

## **“Both Sides Now” by Katie Howard – Awarded Judges Choice**

*Photo – Both Sides Now*

“Hello, how was your day?” I’ve always wished I could ask you that. On the contrary, I will never, nor have ever, been able to do that. I’ve never been like you. Why? I have never walked, talked, looked, acted, or been treated like any of your kind. You see, I’m a mountain. If one were to ask you to describe a mountain, you would picture a heaping pile of rock. That’s what I am. I remember the day when I realized I could not be like you and your kind, no matter how hard I tried.

The air swirling around me felt warm and the sun shone brightly, accenting all my rocky features. Many people had shown up to walk about the small-scale city I looked upon. I looked over at the town and saw hundreds of people admiring it. People were talking loudly due to all the humans inhabiting the town. Many people stopped to look at me, then soon went back to walking around the town. I noticed one couple – the woman had short locks of auburn hair and big hazel eyes, while the man had black hair with dark blue eyes. They seemed to be young, and adventurous. They were like young deer exploring the forest together. The woman’s head turned towards me in a flash. Her eyes lit up as she tugged her husband’s sleeve.

She waved at me and yelled with her high voice, “Hi, mountain!” No one had ever noticed me before. Sure, people had seen me, and admired my features as if I was an exceptional feat of nature, but no one ever thought I could be like them. I felt as if one thousand fireworks were going to explode inside me. I heard a deep voice chuckle at the woman’s call.

“Dear, the mountain can’t respond to you. It’s just a big rock,” Any joy residing inside me now depleted to nothing. It vanished into thin air, nothing remaining, except the cold feeling inside me. The woman raised her voice then half-shouted at her husband, “I’m just trying to have some fun. We came here to do that, so I’m doing that.” She was defending herself, not me. The coldness increased, even though the day was so warm. The husband spoke up again, his voice calmer than his wife’s.

“I’m not saying you’re not having fun. I’m just telling you so people don’t think you’re crazy,” the woman put her hand up to make another argument then lowered it, having nothing left to say. The taller man laughed at his wife’s defeat. His laugh sounded hearty and earnest, as if he was actually enjoying his time in this tiny old town. The woman flinched at her husband’s laugh then lightly punched him in the upper arm.

“Don’t laugh!” she exclaimed. This, however, did not stop the man’s laughter. It only increased. The man held his stomach as he tried to stop laughing. Soon the woman laughed too, her laugh was light and airy. After a few seconds, they both stopped laughing. They intertwined their hands together and walked away as if nothing had happened at all. Even though they went about their day with smiles on their faces, I felt the opposite. Their laughter made me want to turn away, but I couldn’t. I was still a mountain, and mountains can’t move.

Their words pierced the coldness that took the place of a heart inside me. The wind turned cold and howled deeply as I mourned to myself, but no one would know what pain I was going through. I could not show it to anyone because I was cursed with a cold outside that showed no emotions whatsoever. The outside of me that was strong contrasted with the hopelessness I felt at that time on the inside. This was one of the events that triggered the hate towards myself.

I could not tell anyone my problems. No one would sit down and listen to me talk for hours and understand what I was going through. On the contrary to what your kind believed, I did have feelings. When people talked, I listened to every syllable that came out of their mouths. Whether their voice was raspy, or friendly. Whether their voice spoke quietly or exclaimed everything they said. I still listened. Over the years, I heard many stories from many different people. Some came from fancy men with odd accents, to legends told by red-skinned warriors.

I longed for the day when I could tell the world my stories. The day when I could walk, talk, act and be treated like the people I watched go about their lives everyday. I wanted to talk and wanted people to listen to me. People looked at me, but they didn’t see me. For centuries I wanted to be seen by someone – someone to take in every single feature of my cold, rocky exterior and appreciate all of me.

Who would want to admire a stupid rock like me anyway? I had no outstanding features to be admired. I was just a big rock as the man with the deep voice said that day. At times, I wished I could disappear, go somewhere new, be someone else, meet new people, and tell their stories.

It was a cool autumn day, just like any other. I sat alone watching people walk by. A girl with short brown hair and bright green eyes holding a sketchbook close to her chest paused and stared at me. She looked around frantically to see a light brown bench. She sat down on it, took a picture of me with her large camera and started sketching in her tiny book. She occasionally looked up from her sketch to notice every one of my features. Notice my features, not just see them. There was something sprouting from my cold interior that I had not felt in a long time. Happiness. I was an eagle chick that had just learned to fly.

When the girl finished, she stood up, dusted herself off and looked at me. She smiled. Not to someone around her. Her face turned from a look of industriousness to one of joy towards me. Her green eyes sparkled as she smiled. The smile lit up the entire town I looked down on. Everything seemed so more vibrant now. I swear I almost saw a halo sitting above her head and wings sprouting from her back. She was an angel. I had never been treated like more than just a pile of rocks and dirt.

So this was what being human felt like.