The Hurricane

The hurricane creates accelerated whirls around a lonely core of domestic violence. The house entire lifts from its moorings and spins through skies, plummeting down to land upon the unfortunate witch, killing her instantly and creating havoc amongst the munchkin population who assumed she was entirely to blame.

And it’s only now she’s dead that they begin to ask those proper questions about whether this was truly accidental or the consequence of some malign force far more powerful than ever suspected. And suddenly her thin protruding legs in their torn stockings look so vulnerable sad and forlorn—and they all wonder if there was more they could have done.

Sharon Rockman
1st Place – © 2022
Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

Columbine

Oh Columbine, Venus cried when her lover left for a journey to a planet much darker than her apricot veil.

Earth’s mountains were nothing like the rich rocks of home, merely bleak and gray with omnivouring occupants.

For days, she called for bees, luring with sweet relief, but in this wasteland, they could not hear.

When the earthlings came instead and wrapped their hands around her throat, screams echoed through abandoned stone.

Her bitter honey leaves were ripped apart, crushed just like her purple petals, chained in lockets around their necks.

Oh Columbine, Venus cried, her lover’s power to arouse affection abused to demand loyalty by creatures of infidelity.

Vanessa Jae
Honorable Mention – © 2022
Germany

Creation

Once a year we go Out into the woods Where the trees have spilled piles of leaves Fit to set the ground on fire. My grandfather says that he built my grandmother Out of those leaves. He gave her a fiery tongue And vivid red hair And enough of a spirit that she could leave him If it ever came to that. Clay is damp and wet If you ever want a real person Shape them out of changing autumn leaves.

Rachel Basha Friedman
3rd Place – © 2022
North Hollywood, CA, USA
The Unborn and the Dead

The unborn and the dead have tea
in the parlor of autumn cemeteries
steep pomegranate rinds slowly in early greyed tears,
pour out the red leaves swirling from the bone pot
to read pasts and futures that stain the cups like dried blood.

They each take two casket slabs of sugar
to sweeten the pain of mortality
then sip the grief that will come,
the grief freshly brewed.

The unborn and the dead have met
the same ghosts, psychics, mothers and morticians,
and chat about their homes of dark matter and neighbors:
the embryos moving in, the withered corpses moving out–
the tomb of the womb, the womb of the tomb
where your last hour will be someone’s first.

At night, they whisper together as you fall asleep
while the clock twitches its cold green numbers at your head:
You began in dreams, say the unborn.
You will end as memories, say the dead.

Lorraine Schein
2nd Place – © 2022
Sunnyside, NY, USA

Heel to Toe

My grandmother put silver slippers on my feet; she told me to walk in them, click my heels.

Her slippers glittered like stars as I teetered from bed to wall
\textit{click click click}

Back with her at bed’s end I stepped out and found blood lining dried brown spots adorning the heel of one, toe of the other.

I asked her how she cut her feet inside shoes that always always fit her perfectly.

She said nothing, said to put her lovely slippers on again.

My feet grew to fit–cover the stains and click my way to work–click me home again.

My grandmother died when I was twenty-five lying alone in that bed, gray hair a veil across her face.

I found her amidst tangled quilts, unscarred feet bare

like mine used to be.

Marisca Pichette
Honorable Mention – © 2022
Deerfield, MA, USA
Miss Moore’s Wallpaper

On a rain-slicked Saturday,
Lily and I were playing hide and seek on the wooded hillside
when Miss Moore invited us into her clapboard house.
The aroma of freshly baked Danish pastries
was too alluring to resist.
Her small gray house perched at the bottom
of the hill, lonely and dismal.
We sat on the carved wood loveseat
and savored the pastry’s buttery and flaky texture,
our eyes roaming around.

Something made my heart stutter—
not the dim light, not the musty smell,
not Miss Moore’s pointed long nose or her lopsided smile,
but the wallpaper that covered every inch
of the wall—briars woven with strings of brambles
and spiky leaves, as if thorny snakes twisting and crawling.
A fly landed on the wall and was immediately
wrapped in vines, sinking into the floral pattern.
Startled by the sight, I grabbed Lily’s hand and we thrust out of the door,
dashing down the rocky road until we had to gasp for air.
I tried to explain what I had spotted,
but Lily swore the wallpaper was only pretty pink roses.

Since that day, nobody had seen Miss Moore—
she vanished inside her own house.
Rumors spread that she was a witch
and one of her potions had gone wrong.
At night, people heard a whispering pitchy cry
with the scratching sound of fingernails echoing from her house.
I knew they must be from behind the wallpaper,
but nobody would believe me.

Allison Xu
Special Young Writer’s Award – © 2022
Rockville, MD, USA
About the Winning Poets

Sharon Rockman (First Place)—Sharon Rockman is a poet, copywriter and editor. She is currently completing an internship in vet nursing. Her poetry is a direct, acerbic and often humourful evocation of human nature and relationships; how we navigate, celebrate, collaborate, love and lose. Her work has been shortlisted for the ACU, Ros Spencer, Robyn Mathison Poetry Prize, Tasmanian Women’s Poetry Prise, and MPU. She was awarded 3rd place for “My Brother Jack” and has been published in Makarelle, Slush Love, Palette, and The Canberra Times.


Rachel Basha Friedman (Third Place)—Rachel Basha Friedman writes from North Hollywood, California.

Allison Xu (Special Young Writer's Award)—Allison Xu is a high school student in Maryland. Her poetry and short stories have been published in Germ Magazine, Secret Attic, Bourgeon, Cathartic Literary Magazine, The Weight Journal, 50-Word Stories, and several anthologies. Her work has been recognized by Scholastic Arts & Writing awards, Blue Fire Creative Writing Contest, Kay Snow Writing Contest, etc. In her free time, she enjoys reading, swimming, and playing with her beagle.

Marisca Pichette (Honorable Mention)—Marisca Pichette is a queer creator of monsters and magic. Her work has appeared and is forthcoming in Strange Horizons, Fireside Magazine, Fusion Fragment, Daily Science Fiction, Uncharted Magazine, PseudoPod, and PodCastle, among others. She lives in Western Massachusetts, surrounded by bones and whispering trees.

Vanessa Jae (Honorable Mention)—Vanessa Jae writes horrifically beautiful anarchies, reads stories for Apex Magazine and translates for Progressive International. She also collects black hoodies and bruises in mosh pits on Tuesday nights. To read tweets by interesting people follow her at @thevanessajae.

How to Enter the Annual BSFS Poetry Contest!

1. Entries should address the themes of science fiction/fantasy/horror/science.
2. 1st prize: $100; 2nd prize: $75; 3rd prize: $50. Additional awards may be authorized at the judges’ discretion.
3. Limit: 3 poems/person, maximum 60 lines each. No entry fee.
4. Winners will receive a cash prize, convention membership and be invited to read their winning entries at Balticon. Attendance at Balticon is not required to win.
5. Please no previously published submissions.
6. Winning poems will be published one time in the BSFAN, the Balticon convention souvenir book. In addition, a pdf version of the winning poems as they appear in the BSFAN will be available on the Balticon Poetry Contest website. Writers retain all rights to their work. By submitting to the contest, entrants agree to these terms.
7. Deadline: Mailed entries must be postmarked, and e-mail entries received, by March 1. Entries that do not meet this deadline will be considered for the following year. Please include your name, address, phone number, e-mail address & a brief bio with your entry.
8. Entries may be submitted via the BSFS Poetry Contest Submission Form at: bsfs.org/bsfpsmqetry.
9. Entries may also be e-mailed to poetry@bsfs.org or mailed to “BSFS Poetry Contest,” c/o BSFS, PO Box 686, Baltimore, MD 21203-0686. Info: poetry@bsfs.org.
10. While we would like to respond to each entrant personally, it is not always possible due to the large number of submissions we receive. Please check the Poetry Contest website (bsfs.org/bsfpsmqetry.htm) periodically for updates and announcement of the winners.
11. Good luck & keep writing!