

THE PLACE BEYOND

Winning entry for last month's prompt 'Borderlands'

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The only light is the slight flicker coming from a dying bonfire, a refuge of warmth amidst the cold winter darkness. The noise of rhythmic banging on steel drums resonates through the air, breaking any kind of tension. He sits on his porch. He does not own, nor need, a chair. This man has done very little with his life, and for whatever he has achieved, he has never waited long enough to receive any recognition. His name is Jen Hood.

The Jen is not short for anything.

Jen is now sitting on his porch, his back against the wall. He is in deep thought. He resides in a small island at the edge of a place that isn't supposed to have any island. The people who live with him on the island are people who do not exist. Jen isn't sure if he exists himself. He had lost his identity a long time ago; he only goes by Jen now. It is a good thing that where he lives, things like names and histories are not important. All that matters are the stories. If you have good stories, you have a place on this island that Jen has come to call home.

Jen has all these stories in his head, but he can never remember experiencing them. He feels like a vessel that carries eons of memories inside of him, that are meant to be stored and then passed on when he can no longer carry out his duties. There are days when Jen comes to truly appreciate this curse: by possessing all these memories he can walk through time, visiting places, experiencing emotions and reenacting events long lost. Jen enjoys that about his affliction. But there are also days when he becomes lost in the past. Where he cannot find his way back and is riveted in time, searching for something only he would know. Those days, he finds himself stranded in an echoing chasm. But this chasm is not his,

no, it never truly was. It belongs to the creators of all those memories that he possesses, all those experiences that he harbours, like a thief not wanting to let go of his stolen treasure. He does not know how to rid himself of them, he has grown too dependent of them. No longer does he remember how to create memories, all he can do is relive old ones that never truly belonged to him. Jen has become a sad man,

wrong things? He could never reach an answer but yet he chose to sometimes mull over these matters. Light began attacking the darkness now. The story was reaching an end. Jen decided to listen closely to the ending. Now as the sun became slowly visible across the horizon, Jen lapsed into the world spoken of in the story. It was about a man, one who had experienced many things, but forgotten them as quickly as he

solved by the body, but rather a problem for the mind. Thus to solve it he must unlock his intellect and to do so he must access his memories. Relentlessly the man attempted to recover his memories, even tiny strands, but he was unsuccessful, he could not do it. This went on, the man kept trying and failing and the problem continued to stare at him mockingly, until one starry day someone walked up to him. The

person spoke of a way to help him revive his memories. The man jumped at the opportunity, but the stranger warned him that by doing so he would become a container. A container that holds memories and can never lose them, one that is cursed to continue living endlessly for the sake of creating more and more memories. The man did not understand the gravity of such a curse and so instantly accepted the offer. This allowed him to solve the problem.

Now Jen was intently listening, not knowing what he wanted to hear. The speaker kept talking. The man in the story realised that the stranger had not been joking. By unlocking all his memories he was now stuck in this body that refused to age, forced to create more and more memories. What would he do? He was out of answers, so he just kept doing what he knew – solving problems, for eternity.

After the story was over, Jen went up to the

speaker and asked him where he had acquired this story. The storyteller replied, "From the land that lies between everything that you see and everything that you believe. The place where past is future and future is non-existent. The spot where perception is no longer the only tool for discerning and understanding reality. That is where I have acquired this story, and that is where all stories come from. It is the Borderland."

The writer, aged 15, is a grade 9 student at Sunbeams.



This Month's Prompt:
Whirlwind
Deadline:
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who has come to choose the reality of others over his own, a place that lies between reality and the world of dreams, a limbo flanking both sides. He has come to resign himself to the Borderlands.

As Jen listened to the story of the day, being told by its charismatic holder, encouraged by the rhythmic banging of drums, he began to think – something quite rare for him to do. He thought to himself, why did all these people choose to do all these things? Why did they make so many mistakes? Why is there so much happiness in all the

had done them. He would wander the globe, doing things without understanding how he did them. He held no memories, or at least none that could assist him in discovering himself. One day this man faces a problem he can't seem to solve. This body of his, the only part of him capable of remembering his past, cannot recall any possible way to solve this problem. The man does not know what to do. This comes to him as a most excruciating surprise. In this state of helplessness the man realises something. This is not a problem to be