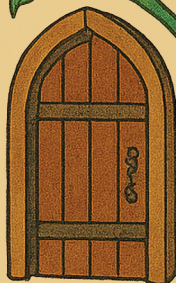




**STORIES**  
from  
**GrailHeart**

❖ Volume 1 ❖

**WILLIAM  
ZEITLER**



# STORIES from GrailHeart

❖ *Volume 1* ❖



William Zeitler

Stories from GrailHeart

Volume 1

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# What is “GrailHeart”?

The Grail was never just a cup.

It's the Empty Vessel —  
the Longing itself  
for the Good, the True, and the Beautiful,  
always just beyond what we think we know.

Because the Grail has never truly been about an object.  
It's about the hunger in the human heart —  
that holy ache that calls us  
toward something deeper, truer,  
wider than the world we see.

The mind has its own kind of knowledge.  
But the heart has another knowing of its own.  
And the heart knows the way.

The Grail is not the end of the Quest.  
It's the beginning.  
The very moment you feel that ache of Longing,  
you have already begun the journey.

GrailHeart exists to honor that journey.  
It is a weaving of stories and music,  
a place where myth and melody meet,  
sharing moments of stillness and wonder  
in a restless, distracted world.

These stories are part of that weaving.  
They are not explanations.  
Nor mere entertainment.  
They are invitations — to pause, to breathe,  
to remember that beneath the clamor of the world

there are still quiet paths and moments  
where wonder waits.

Each tale came to me much as a melody does:  
a fragment first, then a gesture,  
and finally a whole form that asked to be shared.  
They are not meant to be solved,  
but to be sat with — like a cup of tea by the fire,  
or savoring a sunset with someone you love.

If you find encouragement in them,  
or tenderness,  
or simply a moment of stillness,  
then they have done their work.

May they serve as companions for your own journey,  
and remind you, in whatever season you find yourself,  
that the heart is vast enough to hold  
both solitude and belonging —  
certainty and mystery —  
stillness and longing.

So let us begin...

— *William Zeitler*







## The Wager



o one saw the Stranger arrive.

One autumn morning,  
as mist unspooled itself from the hills,  
he was simply there —  
seated at the dry edge of the old fountain,  
scribbling in a thick, weather-stained book.

His boots were worn.  
His coat dark and plain.  
He neither begged nor bargained.  
He only watched,  
listened,  
and wrote.

The fountain hadn't flowed in years.  
A ring of moss circled its base like a faded crown.  
Children had once been forbidden to climb it —  
though some did anyway.  
But no one touched it now.  
Not with the Stranger there.

At first, the villagers kept their distance.

But time softened suspicion into curiosity.  
Some approached.

They found him polite,  
if not exactly friendly.

When asked who he was, he replied,  
“One who longs for the Silence.”

When asked what he wrote, he said,  
“The names of those who are ready.”

Ready for what? He would not say.

Still, people came.  
They told him their regrets,  
their dreams.  
He never interrupted.

Only once did he ever offer anything unasked.

That one was Lira.

She came near midnight,  
cloaked in a shawl too thin for the wind.  
Her hands trembled,  
but not from the cold.

She had lost much.  
Her father, to fever that took him in three days.  
Her brother, pressed into a war no one believed in,  
returned in a box sealed with wax.  
Her mother followed them  
to the Far Shore not long after.

Lira did not cry when she spoke.  
Her voice was flat, low —  
like someone who had buried too many things  
and forgotten where.

“I want power,” she said.

The Stranger looked up, but said nothing.

“Not for revenge,” she added.

“Not even to gain some worldly advantage.  
Just... so I never feel helpless again.”

He closed his book.

“That’s a holy thing to want,” he said.

“But the sacred never comes cheap.”

“I have nothing left to pay.”

He studied her for a moment.

Then, gently, he reached into his coat  
and withdrew a small, square object  
wrapped in faded linen.

“Then give *this*,” he said.

She frowned.

“I don’t understand.”

He unwrapped it.

It was a mirror, no larger than her palm.

Its frame was blackened silver,  
etched with runes too faint to read.

The glass shimmered faintly,  
as if it remembered light  
even when none was there.

“Look!” he said.

Lira took the mirror and stared into it.

What she saw was not her face —  
not exactly.

It was she,  
but not as she was.

In the mirror,  
her face shifted.

In one image,  
she stood tall and beautiful —  
but cold-eyed,  
armored in charm and elegance,  
surrounded by people who obeyed her  
but did not love her.

Power without intimacy.  
Prestige without peace.

In another,  
she was aged and ragged,  
eyes hollow,  
muttering curses to ghosts.  
Still bitter.  
Still alone.

Her strength calcified into suspicion.  
Her pain hardened into armor  
no one dared approach.

In a third,  
she saw something so luminous  
it made her wince:  
a self formed of sorrow  
transmuted into grace,  
eyes like hearthlight in winter.  
A fire that warmed,  
but did not burn.

A healer.  
A guide.  
A mother to none —  
and to all.

Other images flickered at the edges of the glass.

Blurred.  
Unchosen.  
Waiting.

She lowered the mirror.

“That one,” she whispered.  
“That’s the one I want to be.”

The Stranger nodded.

“Then you must make a wager.”

“With whom?”

“Not with me.  
With the mirror.”

“What’s the price?”

“Everything you still cling to.  
Every story that begins with ‘I can’t.’  
Every statement that begins with ‘I am this or that’  
which isn’t true.  
Every fear that keeps you smaller  
than the shape your soul wants to take.

You’ll have to lose things —  
safety,  
certainty,  
your name in some circles.

But what you’ll gain...”

He paused.  
“That part is never mine to promise.”

Lira was quiet.  
The night wind stirred the hem of her shawl.

“If I fail?”

“You will,” he said.  
“But only sometimes.  
And only at first.

What matters is that you keep walking.”

She looked down at the mirror again.  
Its surface had stilled —  
now showing only her own weary face,  
but softer somehow.

She wrapped it in the linen  
and tucked it against her chest.

When she looked up,  
the Stranger was gone.

The fountain, dry for decades,  
now held a shallow pool of clear water.

Lira returned to her cottage.  
She said nothing of what had passed.

But the next day,  
she visited the widow who never left her house.

The day after that,  
she stood between two men arguing in the square  
and said one quiet thing that stopped them both.

She began tending the graves no one else would tend.

And when asked why, she only said,  
“Because someone must.”

Each night, she looked into the mirror.  
Some nights it was kind.  
Other nights,  
it showed her things she did not want to see.

But she never turned away.

Instead, she took them to heart.

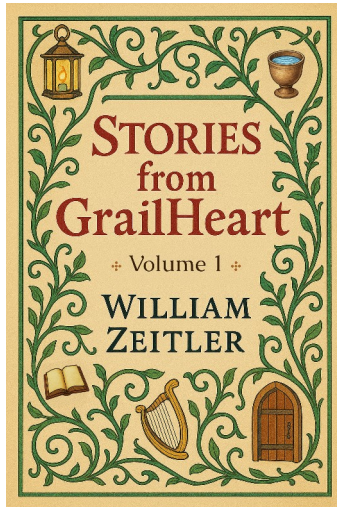
And when travelers came and asked  
if the village had a wise woman,  
they were pointed toward the girl  
with fire in her bones  
and a mirror in her pocket —

one who, long ago,  
had made a wager  
worth everything.





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