BSFS Poetry Contest 2021 Winners

It is a Father’s Tale

Time out of time I carried you in your dressing gown downstairs into the moonless night. We gazed at a thousand suns studding the sky. Meandering along back lanes; I lifted your arm to point at Orion, drifting above rooftops. We drew a ‘w’ and a triangle in the dark bowl, traced a hunter’s belt and coloured in a lion, a charioteer and a little bear. I didn’t know then that you’d drift out of reach when I reached for the thousand and one stories to keep you listening – to keep you where trolls, giants and goats sleep under bridges.

Eric Nicholson
1st Place – © 2021
Gateshead, Tyne & Wear, UK

Milicent Patrick Speaks of Monsters

The studio wanted a sad, beautiful monster for their black lagoon. Imagine the lone, lonely survivor of an ancient race– half-man, half-fish, they said. I sensed his presence. His rough skin, deep gator green. His dank, amphibious scent. Special effects made the underwater suit, but the creature’s face belonged to me. It had to be hideous, yet human enough a girl could almost fall in love. I sculpted muttonchop gills, voluptuous lips, sorrowful, sloping eyes. My boss told anyone who’d listen that he alone designed the Gill Man, a boys’ club lie that hung on me thick as Spanish moss. I gave them what they wanted– a lovesick monster, gentle fiction– and never saw the creature lurking in the shadows.

Laura Shovan
Honorable Mention – © 2021
Clarkesville, MD, US

Sea Stack
© 2021 Alyssa Winans
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Memories of a Mermaid

A glittering sliver of something was glimpsed on the horizon today
Bobbing slowly nearer,
Like a cork on a rough sea
Every now and then the beauty of it
Caught the eye of a turning sunbather
A child even pointed once,
Declaring it a mermaid
But as the day drew on
Interest waned
And the beach began to clear.
The glimpse of glitter swelling
With the drawing in of the tide
Grazed the sand of the shore
For the first time
Shifting back
And forth
Back
And forth
With the slow rhythmic pulse of the sea
Before finally coming to a halt.
Moments passed.
The snout of a spaniel sniffed indifferently
A dog walker stopped
Hesitantly, poking with the toe of her shoe
A naked body flopped back
A picture of sullied perfection
Luminous skin a wonderful shade of pale
Blue eyes wide, an expression of mild surprise
Colourless hair encrusted with sparkling sand
Only the curl of a piece of paper held tight within a hand
I told you not to drown
It said.

Natascha Graham
2nd Place – © 2021
Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK

Cygnsus

She developed her muscles
and her instincts
on the farm
and by protecting her flock.
She’s not some dewy maiden
or disguised princess
dancing lightly in satin slippers.
As a girl
she was too big
and too loud
and too awkward.
Now they see her coming
and flee.
Enough.
If she is to be cast out
for being who she is
she will be who she is
unapologetically.
She sways with purpose
and her voice is low
as she walks out into the night.
She dons and fills
her skin
of feathers and down,
flexes her powerful wings
and flies up
up
and away
to her flock
of stars.

Ryan E. Holman
3rd Place – © 2021
Kensington, MD, US
The Catty Hours

Midnight with my little black cat
Waiting for Halloween
Pricking me with his fine needle claws–
Signs of love as he purrs, purrs–
Sharp as his green eyes
Staring deep into my soul,
His pointed ears, pointed tail
Little black magic cat
Riding on my chest like the flat of a broom
As I soar through dreamland,
Guarding me,
Hissing my demons away
As anxieties dig deep
In the wee small hours
The witching hours
The canny, green-eyed hours
The catty hours
Calm dark waters, dipping cool hands
Smooth as the black velvet of midnight
(With my little black cat)
Fingers stir through purring black fur
As I smooth angled cheeks and triangle chin
That slant like his wise, glowing cat-eyes.

Max purrs me to sleep, rumbles regular as waves
Pushing me off the shore
With Wynken, Blynken, and Nod,
Sailing through star-land, dreamland,
Little black cat perched on the helm.
My long, lean, sleek and sinuous cat-man,
His tail waving like a cavalier’s plume,
Honor bright as Maximilien Morrel
And his cat-like Count,
Rumbling away this tightness in my chest
That catches me, quickening my breath
To nightmares echoing this fulcrum life–
With almost as many loved ones now my beloved dead
As are still living with me on this side–
When my dead outnumber my living,
Will I dip down into that darkness?
Dip down
(onto Death)
I wake to find my cheek pressed sleek
Into purring black cat fur,
And Max gazes at me
With smiling black cat eyes

Adele Gardner
Honorable Mention – © 2021
Newport News, VA, US
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!

About the Winning Poets

**Eric Nicholson (First Place)**—Eric Nicholson is a retired art teacher who lives in NE England. He received First Prize in the Opossum Magazine poetry competition 2020.

**Natascha Graham (Second Place)**—Natascha Graham is a lesbian writer of stage and screen as well as poetry and fiction.

**Ryan E. Holman (Third Place)**—Ryan E. Holman has previously had work appearing in the Silver Spring/Takoma Park Voice, Split This Rock’s blog in their Call for Poems of Resistance, Power, & Resilience, and 2Elizabeths’ 6 Word Story Contest. She has been featured in the Third Thursday Takoma Park Reading Series three times and earned 3rd prize in the Baltimore Science Fiction Society’s 2016 annual poetry contest. Ryan has reclaimed her creative voice following grad school and enjoys writing about everyday and fantastic life, often through the lens of the elements.

**Laura Shovan (Honorable Mention)**—Laura Shovan is an editor, educator, Pushcart Prize-nominated poet, and award-winning children’s book author. Some of her books include the chapbook Mountain, Log, Salt and Stone, winner of the inaugural Harriss Poetry Prize; the anthology Life in Me Like Grass on Fire: Love Poems; and the middle grade verse novel, The Last Fifth Grade of Emerson Elementary.

**Adele Gardner (Honorable Mention)**—Cat-loving cataloging librarian Adele Gardner (gardnercastle.com) has over 335 poems published in Strange Horizons, Pedestal Magazine, Polu Texni, American Arts Quarterly, Dreams & Nightmares, Liminality, and more. Ten poems won or placed in the Poetry Society of Virginia Awards, Balticon Poetry Contest, and Rhysling Award. A fond aunt and fine arts b&w film photographer, Gardner loves watching samurai films and reading comics with cats.