

The Quirky Blacksmith

 GrailHeart story.

The village blacksmith was
a man of steady heat and hand.
With a few quirks no one quite understood.

He spoke little,
but often muttered to the coals
as if the forge were
an old friend with a temper.
Sometimes he sang to his hammer —
always the same five-note tune,
fragile and a little sad.

He wore one iron boot and one leather one.
No one knew why.
When asked, he'd only say,
“Balance,”
and go back to work.

Crows followed him through the village.
He never called them,
but he left bits of bread on the windowsill
and smiled when they took it.

He refused to take silver coins.
He said they made the scales lie.

His name was Arren,
and he had the kind of presence
that made children curious
and adults uncomfortable.

To some, he was a local legend —
a living charm against misfortune.
To others, he was the village oddity —
reliable, yes,
but not to be invited to dinner.

When asked a question, he answered it.
When asked for help, he gave it —
though never gently.
He wasn't cruel,
just unsanded.

The weaver said he was touched in the head.
The merchant said he was touched in the hands.
The healer said he was touched by something the bones remember.

And yet —

when the bridge collapsed in spring floods, it was Arren who devised a curious brace for the beam
and fitted it beneath a dozen feet of icy water.

When a child went missing in the mountains,
Arren was the one who searched through the night,
thorugh the sleat
in places no one else thought to look
until he found her,
half frost-bitten beneath a pine tree.

And when the village well ran dry,
Arren built a strange pulley rig from old iron and driftwood,
and water flowed again —
though no one quite understood how.

He never asked for praise.
He never explained the things he did.
He never once tried to smooth his edges.

People came and went in the village.
Some admired him.
Some avoided him.
Some—
a few—
loved him as he was.

One evening, long after the forge had cooled,
an old friend sat beside him and asked:

“Doesn’t it bother you?
That half the town thinks you’re too much,
and the other half thinks you’re not enough?”

Arren shrugged.

“They’re not wrong,” he said.
“But they’re not all right, either.”

He fed a scrap of bread to a crow
that had landed on the edge of the bench.

“I’m not here to please the village.
I’m here to hold the shape I was given,
until it’s time to return it.”

The fire cracked.
The sky grew soft.
The anvil dreamed in silence.

And in the village,
a child fell asleep, feeling safe,
not knowing why.

— *William Zeitler*
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