

L E E H A R V E Y O S W A L D
**AUTOBIOGRAPHY
FROM DEATH ROW**

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“FOR A NATION THAT IS
AFRAID TO LET ITS PEOPLE
JUDGE THE TRUTH AND
FALSEHOOD IN AN OPEN
MARKET IS A NATION THAT IS
AFRAID OF ITS PEOPLE.”

—JOHN F. KENNEDY, 1961

Prologue

They used to say he never slept. The late-shift guards told me that– the kind of men who saw things the public never would. On their rounds they’d find him still at the rickety metal table in his cell, hunched over an old typewriter that rattled like a dying engine. Two in the morning, three, four– it didn’t matter. The clatter of keys echoed through the corridor, a heartbeat no one could silence.

One guard, a subdued man named Keller, swore he once heard Oswald talking to the machine as if it were a companion. “You’ll tell it right,” he would mutter. “You won’t twist it.”

Keller smiled when he told me this story, but he didn’t smile much afterward. There was something about the way he said it–

as though he knew he had witnessed a man confessing to his only friend.

The typewriter was a castoff from the prison storeroom. Half the keys stuck, the ribbon bled more shadow than ink, and the margin bell rang at random. But to Lee Harvey Oswald, condemned assassin of President John F. Kennedy and Dallas police officer J.D. Tippit, it was salvation. He hammered the keys with a kind of desperation; each strike a bullet, each word a wound he could finally inflict on those who'd wronged him.

Years later, a guard named Les Daniels slid me the parcel tied up in twine. "Mr. Gladstone, I couldn't let it rot," he said. "Not after hearing how he poured hisself into it." His hand trembled as he passed it across the table. "But don't ask me if I believe it. I don't. I just... I couldn't bury it with him."

I didn't ask questions. I carried it home, a brown bundle heavy as stone in my hands.

I opened it in my office that night. The smell hit me first– old paper, damp from years in storage, faint cigarette smoke from inside the prison walls. The pages were uneven, some smeared, others torn where the typewriter’s teeth had bitten too hard. Every line pulsed with urgency. Oswald’s voice was there– defiant, bitter– but vulnerable in ways the cameras had never shown.

Reading it was like sitting in his cell.

He wrote of concrete sweated in summer and dripped onto his cot, fluorescent lights hummed like insects overhead and never let him forget he was watched, food on trays that smelled of bleach, tasteless potatoes and meat so gray it could have been anything.

He wrote that the guards called him “Lee” when they were soft, “Oswald” when they were hard. Every time they walked by, he imagined what they truly thought: Assassin. Liar. Patsy.

But the typewriter– he gave it life. It was more than a tool; it was the only ally he had left. He once told a guard that the missing keys were like missing pieces of himself.

Some nights he would stop typing, sit back, and stare at the barred window as though he was waiting for a signal– someone out there meant to flash a light to let him know the game was still on.

Another guard, who preferred to remain anonymous, said Oswald sometimes leave whole pages face down when they passed, as if daring them to peek. “I read one once,” he admitted. “It just said: ‘I am not what you made me.’ over and over, line after line, like he was trying to beat it into the machine.”

And yet, for all his rants and proclamations, they said he had moments of startling calm. He would ask them about their kids, or hum to himself under his breath– snatches of some Russian lullaby, they thought. As if part of him was still living in another country, another life.

When I read the manuscript in full, I understood what Daniels had meant. It wasn't a confession. There were no apologies, no pleas for forgiveness. What I held was a counter-story, a weapon forged from words.

Oswald didn't just record events; he dissected them, obsessed over them, cast them as pieces of a grand design. His childhood, the Marines, Russia, New Orleans, Dallas— everything became evidence in his case against the world. To him, humiliation were tests, acquaintances handlers, coincidences marks of orchestration.

Whether he believed every word is impossible to say. What's undeniable is the fever with which he wrote, as if stopping would let the walls swallow him.

What follows is that manuscript.

I have resisted the urge to edit or annotate. To do so would betray the voice of the man who typed it under bare fluorescent lights, wrists raw from handcuffs, his death sentence looming. Because Oswald suffered from dyslexia, I have corrected spelling and grammar where needed. Otherwise his words remain as written.

If you are expecting clearcut answers to the greatest murder controversy of our time, you may be disappointed. Even in the final, desperate hours before his execution, Oswald refused to name names or give details, claiming he feared what might happen to his family if he did.

Were those threats real, or did he only believe they were? Are these pages the rant of a guilty man twisting history in his favor, or the testimony of someone who knew too much and was left to die with the truth?

I know what I believe. What this manuscript offers is not a solution but something more dangerous: a way to see the world as he did, and to decide how much of that vision you are willing

to accept.

When I reached the final pages, I felt a chill that has not left me. For in those last lines, Lee Harvey Oswald wasn't begging for mercy. He was demanding to be heard.

Chapter 1: Death Row Begins

I'm just a patsy.

The words still taste of sweat and blood. They live at the back of my throat, scraping raw whenever I swallow. I said them once in front of the cameras and the blinding lights, and they've been chasing me ever since.

Sometimes I whisper them, and the sound bounces off these concrete walls as if another man is saying it with me. Sometimes I say them loud enough for the guards to hear, and their footsteps pause outside my cell.

The first time I shouted it here, a gruff voice said, "Go to sleep, Oswald." As if sleep could drown it out. Months later, after the

novelty of guarding me wore off– the same voice changed its tune:

“Go to sleep, Lee.”

The name is softer now, almost friendly, though there’s no friendship in it. It’s habit. Familiarity. They pass me too many times a day to keep using the last name that’s been blackened across every front page in the country. To them, I’m no longer “Oswald the Assassin.” I’m just “Lee,” the quiet man in the cell, the one who bangs out sentences on that junk typewriter in the corner until the small hours.

You live long enough in a cage, and even your jailers begin to forget what you were supposed to be.

I’m just a patsy. It wasn’t just a cry or an excuse. It was the entire truth, compressed into four words. The world turned its ears away, but I’ll pound it out on these stiff metal keys until I’m no longer able.

The typewriter had arrived like a miracle– or a curse, depending

on how you look at it. The guard who carried it in had eyes that cut through me with hate. He set it down like a judge dropping a gavel.

I laughed when I first saw it. Here was something as battered and unwanted as me, pressed into service by people who wanted only to see it break down. But to me, it's alive. Every letter I punch into the page is a small act of mutiny, proof that I am still an operator, not just the operated on. Each time I jam the "e" key until it hammers out a gray mark, it's proof I can still force the world to notice what I have to say, even if only in faded carbon.

Confession. That's the word they've been waiting for since November. They tried to beat it out of me with questions, paraded me in front of the cameras, shoved microphones at me in the hallways, hoping I'd hang my head and nod.

I never gave them the satisfaction. This machine isn't for repentance. It's for revenge. The first time I touched the keys, I felt it in my bones. The sound echoed through the corridor— clack-

clack-clack– louder than the guard’s shuffle, louder even than the voices in my head whispering *patsy*.

They thought Ruby’s bullet would silence me, the trial would bury me, the chair would finish the job. But I have this. While the keys still move beneath my fingers, I am alive.

Do you know what humiliation feels like? Not shame– humiliation. Shame belongs to the guilty. Humiliation belongs to the powerless. It’s what happens when men in suits and uniforms strip away your dignity and hold you up like a trophy for the mob to jeer at.

Captain Fritz leaning across the table, questions already answered before my mouth opened. The DA puffing for the cameras, spoon-feeding the press the story they wanted. The judge, gavel in hand, pretending this was law when it was theater. They humiliated me. They turned me into a character in a story they’d already written.

But here, in this cell, I hold the pen.

The walls drip when it rains. The air tastes of rust. The mattress is thin as paper and stinks of every man who laid on it before me.

The food slides through the slot and clatters on the tray like I'm an animal in a zoo. Sometimes I let it sit until the smell sours, just to remind myself I still have a choice.

The nights are worse. Darkness comes heavy, pressing on my chest. Sometimes I lie there and imagine the footsteps outside aren't guards but the others— the ones who failed to kill me in the garage basement, the ones who still want me gone before I say too much.

Maybe that's why they brought me this typewriter. Not kindness— insurance. Let him write, they say. Let him spend his words on ink and keys instead of speaking them aloud.

They miscalculated.

This isn't therapy. It isn't confession. This is testimony, and testimony is dangerous.

They called me a villain. They painted me as a lone wolf, said
I was nothing. Well, I am something. And if the chair hums
tomorrow, or next week, or next year, these pages will remain.
They'll outlive the headlines, the smirking reporters, the jeering
guards. They'll outlive the lies.

Because this isn't just an autobiography. It is a weapon.

When the last word is typed, when the ribbon runs dry and the keys
fall silent, the words will stand as proof that I was never what they
made me. I was not their assassin. I was not their creation.

I was their patsy.