

L E E   H A R V E Y   O S W A L D

# AUTOBIOGRAPHY FROM DEATH ROW

A novel by D. Matthew Cutler

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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

**T**hey used to say he never slept.

The guards told me that. Not all of them, only the ones who had worked the late shift- the kind of men who saw things the public never would.

They said sometimes they'd make their rounds and find him still at that 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 would echo through the corridor like a heartbeat no one could silence.

One guard, a subdued man named Keller, swore he once heard the man talking to the typewriter itself, as though 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—like he knew he had witnessed a man confessing to his only friend.

The typewriter had been a castoff, salvaged from the prison storeroom. Half the keys stuck, the ribbon bled more shadow than ink, and the margin bell rang randomly. But to Lee Harvey Oswald, condemned assassin and cop killer, it was salvation. He would hammer the keys with a kind of desperation, like each strike was a bullet, each word a wound he could finally inflict on those who had wronged him.

When a guard named Les Daniels slid me the parcel years later, tied up in twine, he said, “Mr. Gladstone, I couldn’t let it rot. Not after hearing how he poured himself into it.”

His hand trembled when 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 simply carried it home, that brown bundle heavy as stone in my hands.

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

Reading it was like sitting in his cell.

He described the way the concrete sweated in summer, dripping onto his cot in the night. How the fluorescent lights hummed like

insects overhead, never letting him forget he was watched. How the food came on trays that smelled of bleach, tasteless lumps of 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. And every time they walked by, he imagined what they truly thought: Assassin. Liar. Patsy.

But the typewriter– he gave it life.

For his manuscript, autobiography, the typewriter 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.

On some nights, Oswald would stop typing suddenly, sit back, and stare at the barred window for minutes at a time. “It was like he was waiting for a signal,” one guard remembered. “Like someone out there was supposed to flash a light, let him know the game was still on.”

Another guard, preferring to remain anonymous, said Oswald would sometimes leave whole pages sitting face down on the table when the guards 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.

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When I began to read the manuscript in full, I realized what Daniels, the older guard, had meant: it wasn't a confession, not in the sense the world expected. There were no apologies, no pleas for forgiveness. What I held in my hands was a counter-story, a weapon forged from words.

Oswald didn't just write about events; he dissected them, obsessed over them, cast them as pieces of a grand design. His childhood, his time in the Marines, his years in Russia, New Orleans, his return to Dallas- it all became evidence in his case against the world.

Every humiliation was a test. Every acquaintance was a handler. Every coincidence was a mark of orchestration.

Whether or not he believed every word is impossible to say. But what's undeniable is the intensity- the fever with which he wrote, as though if he stopped, the walls themselves would swallow him.

What follows is that manuscript.

Note that I have resisted the urge to edit or annotate. To do so would betray the voice of the man who typed it under fluorescent lights, his wrists shackled, his death sentence looming. However, Oswald suffered from dyslexia, so where appropriate I have

corrected his spelling. Otherwise his words remain as written.

You, the reader, must decide what these words are. The rant of a guilty man, desperate to twist history in his favor? Or the testimony of someone who knew too much, left to die in a chair along with the truth?

When I reached the final pages, I felt a chill that hasn't left me since. For in those last lines, Lee Harvey Oswald wasn't begging for our mercy. He was demanding something far more dangerous: 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, in front of the blinding lights, and they've been chasing me ever since.

Sometimes I whisper them under my breath, and the sound bounces off these concrete walls as if another man is saying it with me. Sometimes I say it loud, 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." Just like that. As if sleep could drown it out.

But lately—months in, after the novelty of guarding me wore off—the same voice has changed its tune. “Go to sleep, Lee.”

It makes me laugh in the dark. The name is softer now, almost friendly, though I know there’s no friendship in it. It’s habit. Familiarity. They pass me too many times a day to keep calling me by 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 sometimes bangs out sentences on that junk typewriter in the corner until the small hours of the night.

That’s the thing: 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. It wasn’t just an excuse. It was the entire truth,

compressed into four words. The world turned its ears away, but I will pound it out again and again on these stiff metal keys until I'm no longer able.

The typewriter I use to write these words arrived like a miracle--or a curse. Depends on how you look at it.

When I first saw it, I laughed. It was a laugh that rattled up through my chest, the kind I hadn't made in months. 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.

The guard who carried it had eyes that cut through me with hate. He had a neck like a hydraulic piston and a jaw that could crack walnuts. He set the typewriter down like a judge dropping a gavel.

I just stared at the keys, at the way the alphabet waited for me. It sits crooked on the little table, one leg shorter than the others,

proppped up by a wad of cardboard I tore from a milk carton. The ribbon is frayed and pale, so faint that sometimes I have to strike a key twice to leave even a ghost of a letter.

Every letter I punch into the page will be a small act of mutiny– an assertion 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 will be proof that 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're all waiting for. The only word they've wanted from me since November. They tried to beat it out of me with questions. They paraded me in front of the cameras, hoping I'd hang my head and nod. They shoved microphones at me in the hallway, daring me to collapse under the weight of it.

But 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 that whisper *patsy*. The typewriter will be my weapon, each strike another bullet fired back at the machine that swallowed me.

They thought Ruby's bullet would silence me. They thought the trial would bury me. They thought the chair would finish the job.

But I have this. And while the keys still move beneath my fingers, I am alive.

*I'm just a patsy.*

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.

That was my trial. Not justice. A parade.

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, face carved from stone, pretending this was law when it was theater.

They humiliated me. They made me into a character in a story they'd already written.

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

The walls here drip when it rains. The air tastes of rust. The mattress is thin as paper and carries the stink of every man who laid on it before me. The food slides through the slot without a word, clattering on the tray like I'm an animal in a zoo. Sometimes I let it sit untouched until the smell sours, just to remind myself that I still have a choice.

The nights are worse.

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

And maybe that's why they brought me this typewriter. Maybe it  
wasn't kindness at all. Maybe it was insurance. Let him write, they  
say. Let him pour himself out on paper, spend his words on ink  
and keys instead of speaking them aloud.

But they miscalculated.

This isn't therapy.

This isn't confession.

This is testimony.

And testimony is dangerous.

They called me a villain. They painted me as a lone wolf. They 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 will outlive the headlines. They will outlive the smirking reporters and the jeering guards. They will outlive the lies.

Because this isn't just an autobiography.

It is a weapon.

It is the truth they feared.

And 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.