

*Ritual*

It was a ritual of terror. We would prepare ourselves for the inevitable coming of him. He, the one we were supposed to respect, came into our lives on this night like a rash rush of pain. We would prepare ourselves oddly for the occasion. We would armor ourselves with proper clothing such as dark colors, nothing festive and bright. Bright colors upset him on this night. We tensed our muscles from head to toe, creating a fortress of stone, a mount, a monument of impenetrable weight against our sworn enemy, our love. Our eyes, nose, cheeks, teeth, would clench, preparing ourselves for the coming of him. We loved and hated him, a confused emotion, dubious by definition and conflicting in meaning. We were young and believed with all our hearts that things would change for the better. That life would smile upon us like the blue skies that loomed across the vast country we lived. Like the way you feel after a strong rain, you hope the sweet smell of dead leaves will transform your life anew. We were the young optimists with our hearts leaping toward the sky in hopeful anticipation for a clear day, and not rain or gray clouds destined to damage our idealistic view of the world. A world in which we loved every inch of fantasy we lived. We loved to play records on this day, but we would turn off the record player at this hour. We loved to play games with one another, but we would stop such fun at the turn of dusk.

When the clouds would disperse and the sun closed its brutal eye to submit to the dark night, and the full moon, which always seemed to appear on these special nights and illuminate our home, shining brightly on our bleak reality, our false dreams, we would descend to our mother's room.

It seemed as if no other home was alive but ours. It seemed as if no other home was lit up like ours. We were special, and God decided to allow the moon to show us how much we deserved its beam of life-its light of life. It was the evening, and the night was black as coal, and we feared its mystery. What was beyond the sky that waited for us? We did not know, but we hoped in our child-like naivety that God would bless us with great answers to all of the unanswered questions we were afraid to ask. Questions such as why out of billions, we were sent to live here in this city, on this block, where all seemed to be something it was not. The something that people usually try to hide, or cover up, the something that comes at night and hits you, or curses you, or throws you out into the freezing cold for the lonely streets. Something when you're in denial is nothing but a faded memory that haunts you until death. If you're smart, you will live in the world of nothing, the world of fantasy. When you live in reality, something is a fearful life of bad memories and deserted dreams, and people you loved gone. We never like living in that world.

We preferred to invent our world of nothing, a world where fathers didn't hit mothers, brothers didn't abuse their arms with needles, and mothers did not cry over a young grave of children she barely had an opportunity to know. On these nights, we had no choice; we had to live in the now, the reality of something. It was Friday, and our house was small, and it was always clean, especially on this night. We would wax the floors on hand and knees. Hoping, in some false illusion, he would like the cleanliness of our home, and take pity upon us. This would never happen, and as the years passed we became frightfully aware that no matter how much we tried to please him, he was hell bent on continuing this dark ritual of hate. We became comfortably accustomed to this ritual, and we allowed him to do what he wanted to do with us, and our mother. We thought that this was normal. That the darkness that flooded our house like a long Texas rain, was normal.

We welcomed the terror of our father's drunken ritual. We would prepare for his arrival by sitting at the edge of our mother's bed, our knees knocking with fear, and await his entrance. Usually he would arrive late for the occasion, and trick us by entering in a good mood. This mood soon dissipated into a dissonance of screams and curses that seemed to merge into a primal language unknown to all except us. We sat on the bed and waited for him to enter. My mother seemed to expect this treatment, as if she deserved it, or was familiar with it. My sister was just as scarred as me, but she refused to show it. She always kept her feelings tight inside.

On this day, she could not refuse her emotions the chance to break away, and fly to the top of her throat, and usher out a wail of anger, of fear at our father. "Here he comes. There he is, drunk again." These words trickled from her throat as if they were fighting to stay inside; the fear of release is a painful one she did not want to make. On this night, she could not help herself.

The time it took for him to enter the driveway and walk into the house seemed interminable. We waited and waited until finally he opened the back door, and lunged into our small kitchen. His steps were hard and heavy, and every move he made seemed to dictate our responses. If he moved slowly, we wondered what he was doing. Was he hiding his liquor again? Was he sitting at the kitchen table? He would never say, but his steps told the story clearly to us. If his steps were fast, we knew that he was either headed toward us, or to the bathroom to relieve his belly of beer. Sometimes he would pee outside, and we could hear that also. The stream of wetness filled our ears with disgust. How could someone relieve themselves on their own back door like a dog?

We didn't question him though because sometimes if he relieved himself, he would simply go to the living room, watch television, and fall asleep, snoring loud enough for the entire neighborhood to hear. We did not disturb him when he was sleeping after a drunk; we just let him be because letting him be meant he would let us be.

This night would be different. He relieved himself and came into my mother's room. His eyes were bloodshot red, and his staggered walk indicated that he was drunk. The smell of liquor entered the room before he did. You could smell it clear down the hallway. The smell had a life of its own; it moved swiftly as if it had a mission and a destination to make, someone to meet or see. The smell swerved around the corner of my mother's bedroom, and announced itself with bold intention. We didn't fear the smell; it warned us of the coming drunk down the hallway. It was in a sense our friend; a confidant who knew that my father could not reason enough to be so courteous. When his face circled the corner, our hearts stopped collectively.

We could see only the hard lines of a bad life unsaid in his eyes. The fear of a lonely boy didn't enter our minds. His eyes were cold but supple with the softness of a baby's bum. He had a hard life, which he never explained, and we never asked. We lived in this house with him for thirteen years, and yet we knew nothing about him. He was a mystery to us, an enigma, and abomination of the real. His bloodshot eyes teared over with a salty substance that could sear through our eyes like a bolt of lightning headed toward an unsuspecting traveler on a lonely road at night. The bolt hits him and he knows nothing but a sharp pain, and then numbness; the body goes limp, and the eyes roll back into the brain, out of sight into God's land. This is the image and language my father's eyes meant to us.

His eyes reached back into some far away place alien to us, and we had to suffer the consequences of that strange existence, an existence that only he understood. I knew a man once who beat his wife daily with such force that he bruised his own knuckles, but yet he had the kindest eyes I had ever seen. My father's eyes were not kind; they were sad and pitiful in form, like a mutt hound left to his own devices in the wilderness: sad, afraid, but willing to kill with a fierce determination if needed. Those were my father's eyes.

He would never announce himself. He would just stand there and leer at our mother, who seemed helpless in every way. She knew this ritual well; she learned it from her mother years ago. Her mother was a tyrant, who ranted and raved about the smallest event, and then beat her children mercilessly until blood issued from their skin.

This was normal to my mother, and her reality was this, and the fantasy life she created with us soon left her vivid eyes once my father came into her room. Her eyes, soft and loving in texture, but hardened in distrust, seemed to melt into active fear when my father appeared. She didn't know it yet, but she despised him. Her eyes told a story of a woman who despised the man she married the day she met him, long ago in a small sharecropper town in Texas, called Waco.

He stood there with those pitiful eyes, waiting for a conversation to begin, for someone to question his existence in the hallway, in the doorframe. He waited there for what seemed like an eternity.

We tried not to meet his eyes because they were hollow with liquor by now, and the sight of them frightened us. It was difficult to avoid his eyes. His eyes were like magnets to our fears, and we were sucked into his dark, hollow world. We were sucked into the violence of his past.

So, we waited for him to say something. He spoke slowly at first, slurring his words, struggling, hoping to find a syllable he could hold onto. Something tangible he could rest his tongue on. He asked a simple question. "Where is the bill?" Just a simple question with no simple answer, but it carried so much weight. No one could answer him. No one wanted to answer him. If we answered, then he would counter with anything that came to his mind, and, being drunk, anything came to his mind. We all wanted it to be over with, but he lingered on, swaying back and forth beneath the doorway. "Where is the Goddamn bill?" My mother finally spoke, and my sister and I took a sigh for the worst. "What bill, man?" He looked at my mother with those eyes; they were red now, red as dust on a hot ground. At this moment, everything moved slowly, and I watched every bit of saliva spewing out of my father's mouth. He began to spit at my mother. "You know what fucking bill I'm talking about." My father talked with a Texas southern twang, not reminiscent of a redneck from East Texas. Their accents were frightening to most blacks because that twang represented evil of a hundred years of unimaginable fear that most blacks I knew felt always.



My father's accent, as well as most blacks of Texas, was more of a southern drawl with a pinch of twang to justify his Texas roots, to let everyone know that he was just as white as anyone. "Gimme the bill?" "I ain't got no bill." She knew what he was talking about, but she did not want him to see the truth of her actions. She spent a lot. She could not help herself; she spent without even knowing she did it. She never bought anything for herself, only for others. My mother was both, sad and contemptible. When you care too much for others, you lose any sympathy for yourself. And, this can be a lonely place for a soul, a desolate place of eternal sadness. In this place, where sadness looms, no one cares. No one hopes. Sympathy is a lost word left behind for those who were cared for. Those who were given sympathy, given care, some relevance of kindness.

This was my mother's world, and, thus, we felt sympathy for her because she was our only hope to a happy life, the elusion of fantasy-a happy life. She sacrificed any love for herself in hopes of passing some down to us, a legacy of a good life.

Most children learn how not to care for others or themselves. Most children, who have mothers and fathers who beat them, do not think about caring at all. Some kill, rape, beat others; some kill, rape, and beat themselves. My mother did the latter. She hit herself every day for being alive, and living with this man she had grown to despise, this man who stood at the door on Fridays demanding answers to unanswerable questions, she saw no future.

Through years of bloody beatings from her mother and various other stepfathers, my mother learned to not think of herself. So, when my father asked her this question, she had no answer because, as she thought of only others, she felt she did nothing wrong. She felt she did nothing wrong when she took his credit cards, and charged for people who never thought of her. We thought of her, my sister and me. We always thought of her, and soon one day it would ultimately drive us crazy, these thoughts that we could not resolve into happiness. "Where is the muthafuckin' bill?" His tone became louder, harsher. She still did not answer his question to his satisfaction. So, he hit her as he had done so many times. He would strike our mother as if it were second nature, a reflex of the natural. He had done it so often that he didn't think twice before he lashed at her face. He hit her so hard that her face turned red, as red as his blood-soaked eyes. I often wondered did his father hit his mother that way. I wondered did his father hit at all, or did his mother do all the hitting in the family. The legacy of abuse has eluded my family for generations, but we do it just the same. Without thought or proper reason, the reason of a civilized culture, we hit each other just the same. He acted like he didn't know where it came from either; he just hit her. Then he did it again. The screams came from us. We would bolt in between them as if we had the strength to stop our father. He was six feet tall, strapped with muscles, a formidable foe. My father's muscles came from work, hard and unkind work.

I always hated the work my father did because it reminded me of how poor we were, of how I didn't like the heat of Texas, and of how I despised anything he liked.

In the beginning, when I was younger, my father felt it was time for him to become a father. Most of my life, my father had ignored my sister and me. We didn't exist in his world of debauchery, gambling, and other unfaithful acts that we did not understand, that did not represent the happiness we had invented. He was this man that we never saw until he would pass by the dinner table, on his way to one of his women. He would just walk pass the kitchen table with chicken and potatoes ready to eat, out the door, slamming it on his way out. No words were shared; no blessings were given.

I did not understand that my father could be unfaithful considering he had no sense of people. How could he talk to anyone? I never imagined that he had it in him to take another woman to her bed, and love her. He was passionless unless he was drunk. He had no loves or dislikes of any nature that he shared with us.

He trusted no one, and people were a seemingly pitiful obstacle that he had to maneuver around in order to get through the day, a mere distraction people were for him. He didn't like them that much. He belonged to no clubs or organizations of any kind. He didn't hunt, fish, or party with the best. He just worked and fought. He did race greyhounds at one time, but that soon stopped. He never said why. He just stopped.

I always assumed it was because Texas law stopped the use of real rabbits as bait. He took me a couple of times to the dog races. My mother made him. She had to scream it into him to understand that a father should spend time with his son, and take him to places that he enjoyed, or else how would the son know what his father was like if he did not know what he liked to do. A man is made by what he does, and if you have the luck of venturing into his past times, you may see a human being separate from your father. My father did not want me to know anything about him. Perhaps that's where he met women, or maybe he was doing something illegal? I wasn't sure, but he did not want me there. I felt it. Deep down in my heart, I realized that's why he stopped. So, he could not take me with him, he stopped going to see the greyhounds tear the live rabbit flesh to pieces. My first time at the dog races, on the way to the track, he did not utter a word to me. He just drove silently toward the back woods, the country, to the track, where other fathers waited with their sons. They always seemed happy to have their sons with them. You could tell that the other sons had a real stake in the races. They weren't there to please their fathers, or try to repair some broken relationship that was too severed to mend. I remember seeing the poor live rabbits being strapped onto this rail pole that extended about twenty feet around the running track.

Imagine a typical race horse track with the holding areas for the horses perched perfectly in a row at the beginning of the track, and put in the middle of the meadow, where trainers and owners sometime stood so they can get a better view, a twenty-foot pole with a live rabbit strapped to it, shaking. Its white hairs slowly falling to the rough ground. The ground was made of black dirt, crusted by the piercing sun, parched for moisture that the rabbit's blood supplied. The ground would suck the blood into its black mouth, a never-ending satisfaction for death, the impending ravaged death of the poor white rabbit. This was the dog races! A place of loyal gamblers and sadistic souls enjoying themselves by watching helpless animals eaten alive by other animals. I liked being out with my father even though he did like being with me.

There were other times to be with my father. After years of discouragement from my mother, my father decided to show me his work, his trade, show me what he did for a living, not because he wanted me to avoid it, but because he wanted me to be it. He must have known that I hated changing tires two times bigger than me in the blazing sun.

We would go to massive concrete factories at all hours of the morning and night to change tires. The large concrete factories seemed as if we were in the Middle East somewhere trudging through immense sand mountains, trying to find our way through the desert.

The large piles of gravel sat high in the sky, and for a small child I was afraid that they would come to life, as large sculptured monsters with stone legs, walk toward me and my father, as we lay in the middle of this immense field of concrete repairing tires in the cold morning, and devour us whole. He saw my fear, and he would laugh at me. Laughter mixed with confusion and contempt. And, so I began to hate the tires. I would awake at the crack of dawn awaiting my father's knock on my bedroom door. I didn't want to go out there with those mountains of stones, just waiting to be drowned by their size. I would press my ear to the pillow and wait for my father to knock on my door. He knew I didn't want to go; he knew I hated what he did, and he knew that in time I would stop going with him, and there was nothing he could do about it. I think this hurt him immensely. The fear that he ultimately had no control over my likes and dislikes, made him seem helpless, like a little child lost in a field of cotton on a hot day, wading through rows of untenable land, hoping to be discovered. My father seemed this way to me. Sometimes I felt guilt or shame because I was happy that he did not knock on my door. Soon the knocks stopped all the same, and I was free from him and his world of tires, mountains, and hardships. None of us liked what he did. He never showed us the joy of what he did. Maybe that's why we never understood his work. The dirt, dust, and sweat of a hard day's work did not appeal to any of his children; we wanted to be free, to dream, to be away from this life he had prepared for us.

So, this is why I think he hated so much; no one understood him; no one wanted to be him.

I would think of these things as we sat on my mother's bed waiting for him to leave, to stop talking, yelling, and spitting vulgarities at us on this dark night, the dark night of ritual, secluded from the other houses, but yet so close to them. We waited for the screams to stop, but they went on for hours. We would stand strong between my father and my mother, while they spat words at each other. His words would slur, and he would spit hate at our mother. I knew this hate came from somewhere that I did not understand, but it was real nevertheless.

My mother would tell us to go into the other room, but we were stubborn. We stayed. He shouted. He cursed. She cried. We cried. We shouted. Nothing seemed to make him stop. My father's tirades would continue for hours. He had the energy of a great dictator, Franco, Castro shouting one of their famous speeches at a docile audience conspired by fear and love.

When a man comes along and tells you that you are being abused and mistreated, and then he takes you under his wing, you trust him, even though he beats you and takes away your freedom. You still trust that he will ultimately make good on his promise to protect you, and then after time, you become accustomed to his style, and you tell yourself that this is your life—a life of endless poverty and shameful neglect with only a glimpse of freedom.

Most women I knew lived in Castro's world. Women say men are all alike, but they never seemed to qualify that accusation. They never say how they are alike in detail. The accusation seems to make sense. Living in a world of male domination, you tend to trust the voice of the oppressor. So, I believed every word women said about men. Yes, my father had the energy of a great dictator. He used to say, "I pay the cost!" He said with the gusto of Hitler on a dark night delivering one of his famous speeches to his hate-filled constituency. "Ya'll don't pay for a muthafuckin' thing 'round here! I pay for everything! You don't wanna do what I say, then I'll take all the shit away!" I could see my father's face grow more and more red with anger, with blood. He wanted my mother to hurt as he hurt. What hurt? He never said; he never discussed his hurt. Who hit him? Who spat at him? Who damaged him when he was full of youthful promise? Why did he lose his love of self, of others? No one knew, not even him. Not even he knew as he stood there waiting for an answer. "Where is the goddamn bill? Gimme the bill bitch!!" She would wave her hand in the air, hoping he would leave. He didn't.

He pressed on, asking more and more of the same question until we lost all sense of time and subject. Suddenly, he left, burst from the room in a rush of wind he entered. All was silent, and we didn't move a muscle, nor did we look at our mother, or she us. We were ashamed of our life, all of the pain and infrequent joy, seemed unbearable at this moment.



So, we did not look at each other, hoping to save our face from falling further onto the wood floor. Silence was golden for a minute, and then we heard a door slam hard, almost bursting the glass frame into pieces. He was gone. A breath of clean air, free from his liquored mouth. The liquor, our confidant, left the house with him.

If you live in an environment where hurricanes meet, you will be fooled by the first burst of wind and rain. You will think after that burst has left that you are safe, but not so. As the eye comforts you for the brief moment in time, and you release yourself to the elements, you are being fooled by God. God is playing with your mind; it is a malicious trick put one humans by nature.

And, then the second rush of wind and rain hits you even harder than the first, and you are fooled into thinking that God actually cares for you. That God actually sees you and protects you. It is a cruel natural joke played yearly on the masses who live in paradise, the paradise of slums frequented by dark skins trotting through life thinking of themselves as cursed. The wind and rain knocks them down and relieves nothing, saves them from nothing, and ultimately takes nothing but their lives, the worthless lives in the midst of the violent seas. This was that night in my house, a stormy night without the rain and wind, but violently complemented with sound and fury designed to scare you to pieces.

Just as the storm releases its power, we took a rest. We heard the door slam again...then the footsteps hard and fast on the wooden floor...then the liquor coming down the hallway with a strong wind of life itself. Here was our friend again warning us of the man to come. He made his way around the corner of the small house. This time he frightened us cold. His demeanor was calmer as he stood there with a gun in his hand, pointing it at us, a .45 I believe. I could not be sure because I was not aware of the types of guns he pulled. Only, that he pulled them frequently. "Ya'll kids move out the way!" We did no such thing. We stayed and dared him to be a man about it, and shoot us all. We would go down together. There was something ultra tragic about our lives when my father picked up his trusted friend, his gun. He would load it in front of us to show he meant business. Each bullet he would carefully place into the chamber, all the while cursing us for being born, in his way, in his life, cursing someone that we did not know. Was he really cursing us? Or was he cursing someone he did not have the courage to curse long ago? It was said that my father's father went crazy one night and nearly chopped off my father's finger with an axe. He lost his mind, and couldn't recover it for his life. He lost his mind in the midst of a sickness that rotted his soul, and proved his infidelity to all. The syphilis ate his brain, and came back for his body. So, he chopped off my father's finger, and left him to pick it up and put it back together, and make a hand to load bullets with.

The way of the world can be awfully confusing, especially if you are black, sons and daughters of sharecroppers in the south, with little or no education, and no sense of self other than the brutal life you were told to live. My grandmother's father lived on a sharecropper's life.

The white man, who never had a name, would tell them that they belonged to him and that he would never let them go. He sounded like an antebellum plantation owner, clinging onto the last remnants of the old south, and instilling fear into an otherwise lifeless family. This is where my father came from.

This life of fear had been handed down by the generations to our day, and the slow evil of the white man persisted in my father's loading of his gun on these dark nights. He learned it from birth; it was his birthright— to fear. Most women of this family grew to hate their husbands, and this was the relationship they had, a relationship based in hate and mistrust, destined to end in an unhappy breakup, or six feet under the ground, without any conclusions. Rocks had been thrown in my mother's bed, and she had to live with it, no matter how uncomfortable it may have been. Most women I knew accepted their fate with a composed manner learned over years of servitude, their wants always at the end of the rope, lost somewhere in a baseless river of misgivings. Lost memories, a treasured past, a brutal present is all my mother had to rest on.

And, so she accepted the beatings, the cursing, the guns—the guns my father loaded with careful precision, as if he were holding a newborn, afraid to drop her and cause damage. Once loaded, the gun took on a different life, one of menacing appeal to him, and utter terror for us. We only saw the barrel of the large gun he toted. It was big and black with a silver handle with tiny screws attaching it to the shaft of the piece. “Where’s the fucking bill bitch? Where is it!”? My mother would cower in the corner and scream back an answer at him. Something to the effect that she did not know what he meant. She would never, even with the gun in her face, tell where the bill was. It was the one thing she held that he wanted, and she refused to give up its whereabouts. In an odd way, it was the only power she had: to spend in his name unabashedly for others, and deny him access to the bill, to spend his life away. He paid all the bills even the ones he did not create. He hated buying for others, even his own mother. He did not understand the necessity in thinking of others, and what would make them happy. She knew this, and she knew that because he could not understand her motives, she held him in an unusual position of fear. Standing sweating and slobbering from the mouth, my father, at this moment, was reduced to an embarrassing drunken mess. My sister and I stood in between him and my mother again, and we dared him to shoot us.

Deep down we knew that a man standing that long with a loaded gun was a dangerous man, but something told us that this man, this drunken man, standing slobbering on himself, with no inhibitions to feel shameful for, would not pull the trigger. He knew it too. That's why he was so angry.

He knew ultimately that he was a coward who loaded guns, and cocked pistols on frightened women and children, but was unable to pull the trigger, end the life of his seed, the only thing he thought a man should do in this world, supply seed for the world to fertilize in its brutal system of demoralization and hatred. He saw the world this way. He did not understand that some people loved other people because they loved to love other people. He did not understand.

He even hated himself, his mother, sisters, brothers, wife, and children. Everyone was his sworn enemy, especially on nights like this one. Oddly, I wanted him to shoot me. I wanted him to slip one night and release the trigger, release the years of fear he suffered and give it to me. I wanted the bullet to pierce my heart, and watch my mother see me die right there on the hard wood floor of their bedroom. This torture would make her see the senselessness of their violent union, this union of fear, of nothingness, of lifelessness. I was a cruel child with the same hidden fears that my father possessed.

This ritualistic night of terror was a special night, destined to link itself to years of history of the same type of hatred that no one could explain, or never bothered to ask the question. "Why do we beat each other down, and pull loaded guns, or strip our children naked and beat them senseless?" No one could answer.

The brutality of the question answers itself; we were too scared to say. So, my father stood there, hopeless in his intention, and utterly confused as how to exert his manhood. He just leered at us three, and said with a resigned defeat, "fuck it." That was it. This is just one occasion of this ritual. There would be countless others. So many that we grew to expect them routinely.

Why did our mother subject herself to this life with a man that I never believed she really loved, a man lost in this brutal life in which he created for himself and his family? When I was a child I never thought of my mother as a child, or, as most children do, I never thought of my parents as human much at all, except when my father would attack us. When he went into his rages, I often wondered what kind of children they were. As I've told you, I knew nothing of my father's childhood. He never spoke of it. I often thought he must have been beaten or witnessed his mother being beaten as a family tradition. I wasn't sure of anything. He kept it close to his heart, and never spoke of himself much at all.

It was stemmed in years of the harsh reality that demanded beatings and more beatings often in the hope of toughening the youngster. Like a cowhide being transformed into leather, they beat their children senseless; hoping to tighten them for future sale. This is the truth of my blood, the only truth I know. Women had always known this truth, but they kept their mouths closed in the hopes of surviving, and continuing a legacy of degradation familiar to them. The desire to live for one's self, and not care for the man lying next to you is a feeling of exaltation, a feeling of selfishness only entitled to men. Some thought of killing the marriage that placed them in chains of slavery, chains of love, and chains of hate. No matter, they would return to serving the male desire as soon as one was available for the picking. No one ran away.

In my world, a man is not too hard to find, but a good man is altogether another animal to be tamed, and the women of my world knew this. So, we all waited, dreamed, and fantasized about meeting the proper man to take care of us all, but he never came. The only man we knew was the man who entered our mother's room on those lonely nights when God let the moon shine bright upon our house and deemed us special to the rest of the world. We waited for him to come to us, like a savior far away in the midst of heaven or hell, destined to save his people and destroy their souls. We waited for him to look at us with his sad, bloody eyes, and load his gun with his cut off finger.

The night is black and so are we.