

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

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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

Cygnus

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
 up
 and away
 to her flock
 of stars.

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

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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
 (into 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 *2Elizabets' 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.