
JPI FLASH CONTEST

We have a winner! And four honorable mentions. We had over twenty entries for our first contest featuring micro-fiction fantasy stories.

The decision was difficult with all the great stories we received. Creating a story of 500 words or less was a challenge that our entrants accomplished with flair.

So, without further ado here are the winning stories.

First Place Story:

“A Safe Place to Remember” By Christina Tang-Bernas

A Safe Place to Remember

By Christina Tang-Bernas

The dragon opened its eyes at the change in light and scent signaling that someone was at its cave entrance. It raised its head to peer down at the human who had dared disturb their nap, shedding faded ticket stubs and dried flower petals and brightly colored greeting cards from its scales. The woman looked too old and frail to do much harm, but one didn't live as long as the dragon had by underestimating people.

The white-haired woman stared back at the dragon, who was perched atop costume jewelry and bronzed baby shoes, "Wish You Were Here" postcards and bedraggled teddy bears, before stepping forward.

"Here," she said, holding out an object with both hands. "This is for you."

On closer inspection, the dragon snorted, "I don't hoard books. Try the dragon in the next valley." It turned to go back to sleep, but the woman shook the book.

"It's a photo album," she insisted. "I've heard you hoard sentiment."

The dragon reached out to delicately lift the cover open with a claw, then flipped the pages.

They were full of photos of the woman, much younger, in a lacy white dress. Of a smiling man in a too-large suit. Of balloons and cake and dancing. Now that it was touching the book, the dragon could feel the emotions imbued within it. It wanted to rub its face against the yellowed paper.

"And what do you want in return?" the dragon asked. Humans rarely volunteered to face a dragon unless their desire overrode their fear.

"Nothing, really," the woman said. "I just want you to keep it safe. I—" she stopped, shoulders sagging. "I'm losing my memory. Sometimes, I look at the photos in my albums and I don't really remember the people in them anymore. I'll point to someone, and they tell me it's my husband, that I used to love him very much. And then, I'll wake up the next day surprised I could have ever forgotten him, the person I spent most of my life with, the one who knew how to find my laughter best. One day, maybe I'll forget him forever, or even forget myself, and these photos won't mean anything anymore. Or I'll pass, and the people who have it next won't care for it, or understand. So, I want you to have it. To keep him safe. To keep my memories safe."

The dragon considered this for a long while. "I understand," it finally said. "It will be safe in my lifetime, which is many times those of humans." It pulled the album into the midst of its hoard, so that it could no longer be seen. Satisfied with its new acquisition, the dragon curled up, eyes closing back into sleep and tail coming around to tuck its hoard closer to its body.

Only the soft footsteps and the light and scent changing let it know its visitor was gone again.

The End

Honorable mentions in no particular order:
"Bodies are Wasted on the Young" by Joe Giordano
"Arthur's Return" by Dawn DeBaal
"Growing Older Alone By Nicholas Poe
"Clarity" by Jen Mierisch