

## **The Rock I Could Take**

**Written by Heba Ahmed**

I carry a rock in my pocket every day.

It is nothing fancy. It is small, gray, and rough on one side, smooth on the other. It appears to have lived two lives. To anyone else, it might look like just another stone you would kick on the sidewalk. But to me, it is the most valuable thing I own. It came from the one place I never wanted to leave: my brother's grave.

I remember that day clearly, yet not clearly, as if it was both sharp and blurry at the same time. The sun was low in the sky, and the air felt heavy. It was like the world itself knew something terrible was happening. My brother was already buried. The ground around his grave looked too normal for something so sad. People stood around, talking quietly. I could hear shovels and dirt being moved. When the funeral ended and most people left, I stayed. I got down on my knees and put my hand on the fresh dirt. I hoped, even for a second, that I might feel some warmth from him still there. Instead, I felt something hard, a small stone, half-buried in the ground. Without really thinking, I picked it up, and my hand closed around it. I did not plan it; it was not part of any ceremony; it was just something I did, the way you grab someone's hand when you know you will have to let go soon.

Not long after that, I had to leave my home country. I was moving to Canada, cold, far away, and unknown to me. It felt wrong to go so far when my brother would always stay in that one place. I could not bring him with me, but I could take the rock. The night before I left, I sat alone in my room, holding it. I turned it over and over in my hand, looking at every edge and bump. That stone had been in the ground with my brother. Now, it would travel with me across the ocean. It was the only piece of him I could carry.

We left early, before the sun came up. The streets were empty, quiet, and dark, except for the streetlights. Their orange glow lit up the wet road, and rain from the night before made the pavement shine like gold. I held the rock tightly in my pocket and looked out the van window. That orange light felt like home, the last light I would see before everything changed.

The airport was full of noise: people rolling suitcases, announcements over the speakers, and the smell of coffee in the air. But I did not care about any of it. I kept my hand in my pocket, rubbing the rock with my thumb. I held it tight as I got on the plane, like it could keep me grounded, even when we were flying high above the clouds. At one point during the flight, I looked out the window. The sun was shining on the ocean far below. The water sparkled, and my chest hurt from already missing home. I thought about how that rock had never left the cemetery, had never seen the sea. And now here it was, flying through the sky, just like me. I never thought I would leave home, but there I was, crossing the world.

When I arrived in Canada, everything felt different. The light was cold and white, not warm and golden like back home. The air felt sharp. That first night, I stood under a streetlight and looked up. The light was not orange; it was silver, covered with raindrops, and of course, it did not feel like it belonged to me. But I still had the rock in my pocket. I realized something: light is still light, no matter what color. And my brother is still my brother, no matter how far I am.

The rock has changed a little over the years. The rough parts are now smoother, worn down by my hand. But it is still with me, in my pocket during the day, on my nightstand at night. Sometimes I see the streetlight outside shine on it, and for a second, I feel like I am back at the grave, kneeling, picking it up for the first time. I do not carry it for luck; I carry it for its weight, not just the physical kind, but the emotional kind. It reminds me of what I lost, but also what I still carry. When grief makes it hard to breathe, holding the rock helps me feel steady. I could not keep my brother alive, but I could keep the stone, the one thing that touched him and now travels with me.

When people ask why I carry a rock, I just smile and say, "It means something to me." But the real answer is longer; it is my connection to a place and a person I can never return to.

The rock has been with me in two countries, under two skies, in two different parts of my life. And for the rest of my life, it will stay with me.

It is the one piece of my brother I could take.