

## Wilderness House Literary Review 8/4

*Brad Felver*

### STONES WE THROW

**A**t mother's wake, I threw stones at the sky. It was dark, deep snow trenches wrapping around everything like an acoustic damper. Even the hollow wail of coyote flattened into a muffled echo. I threw stones, chucking them high into the darkness, where they seemed to lodge, like stars that had forgotten how to glow, or perhaps like young stars that hadn't yet learned.

I hid outside in the dark while all those aunts and uncles, scary strangers, roamed our hallways and ate potato salad and made sad faces at father, like apologies. I threw stones until my shoulder ached and thought about how I kind of liked the pain right then, like it was helping somehow.

"Come say goodbye now," father said later, leaning out the back door.

"I want to stay out here," I said.

He hesitated on the back steps. He hadn't put a jacket on. "Caleb," he said.

"It's scary in there," I said.

He let the door close behind him and sat next to me. We were both of us out of the light that spilled from the door but if you looked long enough, you could probably see our breath. "It is scary," he said. "I'd hoped you might save me by coming back in."

"Sorry." I wasn't, though. I was glad to be outside, away from all that, glad to have him sitting next to me, not quite touching but almost, like I could feel his heat. I rubbed on my shoulder.

"What did you do there?"

"Throwing rocks," I said.

"Not into the garden, I hope."

I shrugged. I didn't want to tell him how, yes, I'd thrown them toward the garden but then the sky had sucked them up. They were stars now. "It hurts but kind of feels good," I said. "You know?"

"I do," he said. Then he moved over the last bit, and our hips were touching as we sat there. He unlaced his boots and took off his socks and plunged his feet into the snow all the way up past the ankle. I stared up at his face, but he wasn't looking at me. He was looking at the sky where I'd been throwing stones.

I asked then, Didn't that hurt? and he said Yes, some, but it also felt kind of good. We sat there like that for a long time. He never did go back inside or make me go either. When people started leaving, he didn't get up to say goodbye, just waved without turning around, his feet stuck in the snow, which seemed to confuse everyone.

I went back to school soon, and he went back to prepping for spring wheat. Everything was quieter. The house smelled strange, less lived in. Everyone kept telling us how it was still raw now, wasn't it? But it would get better. We couldn't believe how much better it would get by spring, but

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when thaw finally came and father ran the turnwrest through the garden, he wrecked his blade on all those stones out there, which I know he saw, but he still did it anyway, which everyone seemed to think was an accident even though I don't think it was.