



A Comedy & A Tragedy: A Memoir of Learning How to Read and Write

Travis Hugh Culley

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In this powerful memoir, former bicycle messenger and acclaimed author of *The Immortal Class* recounts his difficult journey to literacy.

A Comedy & A Tragedy is the story of one young man's effort to teach himself to read. Complex and many-leveled, this book is also a manifesto about the acquisition of intellectual independence. It is a plea for better understanding of the impact of dysfunctional family dynamics in education, and a passionate indictment of a broken school system that lets so-called problem kids slip through the cracks.

When Travis Hugh Culley moves with his family to Miami in the spring of 1980, the bright six-year-old hopes things will be easier for him. Instead, he is dubbed "Birdbrain" by his older brother and classified by his new teachers as a discipline problem. Travis fakes his way through tests and homework assignments, mimicking his fellow students and pretending to know how to read. When his music teacher suggests that he audition for an acting program, Travis begins an unlikely path toward literacy.

The moment Travis begins to perform, he is confronted by his angry father, who is threatened by the transformation in his son. Unsure of how to make sense of what has happened, Travis grabs a pen and writes his experience down. Suddenly, everything can be seen in a new light. Having written, he begins to understand in a new way the relationship between words and actions.

When his parents separate and his grades fall, Travis clings to a journal in which he notes the details of his changing life. Having no place else to turn to process his emotions, Travis lays claim to the project of his own emancipation. This troubled student runs away from home but does not drop out of school. With pen in hand, he commits to an education in the theater and begins to fully realize the power and importance of literacy. Travis discovers that only through the mastery of writing can he determine his place in the world. Eventually, he will become an accomplished author—with a triumphant story to tell.

A Comedy & A Tragedy is an important and inspired memoir that will touch the hearts of parents, teachers, students, and anyone who has struggled with traumatic experiences in education. It is a work of love, of friendship, and of confidence in one young scholar's infinite belief in language.

Advance praise for *A Comedy & A Tragedy*

"This tale of struggle, survival, and triumph addresses the inner lives of children and the grave responsibility of adults to ensure that their voices are heard. Readers will readily warm to the story of a bright, illiterate boy who is destined to become a lauded writer."—*Publishers Weekly*

"The story of how writing became a means of healing . . . a testimony to the liberating power of art."—*Kirkus Reviews*

"A starkly unusual and unusually compelling story."—*Booklist*

Praise for Travis Hugh Culley's *The Immortal Class*

“An important new critical voice.”—*Library Journal*

“A truly stunning book, completely original, a mixture of autobiography and philosophical treatise.”—*Booklist*

“An ever-kinetic prose straddling narrative and polemic, with an ear all the while for the small pebbles slipping beneath its feet.”—*The Seattle Times*

From the Hardcover edition.

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