



# *The Fountain of Youth*

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Action/adventure

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Once upon a time. Those are the words every bright eyed child loves to hear. They crave action and magical tales about how the beautiful princess who is unfairly locked away in a grim tower is rescued by a charming prince on a noble steed. But to one girl, on heavens no. This girl does not want to hear about how once the princess is rescued, she will be becoming the prince's wife and bear his children in a dusty old castle where she will spend the rest of her life. No. This girl wants adventure.

The name of this girl is Ares. Ares hair is a bright untouchable golden colour that many would consider to be unnatural. Her face is dusted with a blush and her expressions are soft and kind. But no one who knows Ares would describe her in such a manner. You see, Ares is violent and dangerous. Many would describe her as vicious, a thief, a savage. While other little girls in her village sew and help their mothers with the cooking, Ares often goes out into the woods. There she would pierce the hearts of rabbits, skin squirrels and bath in the trees glorious scent. The mothers in the village would often look at this girl in disapproval and disgust. "How unladylike." They would whisper to one another whenever they saw Ares sharpening a stone or picking at her muddy trousers. However, the boys in the village were fearful of Ares. No boy would dare set foot in the forest without their fathers present. Bears and wolves lurk in the shadows and scare the boys silly. But Ares did it with such leisure. It astounded and frightened them.

One day as Ares was roasting a hare over a well lit fire, she saw something unusual. A young man stood by a great oak tree with a bow in hand. Ares had never seen anyone from her village come into the forest so late in the evening before. She slowly stood up and cautiously walked over to the man. He took no notice of her and

looked down at the map in his hands. Ares did not recognize this man. She assumed he must be an enemy.

“You! Man! Drop your weapons or I will not hesitate to pierce my arrow through your skull!” Ares said in an aggressive tone.

The man lifted his head and looked over at the girl. “Now, what would a little girl like yourself be doing in a dangerous forest? Shouldn’t you be at home? Helping your mother with supper?”

Ares could feel her blood boil. “I would do no such thing!” She retorted. “I have much better things to be doing than mending my father’s trousers! Now, tell me! Who are you!”

The man smiled to himself. “My name is Artemis. I am in search of a rare structure known as The Fountain of Youth.”

Ares lowered her weapon slightly. “A rare fountain you say? Nonsense. There is no such thing.” She said in disbelief. The man shook his head. “It is in fact true, girl. Such a thing does exist.” Ares couldn’t help but shake her head.

“Tell me, girl. You choose to wonder by yourself in this forest with nothing but your wits and a battered bow and arrow. Why? Why would you rather roam these woods alone then stay in that snug little village with your mother and father?” The man asked curiously.

Ares looked at the man with such fierceness in her eyes. “I’d rather roam this forest alone then stay in that village and be their idea of perfect. I am a girl. A women. My faith is already sealed because of my gender. I have been told once I come of age, I shall be forced to marry. I am expected to wear a raggedy dress and work under my mother’s guidance without any say. I choose to be the knight that rescues the princess not the damsel in distress.”

The man looked overjoyed at her speech. “Correct, girl. That’s how children your age should think. You must join me on my quest in search for this mighty fountain. You can show the members of your village that you are more than just a woman, you are a warrior.”

Ares didn't either she trusted this man but she agreed anyway. She knew she was only doing it for her own selfish reasons but she was too blinded by the possibility of being accepted by her fellow villagers.

Ares and Artemis set off on their quest to find The Fountain of Youth. They walked deep into the forest, jumping over boulders and crossing steep rivers. Every so often they would stop and make camp. Artemis shared his fresh loaf of bread with Ares and she would show him flowers and plants that were edible. For the first time in her life, Ares felt like she had a friend.

They soon set back on their journey. Ares had never been this deep in the forest before. Artemis led her towards a deep dark cave next to a beautiful waterfall. He showed her his tattered cloth map. "We are almost there. We just need to venture into this cave." He announced.

Ares started a small fire and dipped a long branch into the flames to make a torch. She handed one to Artemis and they began to travel into the cave. Inside was dressed in complete darkness. Ares almost considered it pretty. They walked down long corridors and make several sharp turns but they did not find anything of interest. Ares was beginning to grow frustrated. Just as she was about to start venting her anger to Artemis, she noticed a dim light.

Artemis didn't seem to notice so Ares gave his arm a tug. "Look." She said as she turned his attention towards the light. His mouth opened slightly in awe as they started to walk towards it. As they walked, the light started to become brighter. They soon found they were walking towards a chiseled stone archway. The light was becoming almost blinding. Ares used her hands to cover her eyes but the light was too intense.

Ares found herself dizzily walking through the archway with no intention of stopping. The light started to dim as she walked through the archway and she removed her hand from her face. Ares was in awe. The hollow underground space of the cave was beautiful decorated with marble columns allied towards a magnificent fountain.

The fountain was made from the smoothest stone Ares had ever seen. The crystal blue water that sprung from the spouts of the structure looked like glittering diamonds being exposed to sunlight. Ares mouth twitched into a grin.

"Artemis! We've found it! We've found it!" She cheered. Artemis was too stunned by the fountain to reply. He

slowly stepped away from Ares and started towards the beautiful piece of architecture. Ares watched him carefully. "Artemis?" She called quietly.

But Artemis was not listening. His mouth extended into a smirk. He started laughing madly. "Ignorant child!" He jeered. "Did you really think that I would ever share such a beauty with you? The only way I was ever going to find the fountain was through the eyes of a child. No adult could ever dream of finding the fountain so I set out to find a child who would not be missed. Who was not loved to lead me to my truest desire!"

Ares began to tremble with rage and fear. Artemis had deceived her! He had only used her for his bidding! Ares' face turned scarlet from embarrassment. "You filthy scum!" She screeched. "You shall pay for your dishonesty!"

Artemis only laughed mockingly in response. He pulled a sharpened dagger from his belt. Ares froze but quickly regained her cool. She quickly reached for her bow but Artemis was too quick. He sliced and stabbed his dagger towards Ares. She sloppily dodged his attacks in panic. Ares ducked away from Artemis' attacks and raced over to the fountain. She clutched onto the soothing marble but her moment of calm was soon interrupted by an enraged Artemis. He slashed his knife at Ares' stomach. The young girl called out in fright. She swiftly jumped back. Ares' body began to fill with rage. She threw her weapon to the ground and in one swift motion, she rammed her hands into Artemis' stomach. The man was caught by surprise. He whacked the back of his shins against the fountain. Artemis couldn't catch his balance in time. He tumbled into the fountain.

Artemis began to scream in agony. The crystal liquid of the fountain began to slide itself into the man's skin. The water could find no wounds or imperfections on the man. It began to consume itself into the man's body. The water was smothering itself over Artemis. He screamed out in pain but it came out muffled. Artemis' once handsome and smooth face began to grow younger.

His face soon looked like one of a toddler. Ares looked on in horror. Artemis was growing younger and younger every second his skin touched the water. Ares screamed when she was what was left of her once friend. Artemis had grown into a petite baby. He wailed and cried in protest but the water continued to consume him. Ares began to cry in pity. He was only a child! She threw her jacket off, her hands gripped the edge of the fountain as she was about to climb over but she was too late.

Artemis' cries were soon drowned out by the calming sound of the water. Ares looked on in terror. Nothing was left of her dear friend except the dagger he had used in attempt to kill her. Ares was too stiff with fear to move. Just like a brutal wake up call, Ares slowly started to process what happened. Ares wiped away the last of her tears. She quickly snatched up her jacket and bow before racing out of the cave.

Ares didn't stop running, despite the taste of blood that filled her mouth. Her legs were starting to bruise and her exposed arms started to bleed from small cuts low hanging branches that given her.

Ares continued to run until she finally stumbled upon her village. Men and women of all ages were frantically searching at the entrance of the forest. Ares was too busy trying to regain her breath to be shocked by the women racing around the woods.

A group of boys who, in the past would have been terrified of Ares grinned when they saw her. "Everyone! Everyone! Ares is here! She has returned!" They cried out in joy. A crowd started to form around the confused girl. Some women were tearing up while some men were sobbing. "My dear!" said a beautiful women with honey golden hair. "Mother." Ares whispered. She had never seen her mother look so happy to see her.

"Oh, how we've been searching for you! We thought you had gotten lost in that damn forest! Oh, my baby girl!" Eleanor, Ares' mother cried. Ares was not used to affection. Surprising both herself and the surrounding villagers, Ares broke down into loud sobs. Eleanor took Ares into her arms and hugged her daughter close to her chest.

Ares launched into her dramatic tale. She told her fellow villagers how she met a young man in the forest, how he promised her a fountain of ominous power. She retold her journey and how she stumbled onto The Fountain of Youth. The boys and girls of her village gasped and gapped in awe. Several men nodded in approval while the women looked shocked but joyful.

Once the girl finished, one of the most well-known hunters of the village walked over to Ares. "You, girl," He said as he offered her a hand. "You are not a girl anymore. You are a woman. You're a warrior."

Ares dried her tears. She looked at the hunter and smiled. She took his hand in reply. The hunter gave a hearty laugh. "Do you hear that everyone? This girl is a warrior!" The village cheered and hollered. Ares' heart swelled with pride.

From that day forward, Ares was not laughed at or mocked. She was treated with love and respect. Women weren't expected to stay at home and cook for their husbands anymore, oh no. Men and women alike fought and fell together.

Ares taught this old fashioned village that anyone, no matter gender, or race, or religion, could be a warrior.

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