

The Weeping Cave

Long ago — or perhaps only yesterday — a sorrowful soul had sealed himself inside a cave. At least that was the story. Some claimed he had been wronged, exiled unjustly. Others whispered that he had chosen his own exile, unable to bear what he had done, or failed to do. Over time, the tale became a warning: *enter not the hollow where despair keeps watch.*

And so the cave was left alone. Children dared each other to approach its mouth, but none lingered long. Travelers made signs of protection when passing by. Moss overtook the path, and silence settled thick as dust.

But there was one who did not turn away.

A wanderer — neither young nor old, clothed in sun-faded gray — came to the village and heard the story in fragments over meals and under stars. She listened, not with the ears of gossip, but of sadness. For she, too, carried silence.

One dawn, before the crows stirred, she took the overgrown path to the cave.

The entrance yawned like a forgotten mouth, rimmed with ivy and shadow. The stone door — smooth, round, weatherworn — stood as it always had, leaning against the opening like a sentinel.

She sat before it and listened.

Nothing.

She leaned closer. Pressed her ear to the stone. A faint sound — barely more than breath. Then a whisper, or perhaps a sob. Or was it her own breath, mirrored back?

She stayed until twilight. The air grew cool. Still, she waited. And as dusk deepened, a strange dream touched her mind — not asleep, not awake.

In her reverie she stood before the same stone door. But now it was slightly ajar.

Not cracked. Not broken. Just... unlatched.

The next morning, she arose and placed both hands on the stone.

It slid open without resistance.

Inside, the cave was shallow. Not dark, but dim with an inner blue — like light seen through closed eyes. The air was thick with time. Along the walls were old markings, made by fingertip or flame. And in the center: a shape, cloaked and kneeling. Still.

She did not speak. She stepped forward and knelt, matching his posture.

Minutes passed. Or hours. The cloaked figure remained unmoving.

Then, softly, she said, "The door was never locked."

Nothing.

More silence.

Then — a shudder. A breath. He trembled.

Slowly, as if rising from water, he lifted his head. Beneath the hood, a face — lined, tender, astonished.

“I thought... I couldn’t leave,” he said, voice hoarse with disuse. “I thought it was sealed.”

“It was not,” she said. “You were waiting for permission.”

He nodded, eyes wet. “And you brought it?”

“No,” she said. “You brought yourself. I only reminded you where the door was.”

The two sat together until the light changed.

When they emerged from the cave, the sun had already begun to set. But the sky was wide and clear, and the path — though tangled — was still there.

The villagers never saw the wanderer again. But they noticed something strange: birds nested near the cave now, and wildflowers bloomed around its mouth. The moss no longer grew over the trail. Some said the cave had healed. Others said it had emptied.

But a few — those who knew the ache of pausing at an unknown threshold — began to make pilgrimages. Not to be rescued, but to sit. To listen. To remember:

*Sometimes the heaviest weight
is waiting for a door
that was never locked —
and a permission
that was never withheld.*

— William Zeitler

2025 April 14

© 2025 William Zeitler. Originally published at: GrailHeart.com

