

The Weight of Words
By Susanne

A certain kind of passive tension seems to fill the empty room. One that is broken only by the rhythmic beating of a heart and the soft spirals of dust dancing through the air, carried by wayward breaths. As the overcast light of an early morning filters through the crooked slats of a window shade, another sound breaks the tension—the turning of a weathered page.

My fingers play at the dog-eared corner of the *Deathly Hallows*, counting the pages left. My eyes flit from word to word, arranged like the crooked bricks of a back-alley wall. I will myself to read faster, racing against time. Above me, posters hang lopsided, edges tattered and colors faded, framing a small blue clock that ticks faintly. I reach the end of a page and, as I turn it, sit up from my position propped on a leaning stack of pillows. Hunched over the book, holding it slightly towards the strips of sunlight fighting through the window shade, I spare a moment to glance again at the clock. Another minute has gone by. Six pages left... I'm so close. A scrape of paper against paper breaks the silence. I'm starting to trip over phrases, returning me to that place where I am lost in the words. *Dyslexic*.

I swore not to let it define me, but as I struggle through *dis...dis...cussing*, I'm terrified that this isn't a choice that's mine to make.

Another page flicks by.

I take a breath. Then I let myself fall into the space between the lines, and a new world engulfs me.

Train whistles sound as the sour smell of smoke and too many people fills my nostrils. I jump aside as a trolley, laden with trunks, skips on the tiles and approaches a brick wall, the large plastic numbers 9 and 10 visible to either side. Beyond it, a red steam engine awaits, surrounded by teenagers jostling among leather steamer trunks and cages of screeching, fluttering owls. Greetings are exchanged, hugs given, and hair mussed as students board the train. I spot a black-haired man crouched in front of an equally raven-haired boy. Albus nervously asks his parents to write, they agree.

Another page.

Albus boards the train as the black-haired man heaves his trunk onto the cart next to him. The train whistles and the din of conversation crescendos with shouts of 'Good bye' as the train begins to creep down the tracks. Albus waves though a billowing cloud of steam as he disappears from sight.

Another page.

Nothing. The page is blank, but a small note about copyright is stamped on the bottom edge.

I'm done.

I've finished nearly 2000 pages of text. I have proven that I can read.

But to whom? I call out into the quiet house:

"I finished!"

Flecks of dust dance in the rays of the sun, casting dim arcs of color through the room. The creaking of an empty house responds. I feel nothing. I realize that through each stained and battered page, the weight of words has lost its power. Now, a page is just a page... a book is just a book. They are no longer a mountain to climb or a hurdle to jump. What once might have been an accomplishment worth gold now seems worthless. My eyes drift back to the clock.

"Finished what?" a voice calls, as the clock's soft ticking fills my ears, and I feel a grin slide across my face.

"Harry Potter," I respond. A cheer drowns out the ticking, and the warmth I expected, the one I had been missing, fills me. *Even if I can't see how far I've come, the people who carried me here can, and I owe it to them to be proud.*

The large hand of the clock moves again, marking the end of another minute,

11:11

The perfect time for a perfect moment.