

THE ROCK AT THE BOTTOM

by Cynthia Hilston

EXCERPT

My mother was the first person I killed. My father made sure I never forgot it.

I tried to forget. Oh, did I ever. As soon as I could read, I lost myself in books at every opportunity. But as a six-year-old boy, who was reminded every time my drunk old man took retribution out of my flesh, the hurled words became etched on my soul.

You're the reason she's dead.

You took her from me.

You're a mistake.

You weren't supposed to be born. To exist.

You aren't supposed to exist.

Those words cut into my being with every laceration on my back. Or every purple bruise on my cheekbone—left or right, take your pick. Whichever side my father was on when he struck.

But he was never on my side.

I was on my side. I and I alone. Sometimes, even I wasn't on my side.

My older brothers and sisters had their lives, and I wasn't part of theirs. Twelve years and a chasm separated me—the unwanted—from them—the loved.

When printed words failed to cover my scars, I escaped to the only place I knew: my imagination.