Balticon 45 Poetry Contest Winners

The Human Guest

The mating time was brief this year.  
Our women sang notes like  
floss on the widewind plains.

A human came who forced his seed  
on Ala of the Yellow Eyes. We pretended  
to be honored; we felt otherwise.

After, Ala wasn’t the same.  
She cut her marvelous hair  
which had been dark and long  
grown down below her legs.

She wandered off to the Darklands,  
heavy with child and none to celebrate.  
We mourn her fate. If she survives,  
she’ll raise his spawn alone.

She was the envy of us all.  
When the child is born,  
she’ll burn his father’s image  
in the sands of our dead oceans.

The human sits on our sacred stones.  
He preens his beard and leers at females,  
with no more thoughts to waste on Ala;  
he never even knew her name.

Come burrow season, we prepare,  
sharpen our talons on caddo root.  
When the freezing gales begin,  
the human will demand sanctuary,  
as his kind always does.

We will confirm his welcome  
with the strewing of his bones.

Marge Simon  
3rd Place  
Ocala, FL

Stardust

These are not my bones.  
They thrum upon muscle and sinew—  
the refrain of death and rebirth  
to the tune of growth and pain  
and wonder.

There is time in these bones,  
they remember when I was not yet  
myself.

This is not my blood.  
Once it flowed through mountains  
fed by winter’s thaw,  
in turn fed springs  
and drop by drop  
wore granite rock  
into dust.

These are not my hands.  
At night they whisper my dreams full  
of memories—  
digging through dark earth for golden roots,  
striking rock and feeding fire,  
pointing at the moon.

This is not my home.  
My every cell yearns toward light, and at sunrise  
cries out  
until I am deafened into remembrance—  
I was born in the sky  
in the hearts of stars.

Kat Kohler  
1st Place  
Madison, WI

The Night World

Fairies dance by moonlight’s glow,  
twirling around roses, sprinkling  
dream-dust on sleeping children.  
Friends of the fireflies.

Stars aren’t diamonds, but the eyes  
of the gods, blinking as they watch.

Crickets and owls and wolves,  
all harmonizing in night’s choir.  
They need no conductor.

Creatures of the day, man sleeps on,  
ignorant of this hidden world, and  
living where the sun is revered.

Except where the fantastical flourishes,  
Diana is forgone and forgotten.

Laura Johnson  
Special Young Poet Award  
Oakville, ON, Canada
Talking to Owl

Heat radiates up from the rust-red roof tiles, the sun’s heat, held captive until it can sneak away now, under cover of darkness.

Owl spoke to me in the twilight, told me to meet him here. He came to my window, a dark silent ghost with eyes of fire. You must listen to Owl when he calls your name.

The rooftop heat keeps the chill of the night away while the sharp stars circle over me. Owl surprises me. He seems to materialize from the shadows and starlight.

Why did you call me here, Owl, to this October rooftop?
   I call every person three times.
   Each time you will make a choice to stay, to wait here for the next call, or to follow.
How shall I follow, without ghost-wings of my own?

And where would you lead me?
   You would not need wings. If you so choose we will follow the trail that souls take, the cloud of light in the night sky, the place where stars are born and die, where worlds incubate for millennia in the priceless dust of galaxies, then live for an eyelink, pass and are born again.
   I will be your guide, now, if you choose to come.

I am silent, words having fled me at this choice. Owl speaks again.
   It is not an easy time to live, and there are many days to come before it will get any better, but then it is not an easy choice.
   Will you come now?

His eyes are the fire that draws small creatures in to their deaths, his silent silhouette like the ghost I will become.

No, I will not follow you yet. I have made plans; the night is as sweet as the day, as good as the borrowed heat of the tiles on my back. Someday I will walk the trail of stars with you. Not yet.

This is the first call. It will come twice more, and then you must make another choice.

Caitlin Walsh
2nd Place
Mentone, CA

About the Winning Poets

Kat Kohler (First Place)—I was a returning student to the University of Wisconsin-Madison a few years ago and received my bachelor’s degree in English with an emphasis in Creative Writing. I have had various professions which together sound like part of a nursery rhyme, and include: baker, carpenter, and cab driver. Besides contemplating the paradigm of language and the paradox of human existence, I also enjoy knitting, yoga, and gardening. I like to grow moss because as a child I thought that’s where faeries slept—on moss beds.

Caitlin Walsh (Second Place)—I am 20 years old and a full-time community college student. I’ve been writing poetry for about seven years, but the only place I’ve been published yet is a student-only campus magazine. In addition to writing, I read far more novels than are good for me, I make jewelry, and I like to go urban exploring. My eventual goal is to write and publish a novel.


Laura Johnson (Special Young Poet Award)—I am a graduating high school student who loves to write, whether it be poetry or prose. At any given time, I carry with me a science fiction or fantasy novel as well as a notebook for capturing inspiration. My favourite time of day is evening, when I can curl up with a mug of hot cocoa and be moved by another author’s writing.

Honorable Mention

The Complaint of Orpheus
Paco José Madden
Washington, DC

Complete Poetry Contest rules can be found at: www.bsfs.org/bsfspoetry.htm.