



CRACK.

"Fuck Jaime, I'm sorry. So goddamnned sorry," whispers my dad, masked by sobs.

I turn the corner into the kitchen. The flower vase is in multiple pieces on the floor, making a barrier of glass knives around my father. There is a hole in the wall adjacent from him, with a steel-toed boot underneath. "I caused this, your death is on my hands," and he wants to say more, maybe apologize for all the hurt he caused her, ask God for forgiveness of his sins, maybe apologize to me (who am I kidding?), but his adam's apple is caught in his throat and he just wails. It's the sound of a hyena killing a wildebeest. The air is ice-filled.

I start to pick up the shattered glass all around him. Finally realizing my presence, he jumps, brushes my arm. A piece of glass cuts through my skin, a yelp, and blood drips to the tile floor. We both look at the crimson splotch and it brings back ghost memories and I feel like the house is suffocating me. He face is plastered with regret, the first time I've ever seen this. He stares at me, and I feel sympathy from him (maybe me?).

"Oh Johnny, I'm so- I'm sorry- I'm a mess and everything I've-" and his throat closes again. He stands up and truly hugs me for the first time. I don't know how to react. Do I hug him back? Can I forgive him for all the hurt engrained in the walls of this house? Do I pull away and scold, just like he used to do to me? I don't know. I don't know.

So, I stand there, limp, motionless, and focus in on the rip in the curtain.

6: A Plea for The Unimaginable

"mom-"

"why do you let him do this?"

"i don't let him- pumpkin i hate it as much as you"

"you can't hate it as much as me, cause you aren't the one being hit and spat at"

"you think you are the only one in torture? have you seen my arms? my back?"

she lifts up her shirt and an africa-shaped bruise is stitched into her back

"you think i want this? you think i wouldn't love for this to stop happening?"

"mom- i'm sor--"

"no don't you fucking apologize, not to me"

i can't stop wondering what in our house is africa-shaped

"mom, do you love him?"

"yes, no, i don't know, i used to, he was never like this, he was gentle, he was warm"

"gentle? you gotta be fucking kidding me"

"hey watch your fucking tongue"

i curse my loose tongue "and son, munchkin, he was gentle with you, he used to play peek-a-boo"

"i don't believe it"

"he did, son"

"he doesn't love me, no one that cruel can love" mom eyes send a water drop down her cheek

"he loves you son, he just-"

"he just what? shows his love by leaving scars, bruises, and hatred everywhere on us?"

"son, he works thirteen hours a day, and it's hard-work, little pay, he supports us"

"so that gives him the fucking right to hurt his most beloved? he should man-the-fuck-up"

she is weeping too much to correct my language

"mom, i'm sorry, i'll stop, i'll shut up"

"he used to take me on really romantic dates, one time he rented an entire boat, learned how to pilot it, brought me out to the middle of the lake, pulled the chair out, cooked me an entire feast, told me i was everything he needed, i was gorgeous, i was the one, told me we should have a kid, have you, and you turned out wonderful, and he caressed me and danced under the moon and it all sounds so cheesy looking back on it and i wish he would stop drinking"

7: Reconnections

"Dad," the name still sounds odd coming out of my mouth, "it's okay. I understand, she left a huge emptiness and it's hard to fill the void with anything but violence and tears," and I finally hug him back. His body just crumbles at my touch and I have to hold him up. He is freezing. Our faces are both wet.

"Son, Johnny, I'm so sorry for everything I did to her. To you. I just didn't--" he starts to cry uncontrollably (I think I am too?). "Dad, it's alrig--"

"No it's fucking not alright. I was an asshole. I am an asshole. Your blood, her blood-" he pauses and tries to reassemble the broken jigsaw puzzle inside of him, "I've stained this whole house with my ungodly presence. I hated my job. I hated myself, I still do. I should be dead for the things I've done to you, my family,"

"Dad, stop. Don't say that. You kept us fed and sheltered."

"That doesn't mean anything if it caused me to lose both of you."

He did lose us. He left us. One day, he just never came home. He forced mom into a waitress job she hated. Men grabbed her ass, verbally assaulted her. She came home crying most nights. She went into outrageous debt trying to pay off the house. She was too proud to lose it. It was her home, more than it was my father's. She left her hugs in the blankets, beds, couches. He left wars in everything else. "Why did you leave?"

He can't stand to look me in my eyes. He is looking at the floor, a small pond around his toes.

"Why did I leave? Because I hated myself. I tore everything apart. One night I came home, whipped you with my belt for some inane reason, and came into bed and tried to kiss her. She kicked and slapped me out of bed. She told me my touch made her shudder, and that she didn't love me anymore. I punched her for the umpteenth time. I slept on the couch. When I looked in the mirror the next day, I didn't recognize myself. There was evil in the corners of my mouth, in my pupils and I hated myself. I had to get away. You guys were better without me."

"She tried to kill herself the third night you were gone."

"nononononononono"

His entire face sinks and melts into an emotional wreck. He is kneeling now. He resembles a broken ventriloquist doll. "Why'd you never visit her in the hospital?"

He is shaking non-stop. The entire kitchen feels like it is shaking. For five minutes the only noise is his wails.

"How could I? I caused her illness. My beatings, stress, my lack of affection killed her. I'm a murderer Johnathan, a murderer."

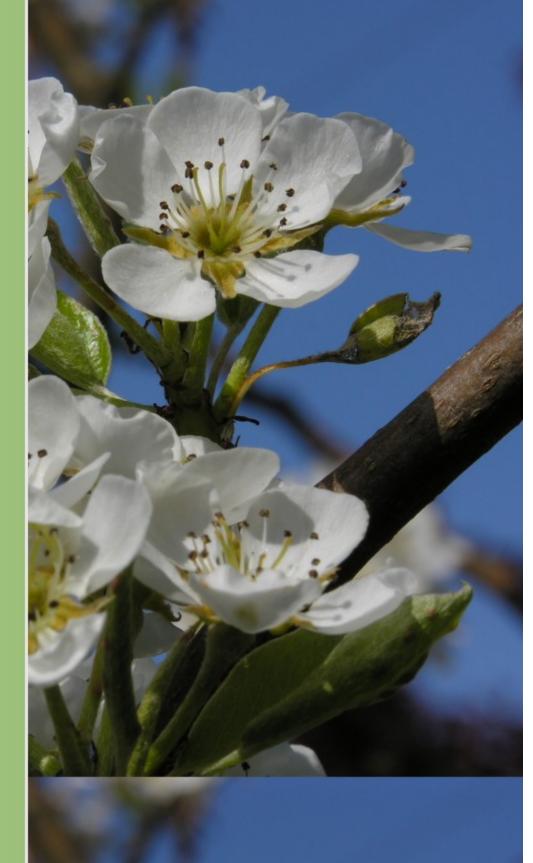
"Cancer killed her, D-"

"No, I did. She knows, I know, God knows, you know."

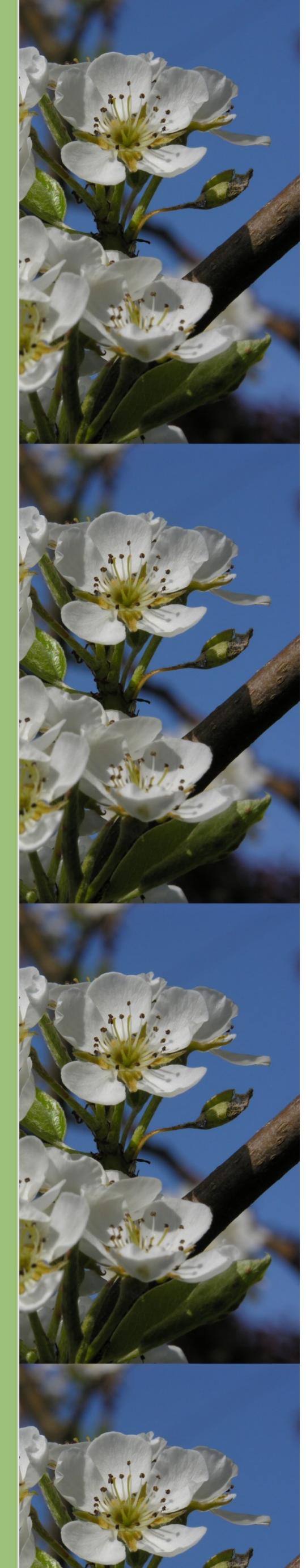
"She loved you." "And I murdered her."

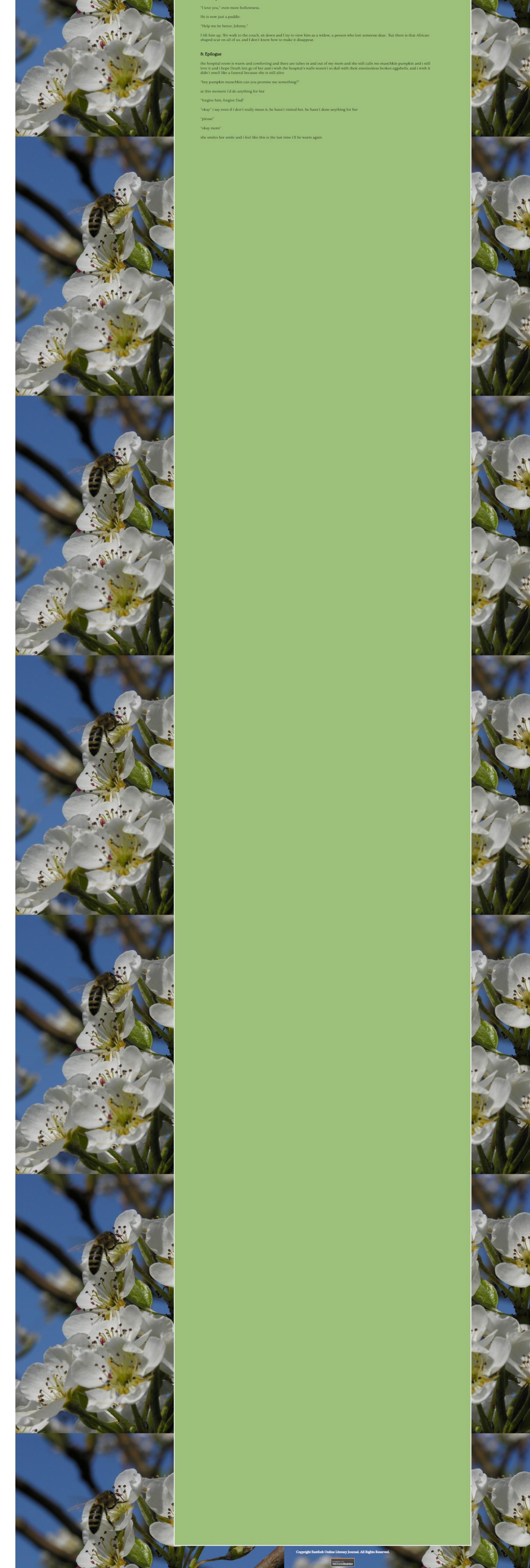
"Dad, I forgive you."

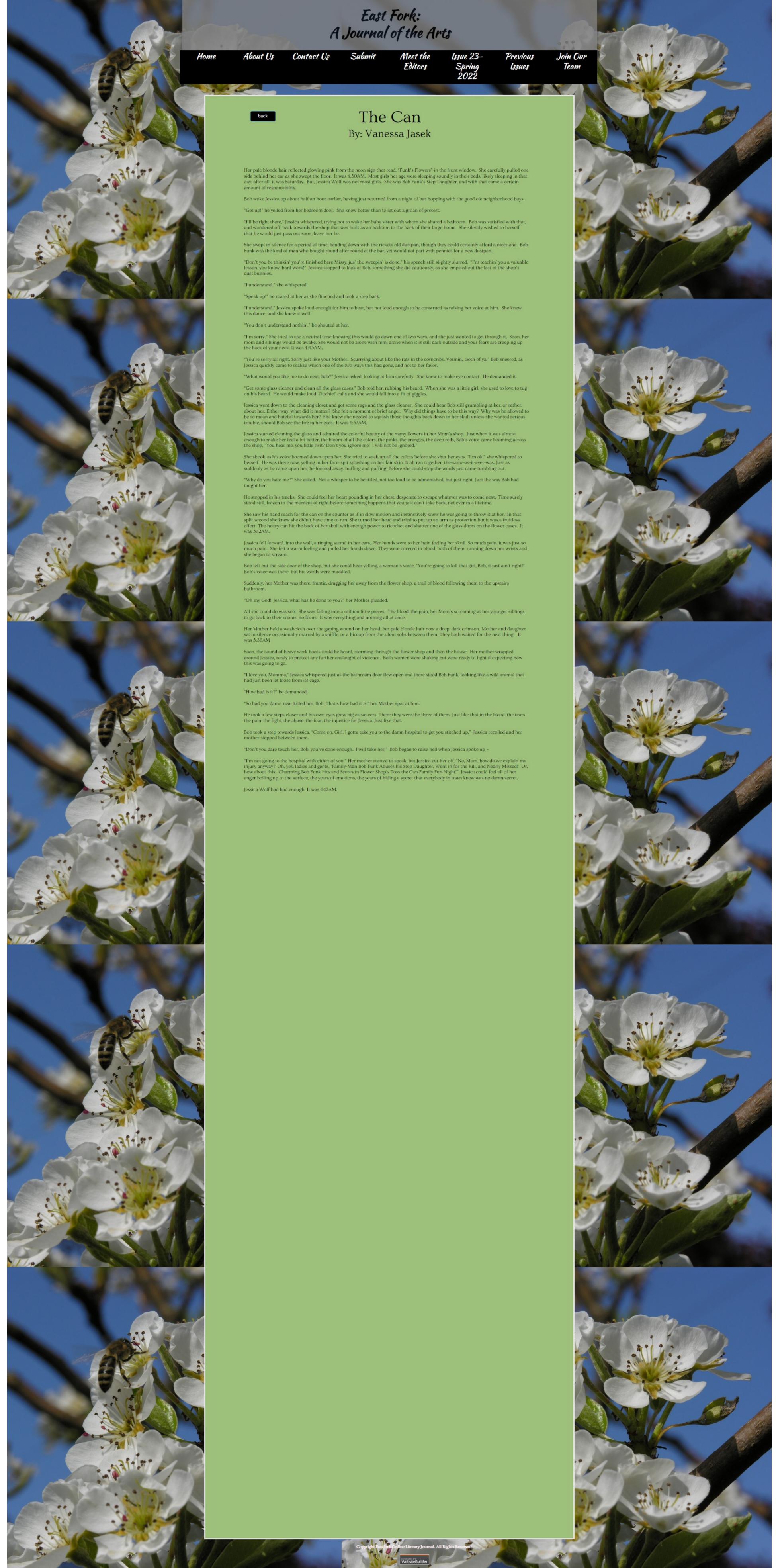
As the words leave my mouth, they seem flat, hollow, like I want to mean it but I don't. There is a still scar visible on my chest and it cuts to the ribcage.











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