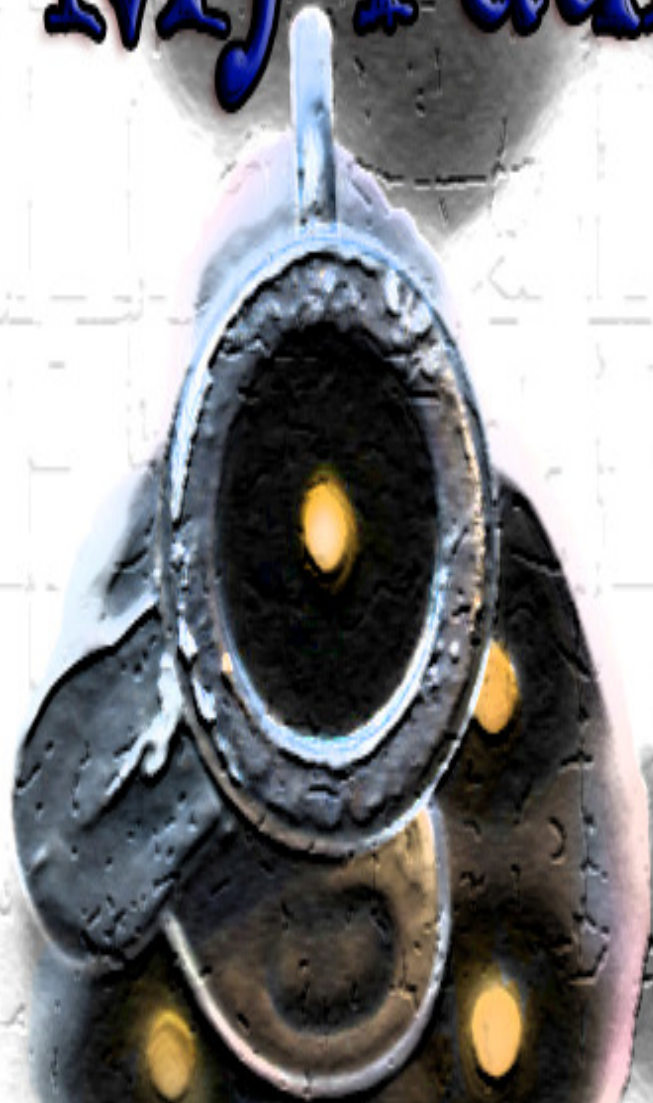


My Father's Gun



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MY FATHER'S GUN

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Dedication

I'd like to give a note of thanks to fanstory.com which challenged me to write a short story that began with the tired cliché of "Stop or I'll shoot". I'd also like to give my heartfelt appreciation to the ladies at Crossroads CR who gave me the courage to bring up some painful memories, which became the direct link to creating My Father's Gun. Last and certainly not least, for anyone who has suffered or is suffering at the hands of an abuser, there will be better days, and this one is for you.

My Father's Gun

“Stop or I’ll shoot,” I said, pointing the Taurus .357 at my reflection. Gazing into the mirror, I saw what Mike would see before he took his last breath. He’d see a scared, frizzy-haired, pudgy girl pretending to be tough like the police officers on the show Cops.

I dropped my hands. Who was I kidding? There is no way I could go through with this. I could pretend to shoot him all I want. I could squeeze my eyes shut and wish him away and yet he’d still be here. With resignation, I placed the silver and black revolver on the bathroom counter.

The power of the .357 is legendary; it would make a huge hole and a loud boom. I’ve shot it a few times at Mr. Riley’s farm when he wasn’t home. I’ve learned to control the kickback, and I’ve come pretty close to hitting the bull’s eye on the paper target. I’m certain that I’m as prepared for this as I am ever going to be. Turning on the cold water and drenching my face, I tried to ignore the quake that ran through me and made my head spin.

A few months ago, while I was sneaking on a new pair of Jimmy Choo’s my mother had just bought, I found the gun packed in a dusty chest in the back of her closet. All that was left of my father had been neatly arranged as if it had been centuries since his death. The gun had been buried beneath my dad’s old Marine uniform, with his shiny silver, star shaped Chicago Police Department badge lying against it. As I sorted through my father’s belongings, I could feel his presence. Although I’d never handled a gun before, I was strangely consoled by it. It was then that I realized that I was supposed to stop this thing called Mike. No one else would stand up to him, but me. No one else could see him for what he was, but me.

“How much longer will you be?” It was my younger sister, whining like usual.

“Give me a sec,” I yelled toward the door as I slid the weapon into my coat pocket. I put on my dad’s old Chicago Bear’s jacket and zipped it up; hoping to conceal that one side of the jacket was carrying a heavy load. I felt comforted wearing my dad’s jacket. It felt like he was coming home soon and maybe we could watch a game together later. I didn’t think my fourteen year old sister would think twice about me coming out of the bathroom wearing a jacket, she’d probably have her iPod blasting in her ear or be texting into the latest high tech phone she’d just gotten. She was always getting gifts from Mike, to say that she was the favorite is like saying Bill Gates has some money.

Taking one last look into the mirror, I decided that nothing looked out of place before opening the door.

“Move!” Lisa said, shoving me out of the way.

I didn’t respond. It wasn’t a bright idea to argue with my little sister. I’d been told many times that if I couldn’t get along, then I had to get out. My high school

graduation is less than a month away, and Mike has been pestering my mother that it is time for me to go. He uses every opportunity to badger her about my living at home. Last week, Mom sat me down and told me that she'd decided it was best if I visited my Aunt Virginia in Florida after graduation, "...so that you can think about your future," she'd said. Although Mom had spoken gently and with a little sorrow, we both understood that she had sold me out to make her new husband happy.

I walked downstairs slowly, taking deep breaths with each step. I passed through the living room, which had been recently furnished with new white leather furniture and art work from a local artist my mother loved and whom I thought had less than adequate talent. I continued on through the dining room and the newly remodeled kitchen, which were also empty.

I opened the door to the basement and casually walked downstairs, my heart doing triple-time in my chest. I knew this was where I'd find the beast that had invaded my home. Mike had a bottle of Bud titled to his lips, and he held a pool stick in his left hand. Looking around, I confirmed that we were alone.

"What the hell do you want?" he snarled, watching me, his lower lip glistening and foamy with beer.

"Where's Mom?"

"Does it look as if she's here?" he shot back. Mike put the beer down on the wet bar behind him and transferred the pool stick to his right hand. He leaned over the pool table and sighted the red ball to the middle right side hole.

"Did she go shopping?" I asked, trying to sound casual. If my mother were shopping, then she wouldn't be home for a few hours. My sister, Lisa, had on her headphones, and if I were lucky she wouldn't hear a thing.

"She's always out spending my money." Mike shot the red ball into the hole as if he were a billiard professional.

"Mike, I think you should leave," I said. I hated that my voice sounded like a scared little girl. Yes, some would argue and say that I am still a child, but I wanted to sound powerful ... like my dad. Although I'd decided to shoot Mike, at the last second I wanted to warn him. I guess I didn't want to hurt him, I just wanted him gone.

Mike responded by laughing.

"The only reason my mother stays with you is your money, isn't that enough to make you leave?" I pleaded.

Mike shrugged. "I really don't give a damn why she stays with me," he said. "If it's any business of yours, my marriage to your mother has its upsides."

It was the way he sneered the last word, as if it were pornographic; he was talking about sex. Mike's only interest seemed to be sex. He has the largest porno collection I've ever seen. Being around him was like standing in a rancid sewer.

"You're the one that should leave," Mike continued. "You're not wanted here. You're nothing but a burden to your mother. You can't even get along with your sister. I'd give you the money to leave, but I'd rather burn my money on your mother's shopping trips."

"If my dad were alive--"

"Well, he's not!"

I stared hard at Mike. The tension in the air was thick and hard to swallow. Mike's body was stiff; his free hand was balled into a meaty fist. His desire to hit me was

as clear as spring water.

“What’d you come down here for, Fat-ass? Are you looking for a fight?”

Mike loved to call me fat. I’m convinced that he’s afraid I might forget how much I weigh if he isn’t reminding me every five seconds.

“You will never be a father to me or Lisa,” I said, ashamed at the way my voice quavered.

“I don’t want be your father, and I’m already Lisa’s Daddy,” he said the last bit without looking at me. He hit another pool ball, this time he missed.

I bit down until I heard my teeth grinding together. Every time I heard Lisa call Mike Daddy my blood heated, the word sounded blasphemous when directed at this beast. Lisa and I had a father; his death would never erase him from our blood or my heart.

“You’ve disrespected me,” I said. “You’ve disrespected my mother, and you’ve taken over my father’s home like it was always yours. I’m going to tell you one last time, you need to leave.”

Mike stood erect. He was over 6” tall, and his arms, back and legs bulged with the muscle he’d earned in a gym and from a syringe. “What did you say?” he asked, his voice sounding more like a growl. He approached me, holding the pool stick as if it were a bat; his eyes had darkened into small rat-like beads.

“Do you want to say that again?” he dared.

I took a step back. I had to remind myself that I wasn’t afraid of him, but here I am shaking because I knew he was going to hit me. I thought of the bruise on my side that still hadn’t healed and the scar on my back that would be a permanent reminder of Mike’s rage. Although the gun lay heavily in my jacket, I couldn’t find the will to reach for it.

He swung the pool stick at me, missing by less than inch, just as he’d intended. I felt the threat of it as it whooshed past my right eye.

I took another step back.

“Come on, tough girl,” Mike taunted. “Say it again.”

“Get out of my house!” The words ripped from my throat as if someone had reached in and yanked them out.

I didn’t even see the blow coming. He was on me in a blur, and I was on the ground. I held one hand up to protect myself from the pool stick which was raining down on me like bashes from hell. Over and over, he hit me. My lower back, my upper back, my thighs, the arm I held up, there wasn’t a spot on me that Mike didn’t strike. I screamed and I kicked out, but it was useless. Then I heard a snap. He had broken the pool stick on my back, but he wasn’t finished with his abuse. Mike began kicking me with his heavy work boots.

I don’t remember reaching for the .357. I heard the gun explode and could feel the weight of it in my right hand, but I don’t recall pulling it from my jacket pocket. Yet, I must have, because my aim was straight. As my ears began to ring, I sat up and caught a scent of the pungent smell of gun smoke. Mike was lying motionless on the floor. I stood up, panting and then pointing the smoking revolver at him, waiting anxiously for Mike to continue his assault.

It was then that I heard my sister’s screams. She ran in front of me and threw herself over Mike, protecting him from me. I dropped my hands to my side. I didn’t realize I was crying until I felt something wet run down my cheeks.

“Mike!” Lisa screamed. She was touching his chest and moving his head, looking

for a wound. I realized that Mike wasn't injured, he must have fainted.

I'd blown a hole into the wall, and the weirdest thought came into my head as I looked at the plaster on the basement floor, my mother was going to ground me for sure.

With a light moan, Mike slowly awoke. Lisa helped him sit up. When he caught sight of me, Mike jumped with fright. If the situation weren't so pathetic, I might have laughed, but all I wanted to do was cry. In less than a year, this man came into our boring, rational, grieving lives, and he'd turned it into his personal war zone.

"Rita, what did you do?" Lisa shrieked as she pulled Mike to her bosom and held him as if he were a toddler.

"Call the police," Mike said to Lisa. "I want this fat bitch-"

It was the way I looked at him that made him stop his tirade, that and the .357 I still held in my grip.

"Lisa, call Mama," I said. "Mike's leaving."

Lisa stared at me as if I had grown horns. Fear and loathing shone from her eyes as her face contorted as if she were in physical pain.

"Lisa, we can leave together," Mike said as he awkwardly stood up.

My sister glanced at Mike. I gasped, my eyes opened wide; it was as if Mike had punched me in my solar plexus. It wasn't what was in Lisa's eyes that damned me; it was what wasn't in her eyes that made understanding drop on me as if a boulder had been dropped from a cliff. I felt a burn within my soul as the past year spun crazily before me and I began connecting incidents that had only seemed random before. I thought of all the gifts Lisa received from this man, the fact that she could do no wrong in Mike's eyes, and all the time they spent alone together.

I bent over and vomited. It was violent and disgusting and weakened me as if I were suffocating.

"You ...," I could barely speak. "You touched my sister." It was not a question; it was a statement of fact. I screamed the words at Mike, tears running unchecked down my face and dropping onto my father's jacket. "Lisa, get away from him," I demanded.

As Lisa shifted to obey me, Mike grabbed her arm. "You said you loved me," he growled into her face.

Lisa's eyes grew wide and her lips contoured into a silent scream.

"Stop," I said, aiming the revolver at the center of Mike's chest. I cocked the hammer back. "Or I'll shoot."

"Rita, what are you doing?"

I glanced at my mother and saw the underlying horror that caused her brows to crease and her nostrils to flare. She was wearing a black and white jogging suit, and her cheeks were red as if she'd been running. She approached me without a hint of fear and took the gun from my hands without any resistance from me. Oddly, I felt comforted by her sudden nearness. In that moment, I realized how much I needed her.

Mike gave my mother a reassuring smile as he dropped Lisa's hands, shoving my sister away from him. "I told you before she's crazy, baby," he said to my mother. "I told you that Rita needed to go."

My mother glanced at me, and I saw the shine of unshed tears in her brown eyes. She had never looked more beautiful or more robust than at this moment. I feared that I would never see her again after the police were called and I was carted away.

Staring at Mike, my mother nodded her head in agreement.

I looked out the sliding glass doors and wished I didn't have to witness my mother abandon me. I could feel my heart pounding painfully and I even felt it begin to shatter.

"Lisa, come here," My mother said firmly.

Lisa obeyed. She stepped to my mother and collapsed in her arms, crying quietly.

"You have five minutes to leave," my mother's tone left no room for argument.

I nodded. I had failed my father. I wasn't able to protect my sister or my mother, I could barely protect myself. When I took a step away, my mother's next words made me stop as if I'd walked straight into the Great Wall of China.

"Not you, Rita," she said. "Mike is leaving." It was the way she said it, as if her blood had turned to quicksilver.

Mike stared at my mother incredulously and then his face changed to unadulterated malice. "After all I've given you, you think you can just tell me to get out?" Spittle flew from Mike's mouth as he spoke; he was barely able to stop himself from charging us.

Suddenly afraid for my mother, I stepped closer to her. Mike was waiting for the opportunity to pounce; I could see it in the slight shift of his eyes. My mother is an affectionate and quiet woman; she is no match for the evil that lives in Mike.

Slowly, she raised her right hand and pointed my father's weapon at her lover. In her eyes was something dark and dangerous. She was a wounded lioness, protecting her cubs, prepared to finish this any way Mike desired.

It must have been the promise of retribution in my mother's eyes that caused Mike to raise his palms in surrender. He stepped away from us without another word, never taking his eyes off of the weapon as he departed out of our lives through the sliding basement doors.

A tidal wave of emotions slammed down on us. We held each other and cried until we were too weak to do either any longer. I don't know why I was snooping around in my mother's closet the day I found my father's gun, but I'm glad I did. Today, I found out that my mother has bones of steel and had no fear when it came to protecting her daughters. Today, I found out it was okay to be a seventeen year old girl.