

BSFS Poetry Contest 2022 Winners

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

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

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

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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
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

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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 Prize, and MPU. She was awarded 3rd place for “My Brother Jack” and has been published in *Makarelle*, *Slush Love*, *Palette*, and *The Canberra Times*.

Lorraine Schein (*Second Place*)—Lorraine Schein is a New York writer. Her work has appeared in *VICE Terraform*, *Strange Horizons*, *Enchanted Conversation*, and *Mermaids Monthly*, and in the anthology *Tragedy Queens: Stories Inspired by Lana del Rey & Sylvia Plath*. *The Futurist’s Mistress*, her poetry book, is available from Mayapple Press: www.mayapplepress.com.

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/bsfspoetry.
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/bsfspoetry.htm) periodically for updates and announcement of the winners.
11. Good luck & keep writing!