

Scene I:

(Karia and Brynna sit in a booth at a busy diner.)

Karia:

It's so nice to see you again! It feels like it's been forever.

Brynna:

I know, I can't believe it's been five years since we graduated high school.

Karia:

Yeah, so how do you already have a PhD? You're like some kind of school wizard!

Brynna:

Ha, yeah, something like that. I'm still surprised you never went to school, but you seem well-suited to being a paramedic.

Karia:

It guess it was just the right fit for my talents.

Brynna:

Yeah, I remember in middle school when Jim Farnes broke his leg at lunch and you tried to make a splint out of your notebooks and homework.

Karia:

Not like I would have gotten any better of a grade if I had turned them in.

Brynna:

(chuckles) Maybe not.

Karia:

Hey now, you didn't have to agree.

Brynna:

(laughs harder) I missed you, Karia.

Karia:

I missed you, too, Brynna. Hey, uh, I'm sorry to hear about your mom.

Brynna:

Me too. But now it's my job to look after the old place. And it's kind of nice to be back home for a while.

Karia:

Definitely, I--oh my god.

(Karia pushes away from the table and gets up in a flurry.)

Brynna:

What? Karia, where are you going?

(Karia runs to another table as Brynna slowly follows behind her.)

Karia:

Sir, are you okay?

Man:

My shoulder...

Karia:

Are you having pains in the center of your chest--sir, keep breathing. Stay--

(The table crashes as the man falls)

Karia:

He's unconscious. You, call 911. You, ask the staff if they have an AED--automated external defibrillator. I'm going to start CPR.

(Karia performs chest compressions on the man.)

Brynna:

Karia...

Karia:

Not now, Brynna.

Brynna:

He's gone, Karia.

Karia:

Not yet he isn't.

Brynna:

Karia, he's--

Karia:

Let me concentrate! What? They don't have a defibrillator? Well, remind me to get this place written up.

(Karia stops chest compressions after a long moment)

Brynna:

Kari...

Karia:

Don't you give up on me!

(magic sound)

Man:

Wha--where am I?

(The crowd cheers)

Brynna:

(whispering) Karia, what have you done?

Scene II:

(Brynna pulls Karia by the arm down a sidewalk on a busy street.)

Karia:

Ow, Brynna, why are you dragging me into an alley?

Brynna:

Silens ostium invisibilia.

Karia:

Why are you speaking in Latin?

(The city sounds fade to nothing.)

Karia:

...and why has everything suddenly gone dark? Where are you? Brynna???

(A sound like the striking of the match)

Brynna:

Start. Talking.

Karia:

Brynna, you're holding a flame in your hand.

Brynna:

Your face is about to hold it unless you tell me why you never told me you were a mage.

Karia:

A...mage?

Brynna:

You do magic. I just saw it.

Karia:

I...don't.

Brynna:

Oh quit bullshitting me. That man died back there. All the free mana left his body and then suddenly came back while you look like a ghost. I know where that mana came from, Karia.

Karia:

I...okay, I know that I have this...ability to heal others. But I don't know anything about all this mana stuff.

Brynna:

(sighs in consternation) Well, I know you, so I know you're being dense, not obstinate.

Karia

Hey! I--

Brynna:

You have no idea what you've gotten yourself into, Kari. And more importantly, what you've gotten me into.

Karia:

Brynna, what's going on? What did I do? I just tried to help someone who was in pain.

Brynna:

(sighs softly) You really don't know.

Karia:

No, I don't. Please tell me what's happening.

Brynna:

Karia, I need you to tell me *exactly* what happened the first time you discovered you had this power. Don't leave anything out.

Karia:

Okay. Remember how my mom left my dad?

Brynna:

How old were you?

Karia:

About five. I've told you what my dad was like. He had hit her and driven away for another drink before getting around to me. So we packed our things and ran. My mom was sobbing as we drove.

When we got to the hotel she said that we were going to run away together, far away from where dad could ever find us. She had bruises all up and down her arms. I gave her a big hug and wanted more than anything in the world to make her feel better.

Then the bruises on her arms started to lighten, just as the same places on my body started to darken and swell. My mom always assumed she had just missed them in all the hurry, but I knew even then what just happened.

Brynna:

Is it always like that? Do you take on exactly the same condition that you healed?

Karia:

It was like that at first but I learned to control it. I knew it would be too obvious if my friend's broken leg went away and I came home with one. So I figured out how to spread out the damage and gradually accelerate someone's healing over multiple times rather than all at once.

Brynna:

That's what you did with the old man. Otherwise you would be dead of a heart attack.

Karia:

Right.

Brynna:

Who else knows about this?

Karia:

Nobody.

Brynna:

Don't you try to protect anyone, Karia. I will extract the confession out of you if I need to.

Karia:

I promise! It's the truth! I never told anyone. I was terrified that if anyone found out I would be sent off to a lab to be examined like an animal.

Brynna:

You wouldn't be wrong.

Karia:

What???

Brynna:

Karia, have you ever heard of real-life mages? Not just street magicians or birthday party hacks.
Real Mages.

Karia:

No.

Brynnna:

Exactly. We keep it all under wraps to avoid being detected, studied, and exposed. We consider secrecy to be paramount. Imagine what the world would do if they found out their fellow man could turn invisible, fly, slow down time, or transmute materials.

Karia:

Were the Salem Witch Trials--

Brynnna:

No, just a local pastime. Many other witch trials were, though. And it's my job as Overseer of this region to make sure that never happens again.

Karia:

Overseer?

Brynnna:

My mother was the Overseer, so when she passed it fell to me. Our blood is a proud line of mages. It's my duty to keep us safe by covering our tracks, sanctioning poor behavior, and dispatching of nosy people getting too close to the truth.

Karia:

Brynnna, have you killed somebody?

Brynnna:

No, but I will.

Karia:

Brynnna, this isn't you! What happened to the girl who cried when we had to flush the class goldfish?

Brynnna:

She died when she became Overseer. And I will not let Mother--No, I will not let the world down by being sentimental.

Karia:

So. What are you going to do with me? I just did magic in public. Are you going to kill me too?

Brynnna:

Of course not. My job is to protect mages, not kill them.

Karia:

Oh so self-interest is the law of mages, huh?

Brynna:

Self-interest is the law of Magic itself, Karia. What do you think mana is? It's The Will to Live.

Karia:

The Will to Live?

Brynna:

Or exist, I guess. But all matter is comprised of mana. You can't live or even exist by accident. You have to want to, which means looking out for yourself first.

Karia:

So what's next? What are you going to do to me?

Brynna:

(sighs) Not much now. But you will need to stay with me and learn the ways of the Mage Tower.

Karia:

The Mage Tower?

Brynna:

That's the world-wide association of mages devoted to protecting the art and science of magic from those who would destroy it.

Karia:

Is that who appointed you overseer?

Brynna:

Indeed it is.

Karia:

Okay, well, *Overseer*. What do we do now?

Brynna:

You need to come back to my place and rest. You just expended an enormous amount of mana reviving that man, and you need looking after.

Karia:

Wait, you think that after all of this we're still friends?

Brynna:

No, Karia, I think that after this, I'm your only friend.

Scene III:

(Karia and Brynna stand in a bedroom of Brynna's house.)

Karia:

What are these?

Brynna:

Pajamas.

Karia:

I know they're pajamas. Why are you handing them to me?

Brynna:

Because you're going to put them on and go straight to bed.

Karia:

One, I've never done something straight in my life. Two, I have to go to work.

Brynna:

Then you will call out, put these pajamas on, and go lesbian to bed.

Karia:

But I have to go to work. I'm the only one who--

Brynna:

Who can heal people with magic? Is that it? Is that why you took this job?

Karia:

I need to use what I was given.

Brynna:

You don't need to do anything. Your comrades are trained in medicine. Let them use *their* gifts and training.

Karia:

Why are you so set against me using my...magic?

Brynna:

Give me your hand.

Karia:

Why?

Brynna:

Just do it.

Karia:

Fine.

(magic sound.)

Brynna:

Yep, just as I suspected. Your magic circuits are unidirectional.

Karia:

What does that mean?

Brynna:

It means they go in one direction.

Karia:

I meant what do you mean by magic circuits?

Brynna:

Okay, Magic 101. Mages allow mana to flow through their nervous system like electricity through wires. These are called magic circuits and all mages are born with them. Most allow mana to travel both into and out of them, but yours only allow mana to leave your body.

Karia:

And what's the problem with that?

Brynna:

It's like a river; the flow eventually erodes the riverbed. Since magic doesn't flow back into you and repair your nerves, they start to become damaged. Have you ever felt a sharp stinging pain while healing someone?

Karia:

Yeah, especially lately.

Brynna:

That's a really bad sign, Karia. If you aren't careful you could destroy the nerves of your body. You could end up paralyzed, in a coma, or dead.

Karia:

That's fine.

(A beat of silence)

Brynna:

Excuse me?

Karia:

It's worth it if I can save people's lives.

Brynna:

I swear to god I would kill you if you weren't trying to beat me to it.

Karia:

I'm not trying to kill myself. I just don't care if I die.

Brynna:

Are you hearing yourself?

Karia:

One life for many. That's a trade I'll make.

Brynna:

Well as your Overseer I forbid it.

Karia:

I thought you believed in a woman's right to choose what happens to their body.

Brynna:

Yeah, and as that woman I've decided to forbid you from self-destructing. Why are you fighting me on this? Why are your priorities so warped?

Karia:

It's the heroic thing to do.

Brynna:

Heroes aren't real, Karia.

Karia:

I'll make them real.

Brynna:

That's a snappy comeback, but I won't let you.

Karia:

Why? I want to do this.

Brynna:

Because it doesn't just affect you. I'm not giving up my best friend.

Karia:

Wow. Selfish much?

Brynna:

Yes. You have to be selfish to survive.

Karia:

Such a cheerful worldview.

Brynna:

I told you what mana is. It's the law of all things that persist: stay alive.

Karia:

Well maybe there are better things in the world than existing.

Brynna:

Things you won't experience because you're dead.

Karia:

Well tell me this then. If you're so worried, can't you just fix my magic circuits to let mana flow the other way and heal myself? Or can't I train myself to pass mana to the broken places?

Brynna:

Maybe? But even if you could, it would take mountains of training and patience.

Karia:

Then teach me.

Brynna:

What?

Karia:

Teach me how to control my magic circuits.

Brynna:

I--

Karia:

Can you?

Brynnna:

Yes but--

Karia:

You are my overseer.

Brynnna:

Right but still--

Karia:

Isn't it better than me hurting myself?

Brynnna:

(Sighs) Okay.

Karia:

Yeah?

Brynnna:

Yeah. I'll do it.

Karia:

Yes! Thank you! Anything to let me keep helping people.

Brynnna:

Alright, alright. But you have to do everything I say. Got it?

Karia:

Got it!

Brynnna:

First thing's first, go the fuck to sleep before I cast a sleep spell on you.

Karia:

You wouldn--

Brynnna:

Shuijiào.

(Magic sound.)

(Karia falls to the bed and starts snoring.)

Brynnna:

(Sighs) What am I going to do with you, Kari? How do I protect you now?