

# THE TALE OF ARAGORIA



BECOME A PATRON

## ~ CHAPTER 11 ~ MENTORING

“Mr. Nielsen,” came Mr. Heinz’s cold voice. “Would you mind stepping inside for a moment?” The tone made it very clear it wasn’t a question.

Students bustled all around James in the hallway trying to get to their various classes and labs. James hardly noticed the crowd as his mind still raced—as it had the entire day—to find an answer concerning last night. Why would someone set a trap for *him*?

Mr. Heinz stood in the doorway to his office. His lean arms folded tightly across his chest as if he meant business—which he really did. James knew Heinz was out to get him . . . it was just something he felt deep down for sure. This was one area in his life he didn’t need worry or feel paranoid. Mostly because he didn’t care about Mr. Heinz’s opinion about him.

Now that he thought about it—his paranoia of messing up was always associated with those he wanted to make proud; Grandpa Joe, Andel, Rosden, and Dagget.

“Of course,” James answered with equal iciness.

Mr. Heinz’s eyes flared briefly. James assumed it was because of his lack of respect towards the man. He shrugged it off. Strange how that all worked out like that.

Mr. Heinz ushered James into the office where Mr. McCannon sat off to the side reading a book. Suddenly, James felt a pit in his stomach. He liked Mr. McCannon, and that notion of letting down those who he liked came rushing in.

“Good morning, James,” said Mr. McCannon, not looking up from his book. “Did you enjoy your first night on campus?”

“Um. . . .” James tried to think of what to say. “. . . Yes.”

“We’re going to get straight to it,” Mr. Heinz took over abruptly as he circled around to sit at his desk.

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James glanced over at Mr. McCannon. He was the Executive Director—Mr. Heinz’s boss—and James didn’t particularly like how Mr. Heinz acted as if he were the one calling the shots. Mr. McCannon, on the other hand, betrayed no sign of irritation at the usurpation. He calmly continued to read his book.

“Mr. Nielsen,” Heinz continued. “You went off-campus last night and didn’t return until 5:30 this morning.”

He stared with those accusing eyes right at James. James bit his lower lip as he felt the blood begin to rush through his entire body.

*Stay calm*, he thought to himself. *Stay calm*.

“Would you care to explain where you went?” Mr. Heinz interrogated.

“Nope,” James said abruptly.

Mr. Heinz blinked in surprise. Had no one ever stood up to him before? “Why did you leave?”

“Needed some air.”

“How come it took you so long to return?” Mr. Heinz snarled.

“I got lost in the woods,” James tried to not smirk. “The birds ate my bread crumbs which would have led me back home.”

Mr. Heinz’s face went red. James heard a soft snort and caught Mr. McCannon hiding the smile on his face with his hand. He still pretended to read his book.

“Enough,” Mr. Heinz raised his voice. “As your mentoring teacher, I demand you tell me where you went and why you were gone so long.”

James couldn’t help but shrink back a bit in his chair, but not out of fear. Mr. Heinz seemed to grow ever so slightly. Just enough to be more imposing than usual.

“Alex,” Mr. McCannon finally stepped in. “I believe you have a class. I’ll deal with Mr. Nielsen. Do you mind if we use your office?”

James watched as Mr. Heinz’s hands pressed down on his desk, shivering with a subtle intensity. Mr. McCannon waited—patient and in control—for Mr. Heinz to finally leave. James admired the authority the headmaster commanded.

Mr. Heinz glared at James like a caged animal that wanted to be unleashed. “Of course,” he answered through gritted teeth.

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Without another word or sound, he left the office and James let out a long sigh of relief. He didn't even realize he had been holding his breath. Did it suddenly get a bit warmer?

"James," Mr. McCannon began with a sympathetic but authoritative tone. "I'm not going to ask where you went last night."

James blinked in surprise. Wasn't it McCannon's job to learn details to give an appropriate punishment?

"If you wanted to run away and ditch the school I know you would have," he continued. "But that's not like your family to simply ditch out. Break the rules here and there? Yes. But you come from a good family who'll never break a promise."

The words stung as they sank in. James knew he was right.

"So, it's enough for me to know that you were out all night which breaks our rule of curfew. But I'm also glad you're back."

"That's it?" James asked in bewilderment.

Mr. McCannon laughed. "Oh, no. That's not it. There's still a punishment. You'll have detention during lunch hour. Ms. Smith runs the detention. You'll report to her office today, and if there's another repeat in breaking any of the rules—for whatever reason—you'll have detention every day for lunch for the next four weeks."

"Four weeks?" James couldn't believe it. Then again, his mind was racing at the same time—*what was detention?*

"We have high expectations and standards here," Mr. McCannon explained firmly . . . but still with that sympathetic tone. "High expectations require appropriate consequences."

James slumped in his chair. "I guess I won't break any more rules then," he said.

Four weeks spending his lunch in detention. Whatever detention meant . . . he was sure it couldn't be good.

\* \* \*

Surprisingly, detention wasn't that bad. The way everyone talked about it James figured it'd be some horrible disciplinary measure. If that was their worst form of punishment for breaking rules then perhaps he'd be just fine.

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The rules were simple—no talking for the entire time. Ms. Smith was, thus far, the kindest person James had met. Technically there were two rules—no talking and no sleeping. But for those who were really trying to stay awake but just couldn't, she'd simply turn a blind eye.

For some of the other teenagers in there it looked like absolute torture with the expressions and body language they were exhibiting. But they hadn't been trained by one of the most legendary fairy-warriors in centuries—James had. Being quiet for an hour was nothing for him.

When the bell rang to let everyone know lunch was over James casually made his way to his next class, which to him seemed more of a punishment than detention was—mentoring. A whole afternoon of meeting with his mentoring group and studying whatever he wanted to study. It was a good idea. He just didn't like the fact that his mentor was Mr. Heinz.

His mentoring group shuffled into the small study room. James immediately noticed the walls lined with high bookshelves all full of black-bound books that looked like sinister soldiers in uniform watching them.

"You snuck out last night?" whispered the student sitting next to James.

Aside from noting the eerie bookshelves James hadn't paid attention to who was coming into the room. He had just plopped down in his seat and stared at the floor. He looked up and his mouth went dry. Bailey sat next to him, smiling her radiant smile. She looked even prettier than he remembered. But then again, he did first see her in a dark gymnasium with lights flashing everywhere.

"Um . . . yeah," he answered. What was he going to say if she asked more questions?

Sure enough. . . . "Where did you go?"

"Um . . ." he racked his brain trying to think of something quickly. "I . . . wanted to see our old playing fields."

He felt his face flush as he quickly lied. He hoped she didn't notice.

Bailey giggled. "You know, Tony and I could take you to see our childhood hangouts *without* breaking the rules."

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James nodded with feigned ruefulness. He liked that idea—being with old friends and reminiscing about fun times. Though he still would be distracted by his feelings towards Bailey and even the resentment towards Tony.

Mr. Heinz entered the room through a separate door that connected to his office. James felt the temperature literally drop. Why did this man seem to chill him to the bone both literally and figuratively?

“Welcome, class,” he said in that deceptively melodious voice. “Now, you are all familiar with the mentoring program.”

*Not me.* James still didn’t understand what he was supposed to do with this time, but he figured he’d just wing it.

“Seeing as this is the first of our six terms and you have had adequate time over the summer break, I’m going to assume that you have all planned out in great detail what you intend to study over the course of the term.”

“Um, sir,” said a sheepish looking boy.

Mr. Heinz leered at the young man clearly upset at the interruption. “Yes . . . Timothy?”

“S-s-sir, mine wasn’t so much studying a topic but working on a project,” Timothy said with a shaky voice.

Mr. Heinz looked at Timothy with obvious indignation. James wondered why working on a project rather than studying a topic would annoy him so much.

“And what type of project would you be considering?” asked Mr. Heinz as he towered over Timothy.

“Well, sir. . . . I read a lot about blacksmithing and ancient weaponry and. . . .”

Little Timothy shrank further into himself as Mr. Heinz raised an eyebrow at him. It was just a little gesture, but he suddenly seemed to loom over the entire class.

“Go on,” Mr. Heinz prompted in a condescending tone.

“Well . . . I found a local metalworker who said he’d help me create my own sword.”

James fully expected Mr. Heinz to burst out laughing. He almost did himself had he not felt absolute sympathy for the kid. Surprisingly, no one betrayed any indication

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that they thought Timothy's idea was crazy. In fact, several muttered under their breath their approval of the project and wished that they thought of it themselves.

Mr. Heinz stared coldly at Timothy. Why was he not approving this idea? It made no sense. James remembered a little bit of what was explained to him about the mentoring program. A student could do practically whatever he or she wanted. The main criteria was that it had to be productive and educational. But did a mentor have the right to disapprove a project if they didn't think it worth the time? It was obvious that Mr. Heinz thought so.

"Well Timothy, unfortunately . . ." Mr. Heinz began.

"I'm working with him," James interjected.

Mr. Heinz and Timothy both looked at him, shocked by his outburst.

"Excuse me?"

"I'm working with him," James repeated. "I'm new and didn't get enough time to consider what I wanted to do for my mentoring . . . and Timmy's sounds fun."

Timothy flushed a bit with the added embarrassment. But there was also a slight bit of relief in his expression with the backup James was giving.

"As I was saying before I was interrupted," Mr. Heinz shot James a glare. "As your mentor, I get to approve or reject students' proposals for what they do with their mentoring time."

"You can't reject it," James shot the words out before Mr. Heinz could say anything further.

There was an audible gasp from practically everyone in the room. Apparently, no student ever countered Mr. Heinz . . . ever. James looked at the wide eyes of his fellow classmates. Was this guy really that intimidating?

Mr. Heinz went rigid. "And why," he began, his tone growing colder, "would I not be able to reject this ludicrous idea?"

James noticed Timothy lower his head—his eyes betraying the fact that his idea being labeled as 'ludicrous' was humiliating. James suddenly became even more determined to stand up to the abrasive mentor.

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He pulled out the student handbook and quickly began flipping through its pages. Soft whispers rippled through the class as he looked for a specific sentence. Mr. Heinz continued to stand rigid, patiently waiting for James to answer him.

“Here,” James nearly shouted as he jabbed his finger on a page. “*Students are given the liberty to choose whatever project or topic of study they see fit to fill their mentoring time,*” he began reading. “*The mentor will provide guidance and feedback to the student. The mentor may choose to reject a project. . . .*”

“See?” Mr. Heinz interrupted. “You are mistaken in your . . .”

“*. . . If he or she deems it unproductive and un-educational,*” James countered. Mr. Heinz blanched noticeably. “And your point is?”

“Well, with mine and Timmy’s project there’s a whole slew of educational aspects that we’ll cover.”

“Such as?” Mr. Heinz began to grind his teeth with impatience.

“Well there’s metalworking, that’s a trade that could be useful. Geology—we’ll need to learn a lot about the different types of metal and material. History—what type of weapon; where did it come from; the history of the culture or civilization. I could keep going, sir. We could even show the list to Mr. McCannon if you’d prefer.”

If Mr. Heinz lost some color before, he definitely paled at the mention of bringing it up with Mr. McCannon. James knew instinctively that a project like this would be applauded by the headmaster—and he knew that Mr. Heinz knew it too.

Mr. Heinz’s jaw tightened and relaxed repeatedly as he glared at James. James, on the other hand, stared back at him with confidence that he won the bout.

“Very well,” Mr. Heinz finally conceded. “Good luck to you two.”

A wave of small cheers and congratulations swept through the class as the students applauded James and Timothy . . . at least as close to applause as they dared in front of Mr. Heinz. Everyone knew that it was mostly because James had won the argument. James figured that no one had ever done that before with Mr. Heinz. His angry glare certainly hinted as much.

The cheers lasted for only a brief moment . . . seconds at best. Mr. Heinz snapped his fingers and everyone suddenly went silent.

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“Since you all seem to have detailed plans on what you’re doing,” he began. “You are now dismissed to work on your projects for the remainder of the day. I expect full and detailed proposals of your plans on my desk by the end of the week.”

The students let out a low chorus of groans.

“He’s the only teacher who demands detailed proposals,” Bailey whispered to James. “He doesn’t say it, but he expects it to be at least ten pages long.”

James gaped at her. “He can’t be serious.”

She shrugged her shoulders and smiled sheepishly as if to say, ‘he is—and there’s nothing we can really do about it.’

James noticed Mr. Heinz slink back into his office in defeat. He even . . . just slightly . . . slammed his door.

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~ Michael ~

