

BY THE HANGMAN'S NOOSE:

The story of how I learned to read and write

Reading, writing, music and laughter are the four pillars that hold up the structure of my life. I am fairly certain that if one were to crumble, my entire existence would come crashing down along with it, in a show that would rival the tale of Samson himself.

Of course I did not suddenly wake up one morning with this towering building and its impressive pillars around me; no, like anything worth having in this life, the construction took time and hard work and it is by no means finished. Of the foundations I don't remember much, it was laid down in my early years and try as I might, I can only ever find little flashes that allude to its molding. However, I recall, with astonishing clarity, the time that I learned to read and write. Although this happened over many years, with different teachers and experiences; my earliest memory is of my grandmother and a game we played using only pen, paper and our knowledge.

The first time the game was introduced to me, I was inexplicably drawn to its outcome; I would watch with fascinating horror as the little stick figure sped to its untimely demise. In time, I came to the realization that it was my knowledge, or lack thereof, that marched this figure to its premature end. It was extremely frustrating, to say the least, because although my ink based doodle always had an undesirable end, my grandmother's seemed to always survive. If only I did more. Understood more. *Knew* more. And so, an insatiable thirst for knowledge was born.

Reading became a necessity, the only way to empower me with the knowledge that was essential to my task. On a day like any other, I watched once more as the stick figure I was responsible for, crawled towards its seemingly inevitable fate. Suddenly the little empty lines that signified its fading life force, were all filled up. I remember everything about that moment: The cheerful glint of sun on paper and the upbeat twittering of birds outside the open window. But most of all I remember the smile in my grandmother's eyes, as she watched me comprehend my first success against her superior knowledge. Soon, it became less about the life of an inanimate little figure and more about outsmarting my well-read grandmother. I needed to do more. Understand more. Know more. And each time my little stick figure survived, something undefinable inside of me flourished; helping to shape the person I would someday become.

In the years between then and now; I have come to understand that reading is an invaluable tool. One that will help me build a life structure more impressive than anything, anybody has ever perceived.