

Warrior

By Ella Bergin, grade 6

Kari's heart fluttered. Her mind raced. She couldn't comprehend her emotions. She felt peaceful, but also aware. She felt as if there was danger lurking, but she wasn't worried. To put it into one word, it was magical. She held her breath, wishing that this feeling would stay with her forever.

Kari's eyes slowly opened, as she examined her surroundings. She was in her bedroom. Well, not really hers. She was in one of her Aunt's many bedrooms. The old wooden boards on the floor and walls gave the whole room a rather dingy appearance. Kari stopped, remembering her dream. It wasn't the first one. Ever since she came to her aunt's house she'd always have the same dream. The same mystical feeling. But whenever she woke up, instead of being filled with something magical, she felt tired and weary, as if the whole dream would weigh down on her more and more, whenever she dreamt it. She felt a feeling of longing.

Longing was the perfect word to describe Kari's life. She longed for her parents. She longed for adventure. She longed to be loved. When she was only eight, her parents went missing. No one knew what happened to them. They were just gone. The only thing she had from them was a silver necklace they gave to her as a child. She got shipped around from family members to foster homes for nine years, but every time she got sent back. "She was too much trouble," they'd say. "She's just a burden." "She's too much to deal with." It was always the same. Finally, her elderly aunt agreed to take care of her, except she didn't really take care of her. Kari only saw her once. She lived in an old creepy mansion with servants who would provide for Kari. But Kari didn't want servants or a giant mansion. She just wanted love.

Kari walked down a long wooden hallway. The mansion was so big she spent the majority of each day walking around, discovering more rooms, and finding more and more hallways and passages. That's exactly what she began to do today. She found a grand ballroom, the servants quarters, and a room full of the strangest knickknacks you'd ever find. Then after exiting one of the rooms, she found herself in a long narrow hallway. Paintings of mystical lands filled the wooden corridor. Unlike the old, splintered wood that covered the rest of the house, this wood felt clean and smooth. Kari began to run her hand against the

smooth wood when she noticed something. The wood on the right side of the passage had no pictures and the wood angled vertically instead of horizontally like the others. When Kari stepped back to take a better look, she noticed the wooden planks made the perfect outline of a door. She stepped closer and rested her hands against the planks, when all of a sudden the wooden planks began to lift off the ground. Kari jumped back, as the boards continued to lift, making an opening in the wall. Kari looked around to make sure no one was watching her, and she snuck through the opening.

Kari's eyes opened wide as she examined the room she stood in. It was old and wooden but a large door stood in the middle of the room. Kari was very confused because it didn't seem to lead into another room. It just stood in the center of the room, with no connecting passageway. But what amazed Kari more was the breathtaking light that shone its way through the space under the door and through the cracks and scars that covered the exterior. Her heart pounding, Kari took a breath, and opened the door.

Kari was blinded by a burst of light. It took a second for her to survey her surroundings. She was in a large, open grassy meadow on top of a hill. A lush forest stood at the base of the hill, and a crystal pond right next to that. Even

though Kari was in an unknown land, instead of feeling panicked and overwhelmed, she was peaceful. She took a deep breath inhaling the fresh, morning air. Kari closed her eyes, soaking in every bit of this moment. She had never felt so serene. Right as she was about to head down the grass hill, she heard a rustling of branches from a nearby thicket. Struck by fear, Kari went to grab a stick laying on the ground. Shivering, she crept toward the thicket. The rustling was louder now and more intense. She took a deep breath and started swinging her stick with all her might.

“Hey!! Hey!! Ouch! Stop it!” A male voice yelled from inside the clearing. Kari stopped, but still kept her stick ready. A boy, around the same age as Kari, crawled out of the thicket. He had curly, dark brown hair and matching eyes. He wore clothes Kari had only ever seen in medieval books. A silver and bronze breastplate with a design of a mystical castle imprinted on the front. He wore matching armor on his legs, and a belt and sword around his waist. His face had an amused expression, and it seemed as if he was holding in a laugh. But suddenly his expression changed to something confused and curious.

“Who are you?” he asked with a hint of suspicion.

“My name is Kari” she replied with her head held high, regaining some confidence. “And who are you?” she asked, preparing her stick for another strike

“My name’s Aston,” he replied, his arms crossed. “How did you get here? And where did you get that neckl-”

A thundering sound shattered through the forest. Ashton scanned the area, then grabbed Kari's arm and whispered, “It’s not safe here. Follow me.” And he led her off into the thicket.

Kari covered her face as Ashton led her off into the thorny thicket. It felt like minutes until she was able to uncover her face. She found herself in another clearing, but instead of a forest there was a small wooden cabin. Ashton put his finger to his lips, motioning to be quiet, and led them inside the cabin. Kari sat herself down at the table in the center of the room.

“What was that?” Kari questioned.

“The Serpent,” Ashton sighed. “He’s the so-called ruler here. But his heart is pure evil. He’s not even supposed to be the ruler of these lands”.

“And what exactly are these lands called?”

“Mageia,” Aston replied. “That was our ancestors word for magic”

“So is this some sort of fantasy land?”

“Fantasy? I don’t know about that.” Ashton refocused his attention on questioning Kari. “So where did you get that necklace?”

“This?” Kari asked, clutching the necklace. “My parents gave this to me,”

“How did you get here?” Aston asked.

“It’s hard to explain,” Kari sighed.

Aston heaved a heavy sigh. “I’m going to have to take you to the master scholar. I don’t know what I’m supposed to do here. Come with me. And keep your voice down.”

Ashton led Kari deeper into the forest until they arrived at a cave burrowed in the side of a mountain. Kari thought it was a cave of an animal, but as they went inside it was decorated with furniture and old fashion decorations. A big elderly man with white ruffled hair and spectacles that rested on the edge of his nose, sat in the corner seat reading a large, old book.

“Oh hello, Ashton,” he smiled pleasantly. “I see you’ve brought a guest!”

“Yes, sir. That's what I needed to talk to you about. She arrived in the clearing, and her clothes, and the necklace,” he gestured to Kari.

“Hmmm, yes I see. Come here. Umm, what was your name again?” he said looking at Kari.

“I'm Kari,” she replied, warmed by his pleasantness.

“Well then, come here, Kari.” He looked at her necklace and her clothes and her face, and then began to ask her some questions. “So where did you get your necklace?” he asked.

Kari, who still didn't understand why they were so interested in her necklace, answered, “My parents. They went missing years ago, and are assumed to be dead.”

“And what were your parents' names?” he inquired as he put his book down.

Kari took a deep breath, “Autumn and Jason Collinsworth.”

The scholar's eyes widened. "And how did you get here?"

"Well I've been staying at my aunt's house, and I was walking through one of the corridors and touched the wall and it opened-"

"You touched the wall and it opened?" He interrupted. He took off his spectacles and shook his head. Then he noticed Kari's confused expression and continued. "Oh my dear girl, I'm so sorry. I've confused you. Let me explain. Many years ago, the land of Mageia was a place of peace. All creatures and people dwelled together with happiness. In your foreign country, you have presidents or prime ministers. But here we have the Chief Warriors. They protect our land from all evil, and are the strongest warriors in Mageia. Years ago, your parents were the Chief Warriors of Mageia."

At this, Kari's mouth dropped open. My parents? Chief Warriors? Kari knew they often went on "business trips", but she had never thought they were Warriors of any type! Just average parents. The scholar cleared his throat ready to continue.

"Well, your parents were some of the best Chief Warriors I'd ever seen. They had great responsibilities and great power. And of course with great power comes someone who wants their own. That's where the serpent comes in. He is a

demon of fire, a shapeshifter, who was banished from this land by your own parents. He vowed to get back at them, but we heard nothing else from him for several years. Little did we know, he was spending his time gaining more power and strength. Then he came back and declared war.” At this, the scholar sighed. “He was too powerful.”

“You mean he killed them?” Kari croaked.

“Yes, and he took the role of Chief Warrior for himself. Mageia has been in ruins ever since.” He took a breath. “And you, Kari, are the next Chief Warrior.

This was too much for Kari to believe. Her, a Chief Warrior? The scholar began to speak again,

“Your job is to defeat the Serpent, take back your title as Chief Warrior, and restore peace in this land.”

“But defeating a demon my parents couldn’t beat? I’ve never even held a sword or a bow and arrow.” Kari argued

“Yes, and that’s where Aston comes in. His job is to protect the Chief Warrior at all times. He will train you, and help you in battle, as did his father and his father before that.”

“But I still don’t understand why my necklace is so important!” Kari questioned again. This time Ashton spoke.

“It is the mark of a Chief Warrior. Your parents gave it to you so you would be the next protector of these lands. You must help us. You’re the only one left who can save Mageia,” Ashton begged. Between Ashton’s pleading eyes and the scholar’s knowing grin, she couldn’t help but give in.

Over the next few weeks, Ashton trained Kari in fighting. She learned how to use a sword and bow and arrow, and after she got the hang of it, she was almost as good at it as Ashton.

“It’s in her blood,” the scholar would say, as he watched them practice. Finally, Ashton believed Kari was ready for the final battle. She was ready to face the Serpent.

Kari and Ashton prepared to walk to the battlegrounds, where all wars took place.

“But how do we know he’s going to be there?” Kari wondered.

“Nearly everything in Mageia is alive. The trees, the grass. There’s no doubt the word got around to the Serpent. Are you ready to go?” Ashton asked impatiently.

Kari took a deep breath, “Yes, I’m ready.”

They walked together for what felt like hours, until they finally reached a large open area with smooth stone for flooring. Kari whispered to Ashton, “He’s not here yet.”

“Oh I bet he is. Remember, he’s a shapeshifter. He could be that bush over there, or that tre-” Suddenly a blood curdling scream arose from the darkness, and a creature in the form of a snake emerged from a nearby bush. The serpent was a ginormous creature. Thirty feet tall, with coal black scales. His blood red eyes and fangs glistened in the sunlight. The red horns on his head were the finishing touch to the demon. His cold red eyes stared directly at Kari, and then he lunged for the kill.

Kari closed her eyes for a second as she regained her composure. Ashton managed to whisper under his breath, “Maker, help us,” as the war began.

The serpent jumped at Kari, its teeth bared. Kari managed to jump out of the way just in time, and was able to give him a nasty cut on the nose. The serpent barely seemed to notice any harm had been done to him. He struck again, this time at Ashton who blocked him with his shield, though Kari could tell he had hurt his arm in the process. More blows were made and more injuries were dealt, mainly on Kari and Ashton. Kari and Ashton began to feel weak and tired. They both knew it was a matter of time until they were overpowered too.

Kari could barely breathe. Her heart wouldn't slow down and her mind was cloudy. She could barely stay on her feet. She looked over to Ashton. She could see it in him too. They were going to die. The serpent came in for one more blow and Kari collapsed, but before she could hit the ground a vibrant light shone around Kari and Ashton. The serpent screamed a horrible scream and tried to get away but the light enveloped him. Kari opened her weak eyes to discover a shield of light was covering her and Ashton and blinding the serpent. The serpent shriveled up into nothing but black ashes, as Ashton and Kari collapsed in the dirt.

Later, a fellow tree told them (yes the trees do talk) that the circle of light had come from Kari's necklace, and the tree believed that he had heard two voices saying, "There will be no where you could go where we won't be." Kari didn't have to wonder who the voices were. She knew. And she knew one more thing. She was a Warrior.