

# Greetings From Death Row



by

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The inside was dark. I could just make out the outline of the chair and the restraints and the window with the sliding curtain before the guard shut the door. It took a lot of pleading to get him to show it to me, but guards here pretty are indulgent if you're reasonable. All things considered, it's not an unreasonable request to want to see the place where you will die soon. It was years once, then months, now weeks. It will be days soon. I haven't started counting in hours yet, but I know I will.

I am not particularly afraid, at least not paralyzed by fear, but it is always on my mind. A priest came to "help me prepare myself" and "make my peace with God." I really have no

use for God. Anybody who's supposed to be all-powerful but lets doddering old priests and fat, loudmouth reverends speak on his behalf doesn't particularly impress me. Anybody who could ease the burdens of all the people trapped inside the bubble of suffering that is this world—yet chooses not to and refuses to even give his reasons—has no right to sit in judgement of me. To hell with God.

Though, one thing the priest said stuck with me. He said I should try to clear my conscience, to make amends where I could. He suggested I write a letter to Justin's parents. I actually asked "who" when he said that. Justin Thomas Wallace, he said. Of course, I'd heard the name many, many times at the trial, but it just didn't register right away. How does a kid from the projects rate a name like that anyway? He's still Flick to me. Always will be.

Anyway, he said write a letter to your victim's family telling your story, your hopes, your regrets. They may never read it, he said, but it might help me to resolve some things in my own mind. Apparently, it's a pretty common thing among those in my position. "Greetings from Death Row" they call it. (I'm not sure if the fact if it's common enough to have a name comforts or distresses me.) He said if I couldn't write, he'd take my dictation. He actually seemed disappointed when I said I could—like I took away a job he'd found to make himself feel useful. Well, I can write. I can read, too. And add, subtract, multiply, do long division. I'm not stupid, and dealing with money sharpens one's attention to detail. But, I've always been particularly good with words, and good at reading people and knowing what I needed to say to them. Those skills and my natural intelligence are what allowed me to rise so far so fast in my career, which will end in that small, dark room in the not-too-distant future. So judge for yourself the ultimate value of my intelligence.

In any case, the idea of telling my story appeals to me. First off, the basics: my mother worked, my father drank, and I got little kindness from either of them. I liked school pretty well, but not enough to make home bearable in the end. So I went out on my own when I was 12. Slept in doorways for while, then did things I am not proud of to work my way up to hallways. Someone noticed me and I started delivering packages. I learned the ropes of a new trade, and slowly began to climb them. I took advantage of a few choice opportunities, and before I knew it, found myself in a position to give orders.

At the trial, the prosecutor kept calling me a "Drug Lord"—and I did like the sound of it—but it's a bit too grandiose for what I did. I bought stuff. I sold stuff. I had employees and I told them what to do. It's a business, that's all it really is. Don't get me wrong, it's a nasty business and I don't recommend it for anyone. But I did enjoy it some parts of it. And I was good at it for a while. Longer than most.

Now, let me say this, get it out once and for all: I did kill your boy. Yes, I pleaded innocent and protested my innocence every chance I got, but I did do it. Single shot to the back of the head, where the spinal cord enters the brain (I have some experience in the art). Then, I gutted him and hung him from a street light. That's what I'm being executed for, I know. I saw the faces of the judge and jury and that's what set them off. Not so much that I took a life (quickly and cleanly, I might add. He never even heard the shot), but that I mutilated a piece of meat. A nasty business, as I said before. But I had to do it. I had to make the point, and believe me, I took no pleasure in it.

You see, Flick, your boy, came to work for me when he was all of about 14. I gave him easy work, running packages, taking notes to suppliers and buyers, that kind of thing. I liked him. Bright, eager kid... reminded me of myself. In my way, I wanted to help him, toss some money his way. But he was ambitious, ambitious to a fault. Kept wanting more: responsibility, money, control. So, I sent him away. Told him he didn't work for me any more and to go on home to his mother (my exact words). Again, in my own way, I thought I was helping him. But, of course, Flick went off instead to work for a rival. What did I say before about my "natural intelligence?" Well, this is an instance where it clearly failed me.

After a little while, Flick started coming back. But now, he was bringing me messages from his new employers. They were presented like friendly offers at first—we should form a partnership, pool our resources, maximize opportunities. Later, they were "suggestions" that started to sound like orders. Why don't you stop going on this side of town. You really should buy from our supplier. For a small fee, you can continue working on this block. With each one, I could see Flick getting cockier, more smug, and I'd seen enough to know it was only a matter of time before he would be delivering an entirely different kind of message for me. So, one day when he turned to go, I did what seemed like my best option. I could make

an argument that it was pre-emptive self-defense, but that would imply I think I have a right to defend myself. It's obvious now that the powers-that-be think this world would be a better place without me, and I'm hard-pressed to argue the point. But the same could be said of Flick, your boy. Whatever he once might have been when you held his hands for his first steps, on the day he died, he was something else—as bad as me, and probably on his way to being worse. I'm not sorry I killed him. I'm sorry that circumstances made it necessary for me to do so.

When I was still a young buck in the organization, one of my jobs was driving important visitors to and from the airport. I can remember driving thorough "nice" neighborhoods with beautiful homes and perfect yards and happy families playing in them. Don't you think part of me wanted that? Don't you think part of me wept inside to see images of love and security that I could never have. But I knew such things were not possible for me, and I hardened and learn to hate those images. Sending Flick away was my attempt to save him, but I was so ignorant of what it takes to help someone that I only made things worse. Well, don't worry. I'm paying for that mistake, and many others.

As I said before, I know I'm being killed for cutting up a dead body. But I have done much that, had the judges and juries known, would merit my death many times over. I never expected to live a long, happy life, to die an old man in an elegantly furnished room. If it hadn't been this, it would have been something else. Maybe something quick and unexpected, and I would never have had the chance to think like this about what I am and how I became that. Introspection is not something I've indulged in much before now. And I have to say I've found it pretty interesting. But, like everything else, the time for me to let go of it is coming closer and closer. Sometimes I think about that moment, when I will quit this world and go to something else. I wonder if I will see God, if he's anything like the stories the fat reverends tell. I wonder if he will pronounce a judgement on me with words that boom like thunder in my chest, and I will sink away from light into a dark, searing, eternal agony. I think about this, and I can't lie: I am afraid. Confess, the priest said. Confess and be forgiven. It's a tempting idea. But if such is the justice of that great and horrible God of yours, how could he be fooled into forgiveness when I beg for it out of blind terror. No. I will go to him as I am,

as I have always been. This is not out of pride, but honesty. My truth, savage and hateful as it may be, is the only thing I have left. I can't cast it away. I don't expect you to understand.

So, when that curtain opens and you look at me through the glass, I will do nothing to spoil the cleansing hatred I know you need to feel or challenge your belief that removing me from this world will improve it (it will). Pour upon me all your grief, your anger, your murderous rage. Spend it in those moments and leave empty so you can fill yourselves up again with better things. And remember me. Remember me as something to be avoided at all cost. Hold me up as an example to your children: look at him. His was a pointless, evil existence that came to nothing. Pass by him and all like him and move on. If you remember me this way, then I can truly stand before whatever judgement awaits me and say I did accomplish something good with my life.

**END**