequencies to see if the results met our predictions. As we planned the expansions into additional test scenarios, Cliff Bastion the teams operational director and risk manager had identified a risk theory that although not based in physics, but more on mathematical probabilities led to the exclusion of several high probability combinations of test variables that Janet had been exploring. The 4915 sequence was the one Cliff and Janet could not agree on. Cliff had pressed Janet that this set of variables was to be not explored. But since the funding stopped Janet knew there was little time left to test her theories.

Janet was frantic screaming David "4915! Sequence 4915! The compression destabilized. We have positive indicators! It's a negative compression. There is a hole. There is a hole. Oh my god David it's multiplying! Jackrabbit Jackrabbit Jack..." Then her line went silent. "Janet" I yelled "Janet" But she was gone. Then the elevator stopped. Jackrabbit was our code word. It meant something bad happened in the HOLE. Jackrabbit signaled a catastrophic loss and required an immediate system shutdown to be activated. The Jackrabbit protocol shut down all underground systems and sealed the lab from the surface. Radioactive protection barriers, air handling systems, off site data backups and automated reactor shutdown procedures were all activated. Precautions were in place to protect the outside world from any compounds leaving the lab. As the elevator doors opened I ran.

Down the hall and in the executive wing there was a small monitoring station. Full video, and audio covering the labs provided an operations analyst readouts of all life support, data, power and security systems in the HOLE. Normally a maned post, the monitoring station now stood empty, a victim of the funding cuts. With the Jackrabbit shutdown trigger just 20 yards down the connecting hall in the monitoring station I sprinted. I knew I had to activate Jackrabbit as quickly as I could.

I rounded the corner into the control room and stared. On the bank of monitors I saw images of the lab, or parts of it anyway. Monitor six was focused on the digger. The screen was black. Number four was black too. Monitor four covered the clean room next to the digger. The image on the monitor was odd. They were not powered off, they were just black. A deep black, with a thin fuzzy line near the edges. I didn't comprehend what I was looking at. Monitor two was showing the kitchen. It was normal. I opened the panel with the Jackrabbit shutdown switch and hit it. I looked back at monitor 2 again to the kitchen, the image was still there, but now in the middle of the white refrigerator there was something. What? What was it? What was I seeing? A hole, a black hole was growing. Distorting and twisting the image of the refrigerator door. I jumped back not believing my eyes falling against the chair losing my balance, I stumbled backward. The Jackrabbit sequence took over. Systems were shutting down and turning the protection on. All the monitors went dark as the Jackrabbit status panel went green. We were safe, it was ok I thought. I turned back to the hallway in disbelief, relieved that the lab was secured and isolated. We stopped it, but i was stunned about what was happening to Janet. I had to try her. I grabbed the phone to try and call. I turned and stared out the door and across the hall to the huge window that looked out across the back yard. The phone was dead, and in the center of the window was a growing twisted black hole.

**“The Bridge Waiting” by Diana J. Radomski – Awarded Honorable Mention**

*Photo - Bridge*

I am the bridge waiting,  
Clad of iron and steel.  
For the old people to cross,  
And the young ones, too.  
I hear babies crying,  
From over the hill.  
They're waiting to cross,  
The night is so still.  
Just drop your toll as you go by.  
And I will lift my gate aside.

On the other side you will see, a little glimpse  
Of eternity.  
Green hills and valleys deep,  
A place for a poor soul to sleep.  
And hundreds of immigrants have passed this way.  
To dream of tomorrow, and a better day.  
Bow your head as you pass by,  
For I am the bridge, waiting.

## “The Laundry Chute” by Deborah Anderson

Photo – *Both Sides Now*

They drove along the old mining road and the Jeep seemed to find every pot hole there was. The equipment and all their camping gear in the back slid around and rattled all over the boxes of rock and mineral samples. The sun beat down but it was still cold up in the mountains, especially with the weather guard taken off the Jeep. Sharon pulled her sweatshirt hood up under her cowboy hat but Nance continued to drive with just her sleeveless pull-over on and she wore a red bandanna around her neck in case the dust got really bad. Her dark hair waved about madly as she sped down from the mountain toward the pass as they hit a rare straight-away; Sharon just sat there smiling behind her sunglasses and wondered about opening up a second bottle of Miller. She rarely ever drank when the sun was up but she was excited about being back in civilization again, even if it was Atlantic City, a little speck of a town that blew into Wyoming like a tumbleweed. The fieldwork and mapping was finally complete and as much as Sharon loved her work and the great outdoors, it was time to relax and enjoy. So she decided to celebrate a little early and there's no way she'd be driving anyway, Nance always did the driving and she was pretty bossy about it too. It would be kind of nice in town to get away from Nance and Sharon was pretty sure that Nance felt the same way too.

Nance yelled over at Sharon through the wind and the noise of the rugged road and the blasted boxes of rock specimens sliding around in the back with David Crosby topping it all off by singing about cutting his freak flag hair...

“Can you *pull-ease* put in another 8-track? *Gawd!* I think we've heard that *Déjà Vu* album about eight thousand times now!”

Sharon rummaged through the box of clunky tapes, they had about a dozen of them but they were all getting tiresome if they were even still working. She decided on *The Best of Cream*. She reached behind the seat and grabbed another beer out of the cooler and flicked its metal cap off into space. She bent down below the glove box to light another Marlboro and she lit one for Nance.

Sharon figured they'd be in the small dusty town in about an hour at most and she couldn't wait to take a long hot shower and it would be great just to sleep in a real bed instead of that damn rickety camp cot again tonight. They'd been working in the field for about a month now collecting rock and mineral samples and they mapped out their assigned region of the southeast quadrant with geologic data; they chipped away at outcrops and Forest Service road-cuts examining each find with the tri-loupes that they wore around their necks.

They carefully mapped out each angle of rock with a Brunton compass and they also used a small plane table and simple surveying equipment that would do until the data was imaged against the aerial maps when they got back to the main office. They made camp near a vast pool of water that was fed by a waterfall at the north end of one of the gorges and it was beautiful there, even if the thought of bears and mountain lions were always in the back of their minds. They lived on instant oatmeal, raisins, dried apples, coffee, powdered milk, Miller beer, three cartons of cigarettes, and occasional shots of tequila. It was just a lot easier to stash the dry goods in the secured trunk bay of the Jeep because assembling an elaborate food cache to keep away animals, namely bears, was a pain in the ass and they were usually worn out after working all day.

As night fell, they'd contemplate the meaning of all things created, awed by the bands of the Milky Way and the occasional streaks of meteorites that lit up the August skies. They were serenaded by the lonely howls of distant wolves. The only radio station that vaguely came on in the Jeep was one that played lively yet rather sad Basque folk music and another one that was rife with static that usually featured livestock auctions and vintage country music. They hadn't heard any news in weeks and Nance kept swearing about forgetting the Goddamn shortwave radio, oh well, never again; this was a very hard lesson learned.

But they still had it easy according to the guys at the central office who worked in the Alaskan field where they had to be flown in by bush pilots. No matter where Nance and Sharon were and no matter how remote -- sometimes for two months -- they'd still hear all about Alaska when they got back. Sharon didn't mind too much but it always got to Nance, probably because that's where she wanted to work the most in the whole Western region. It seemed they were always assigned jobs in Wyoming, Idaho, or Eastern Oregon but they always enjoyed Wyoming the most, it is such powerful country with its ever present perfume - an aroma of sage.

Down the road they sped along, slowing to a stop at the sharp corners and switchbacks. Sharon could see the small town far below and her heart sped up. Food! She'd eat until she couldn't take another bite. She finished the beer and tossed the glass bottle in one of the specimen boxes to add to the constant cacophony. She hoped that it got on Nance's nerves and Sharon smiled a little smile to herself, bossy Nance always insisted on driving and giving out the orders.

They drove into town and parked the Jeep in front of the small hotel. The proprietor at the desk looked them over and grinned.

“Are you two from the geological survey?”

This took Sharon by surprise and she asked, “How did you know?”

He chuckled and pointed at her worn t-shirt that had the USGS logo of two crossed rock hammers.

“If the t-shirt wasn't a dead give-away your Jeep outside 'shore is.”

The dusty Jeep had the same logo on the side panel and the two women started laughing along with him. He explained that there was a battalion of forest fire fighters in town taking some well needed R&R so it made rooms sparse but he did have one left if they didn't mind sharing. Sharon was disappointed; she looked forward to her own room after spending weeks with Nance in that God awful tent. She could tell that Nance felt the same way and their moods began to dampen. At least there were two soft beds, thank God. They unloaded the Jeep and lugged their belongings and anything else that seemed worth stealing from the Jeep up a narrow wooden staircase. Nancy's cowboy boots made an enormous racket on the wooden floorboards so she pulled them off. She opened up a window to air the room out and she laid out on one of the beds.

## “The Laundry Chute” by Deborah Anderson

“You go ahead; you can use the shower first. I just want to rest a bit after that horrid drive.” Her ears still stung from the sounds of the road and those blasted bottles smashing together.

When Sharon emerged from the bathroom Nancy was fast asleep. It was only five o’clock and the food could wait. She thought about a third beer and decided against it. She looked out of the smudgy window to look down at the main drag. She saw a saloon that said “Live Music Saturdays”. Today was Saturday! She turned the television on softly and just stared at it, it seemed so odd just watching a baseball game. She flipped through the channels to find some news and caught the tail end of something about the Elvis Presley funeral. Wait. Whoa! *Elvis died!?!?*

“Nance, *Nance*, wake up!”

Nancy opened up one eye, “What, what is it?” She said half asleep.

“Nance, guess what? You are not going to believe this! Elvis Presley died; they were just talking about his *funeral!*”

Nance looked up at Sharon and smirked. “I can’t believe you woke me up to tell me that, my God!” She rolled over and shut her eyes but all she could envision was Elvis stuffed into that white jump suit, ick. She couldn't go back to sleep. Her stomach growled. The thought of the hot shower got her up. She could still feel the jerky motion of the Jeep as she got to her feet and she felt a little dizzy. Her arms and hands could still feel the steering wheel too. She needed some food.

They walked down the main street to take a look around. It was nice hearing cars and people talking and little kids riding bikes. There was a diner called “The Bluebird” on the corner and it seemed to be the only restaurant in town so it would have to do. They felt so clean again and Sharon wore a wrap-around skirt and sandals and even wore her long auburn hair up. Nancy eyed a coin-operated laundry across the street and she couldn’t wait to have clean clothes again that weren’t washed in a stream with biodegradable soap and stiffly dried on a makeshift clothes line or hanging from a tree limb. And where the hell did Sharon have that skirt hidden? She had never seen it before. Sharon was like Ginger or Lovey Howell from “Gilligan’s Island”, her wardrobe had no end, even in the wilderness. Nance felt suddenly self-conscious in her jeans. Oh well, this is how it always was when she was with Sharon - Nance would always be plain old Mary Ann.

Everything smelled so good the minute they walked into the diner; scents of French fries, coffee, and grilling meat with onions welcomed their nostrils and one waitress ran around the tiled floors from table to table in a pale—blue and white uniform; she even had a paper tiara propped in place that was anchored somewhere in her massive platinum blonde bouffant. They sat themselves down in a vinyl seated booth with a tableside juke box. They ordered massive quantities of food which surprised Adelle, the waitress who also wore a great big frilly Adelle name tag. They surprised her even more by eating every scrap and then they ordered pie for dessert and ate that too, a la mode. A group of guys walked through the front door and they took immediate notice to Nance and Sharon. A couple of them waved and one tipped his baseball hat. They all grinned broadly and then sat at a table where they could still see the women. Adelle came over later and informed Sharon and Nancy that the men were a few of the fire fighters resting up after that horrible fire that burned up sixty square miles of land at the Bridger National Forest last week.

She winked at the two women and said longingly, “Oh, to be your age again with such nice looking fellas like that in town in droves. You two should be having a lot of fun this weekend!”

Nance asked for the check and the waitress laughed. “Your fun is already starting, Hon; they already picked up your bill!”

Nance and Sharon looked over and the four men at the table waved and tipped their hats. Nance and Sharon smiled thanks and waved back. This attention wasn't new to either Nancy or Sharon. Despite feeling like she was Mary Ann from “Gilligan’s Island”, Nancy was very pretty with her high cheek bones and intelligent dark brown eyes. She looked fresh and healthy with a glowing tan from all the field work and her love of the outdoors. Sharon was just plain gorgeous. They worked exclusively with men; after all they were geologists, a pretty non-traditional field to be in at this time. They were used to the attention and so was their boss. No way would he ever pair either of them out in the field alone with the guys, to be on the safe side, but those guys were all pretty harmless if not a bit geeky and it was like one big family at the office. An affair with any of them would feel more like incest but the boss was old school. He never did approve of women working in the field anyway but times had changed. Hell, we never even had aerial photos back then to double check our maps, everyone had it easy now.

The two women left the diner waving back again and they headed toward the saloon. It was starting to get dark as the sun slid slowly down. This sure felt better right now than spending another night in the Gros Ventre wilderness. The street was crowded with ranch hands, families, and Basque shepherds who were enjoying being out on the town from the seclusion they called their homes the rest of the week. Teenagers cruised in pickup trucks and Chevelle’s and people started lining up to see “Smokey and the Bandit” at the little movie theater in the center of town.

They could hear the faint whiff of music when the saloon doors were opened and as they entered the bar they had to adjust their eyes to the darkness. It wasn’t all that crowded yet but it did feel good just to be with people again and the noise and the clatter that came from the bar where the Basque sheep herders lined up. They sat down since they went into the field. They didn’t talk much because after a month together there wasn’t much to talk about really. They got along fine even though Nance was on the more intense side. She tended to do things like organize her match sticks in a row on the table or fold each cocktail napkin carefully in half after each drink. Even her ashtray was filled with butts neatly lined up before the waitress emptied it. These kinds of things drove Sharon a bit nuts but it could be worse. At least they both shared the same kind of humor and they both liked the same music among other interests, including their profession. But Sharon’s disregard for organization drove Nance a bit nuts too but it wasn’t enough to argue about, she just knew she could never just leave a glass ring like that on the table and not at least wipe it down. Sharon just finger painted designs in each ring instead. Nance began tapping time with the music coming from the stage, the band was a little off but okay, they played a lot of Neil Young. The fire fighters started drifting in and before they knew it they were having a great big party around Sharon and Nance’s table. Even the band joined their tables between sets. One man with a beard who had that Jeremiah Johnson look going for him asked what they did and why they were in town.

## “The Laundry Chute” by Deborah Anderson

Photo – Both Sides Now

“We’re geologists,” Sharon shouted over the crowd.

“Are you here with that revival then outside of town by the lake?” He asked solemnly. Sharon looked at him confused, “Say what?” she asked.

He continued on despite her apparent look of bewilderment. “And will you be here for church tomorrow too or are you going to be leading the services?”

During a brief lull of bar noise and music Nance started laughing and asked what the deal was about church and revivals.

“Didn’t you say you two are into theology?”

This time Sharon seriously looked baffled. Then she got it.

“I said Geology, not theology!”

Everyone was laughing by this time and Jeremiah Johnson was clearly embarrassed.

Sharon slapped the back of his flannel shirt, “Don’t be embarrassed, it’s so loud in here!”

He started laughing and said he did wonder about all the glasses of wine, that maybe it was an okay thing to do for theologians since it was wine and Jesus sure liked his wine!

The saloon was packed and the firefighters were getting rowdy but they were all good guys. Half of them said they were either engaged or married. The others were almost too shy to talk to the women until the Michelob or Coor’s kicked in. One young guy was homesick and talked about his parents and his kid sister. Other women from town had joined the tables too and it was all about friendly. The band was taking requests and inviting people up to sing. Nancy boldly went up to the microphone.

“You guys know *Horse with No Name*?” How could the band not know it, it was two chords!

Nance was laughing hysterically during the intro, “I’m gonna sing an English teacher’s worst nightmare!” she yelled out; the microphone wailed with feedback.

The tables of people cheered and clapped and Sharon couldn’t believe Nance was up there doing this, she wished she had brought a camera along.

*On the first part of the journey, I was lookin’ at all the life. . .* Then everyone in the saloon was singing along except for the Basque sheep herders who simply looked on amused, smiles creasing their leather-like faces.

*Cause there ain’t no one for to give you no name. . .*

By the time the song ended everyone was smashing drinks together and Nancy was doubled over laughing so hard she was crying. As everyone slowly recovered, a sense of seriousness swept over the crowd. One of the fire fighters ambled up to the stage and held up a shot. “Okay you guys, this one’s for Randy!” The guys all stood up, removed their hats and drank a shot. Jeremiah Johnson whispered over to Sharon that they lost Randy in the fire last week, he got trapped and no one could get to him before the flames did, he was twenty-two years old. Her eyes filled up and then she noticed that everyone else’s eyes were filled up too including the mountain man’s.

It was getting late and everyone was getting tired. The crowd broke apart and they all said their good-byes like they’d been friends forever. Nance and Sharon walked out into the night and the street was bathed in neon and streetlight. The marquis at the movie theater and the ticket booth was dark now.

“I still can’t believe you got up there and sang like that, I didn’t even know you could sing!”

“There’s probably a lot you don’t know about me,” Nance said. Sharon shot back a look and said the same thing right back at her.

Nancy thought she knew everything about people, especially about Sharon!

“Oh come on Shar, you are an open book, I think you’ve told me just about everything there is to know about you over the past two years we’ve worked together.”

“I’m *adopted*,” Sharon said, looking the other way. “I never tell anyone that.”

Nancy couldn’t believe it, and thought maybe it was an elaborate joke that Sharon was famous for pulling, all Sharon ever did was talk about her folks and her family; naturally she’d say something about being adopted too. Nancy felt a bit of anger rising up, it was important for her to know about people, even irritating close people like Sharon and why would Sharon be so secretive? Why would she hold back like this to her?

“I’ve been thinking about finding out where I really did come from, who my mother really is, there has to be a way of finding out. But I don’t want my mom and dad’s feelings hurt if I do find out.”

## “The Laundry Chute” by Deborah Anderson

Nancy stopped walking and looked intently at Sharon. “Does it really matter; I mean I’ve been with your family at holidays for God’s sake! You guys make *Father Knows Best* look dysfunctional!”

Sharon sat down on a bench and smiled and Nance plopped down next to her.

“We all have our moments. My family is far from perfect. Did you know for instance I went missing my very first day home? I was a week old. The whole family was there to see me-- all the grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins -- the whole shebang. When everyone got there they all came upstairs to see me for the first time and the bassinet was empty. My mother started screaming. My father looked out the nursery window to see if there was a ladder, like what happened in that Lindbergh case. ‘Call the police!’ the grandmothers yelled frantically as the aunts all hugged and then there was my mom who was about to faint into my grandmother’s arms. And then my brother Mark began crying saying he was so sorry. No one listened to him. Then he began to wail. What? *Sorry?* Where is she? *Mark, where is Sharon? Tell us!* He walked down the hallway with the entire anxious family following close behind and then he stopped, sobbed loudly, and pointed at the laundry chute. The laundry chute! The women all screamed in horror and the men ambled down the stairs, four at a time and continued down the basement stairs as fast as they could. The women continued to scream, the cousins stood frozen with fear, and Mark continued to sob. But the beds had all been stripped that morning because company was coming and that’s where they found me, I landed into a large hamper on top of all those blankets and sheets and I was perfectly fine; in fact, I was sound asleep!”

Nance looked at Sharon in disbelief and then exploded with laughter. “I always said you were dropped on your head when you were a baby!” They both laughed hysterically, “I’ve never told anyone and it’s one of my family’s darkest secrets”, Sharon sputtered out.

“*Oh my God!*” Nancy cried out. “No wonder you and Mark never got along! Jesus Christ, *the laundry chute?*”

They walked back to the hotel and planned out the journey back to Menlo Park, they’d leave on Monday and they’d call the Denver office first to check in. Tomorrow they’d do laundry after a big breakfast at the diner. When they got back to their room Sharon flipped the television set back on just to listen to it. The reception was snowy but John Belushi was doing a Samurai routine. Nance fell asleep thinking of Alaska and Denali and Sharon looked over the cocktail napkin that Jeremiah Johnson gave her with his name and phone number on it. His real name was Bill Parker and he was from Eugene, Oregon.

She’d call her folks in the morning; they always worried when she was out in the field. She couldn’t believe that Nancy fell for that story about the laundry chute. She thinks she knows everything. Sharon buried her head in her pillow and giggled. But she hadn’t lied about the adoption. She couldn’t figure out why she had always been so embarrassed about that. Maybe she would look for her real mother someday. Her eyes felt like weights and she slowly drifted off to sleep in the large comfortable bed; it was... as soft... as a hamper full of sheets at the bottom of a laundry chute.