



WORDS AND WONDER

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Language is a powerful toy.

By the time I could walk, I understood speech and tone and that they had significance—that there was a meaning to the jumble of sounds coming out of people’s mouths. I wasn’t about to observe this tool and be like, “Nahhh, I’ll pass,” so I mimicked the noises and started transcribing a dictionary in my head to keep up with all the words around me. And it paid off. After a while, I could ask for things I wanted, I could tell people how I felt, I could make my friends laugh. With those words and sentences in tow, when I picked up a stick in the yard, I could make it so much more. Through my narration, that stick could become a key to an invisible door that led to anywhere I wanted to go.

But just like how the shine of having a driver’s license wears off after a couple years, by the time I was old enough to get a failing grade in Handwriting, the potential of language began to lose its sparkle.

It starts with being put on the spot. Some authority says to me, “Write,” and there I sit in a rectangular room, looking at a rectangular book and a rectangular piece of paper, with a point tally commanding me to fill it up or face the consequences. Somewhere along the way, something important is lost. I’m so worried about the number of words I need to write or the number of quotes I need to include that I forget about the wonder I used to feel at a chance to say anything at all.

Sometimes though, I can close my eyes and pick up that stick again. I remember the hundreds of days I spent wandering through the landscape of my mind until my mother would make me come inside from the darkness. No one told that kid to imagine, but he would have whether he was asked to or not. More than anything, I would like to grasp that limitless potential again, but a part of me recognizes that I never actually let it go. In my backyard, the key to that invisible door was language itself.

Maybe one day after enough reminders that words are life’s ultimate playthings, some authority will tell me to write, and instead of dread or annoyance, I will feel emboldened to comply. This time, I’ll know that I—not my professor, not that point tally—hold the key. This time, when I type out each

letter, I won't feel anxiety or boredom or longing for a stroll in the sunshine. I'll feel alive. Every sentence will be magic—each one an opportunity to challenge myself, to learn, to explore.

Or maybe not. It seems there will always be times when I stare at my computer screen, bitter about the wording of a prompt or the fact that I'm not having a beer with friends. But that childlike wonder at the feet of language is mine to embrace always. The kid I used to be will always be there to guide my fingers on the keyboard and remind me of my potential if I let him. Whether I choose to remember it or not, when I picked up that stick, I never put it down.