

## Wilderness House Literary Review 10/2

*Brian Burmeister*  
**Bleeding Out**

About a year after Elizabeth's book was released, Doug invited me to his parents' farm. I hadn't been there since we were kids. We stayed the night and spent much of the morning around the breakfast table. As we were finishing up, Doug's mother mentioned to me that she'd read Elizabeth's book. When she asked what I thought of it, my answer was silently passed from eye to eye, all around the table.

Before we left, Doug wanted to walk the perimeter of the farm. Eventually he stopped us in front of the chicken pen. Didn't say a word. I waited and waited, but got nothing from him. I began to walk back to the house.

He said, "Imagine you're a chicken."

I stopped.

"Now what did she do?" he continued. "She cut off your head, right? Unexpected and swift. And you're running all over the place like an idiot, because you don't have a brain anymore. Which I get. But the thing of it is, and I want you to listen, the blood keeps gushing out. Shooting high into the air. And you're running all over the place while the blood keeps pumping. It makes a mess of everything. Everywhere. But I get what you're doing, because your head's long gone."

He lifted the pen's latch and stepped inside the fence. He knelt down next to some of the chickens then put his hand in his pocket, rummaged around. I feared he was going to pull out a knife and slit some poor chicken's throat.

But he brought out some seed.

"But there's a good to this," he said. "With each stupid little move you make more blood comes out. You see? You with me? Eventually everything is going to be pumped out. You make a mess then it's done. You fall down and stop."

I don't know why, but I grew suddenly amused. A group of chickens fought savagely over the feed he'd tossed on the ground.

He looked at me for the first time since he began. His eyes, hard, stabbed me for something, anything. So I asked him, "Shouldn't the blood have run out by now?" Although I was damn near laughing when I asked it.

I didn't care for his look. "It should have," he said, stern, "yes."