

# THE TALE OF ARAGORIA

## ~ CHAPTER 2 ~ A FIRESIDE CHAT

James slumped in the garden chair next to the fire pit as the sun dipped behind the mountain. The flames of the fire danced as it ate up the logs in the pit. Just like James liked it.

Finally, the day was over.

He had practically torn the suit off once he got to his room at his grandpa's cabin. Everything he owned was now moved in. His friends were right—living in a cabin in the canyon would be pretty fun. Aside from the estate sale in a few days, which Grandpa Joe would handle, everything about his parents passing away was done and over with.

“You okay?” Grandpa Joe asked as he placed the tray of food on the picnic table.

“Yeah . . . I'm fine,” James answered as he went over to help.

Grandpa Joe began unwrapping the hotdogs they'd be roasting over the fire. James loved those. They were never the cheap one-dozen-for-less-than-a-dollar kind of hotdogs but real, gourmet sausages; roasted over a fire with a lightly toasted bun and Dijon mustard . . . few things were better.

“A long day,” said Grandpa Joe.

“Yep.”

“You don't seem to be yourself.”

“I'm fine.”

Grandpa Joe raised an eyebrow at him.

“Really,” James affirmed.

“It's just that . . .” Grandpa Joe paused. “You haven't been acting very normal lately.”

*I'm an orphan now. What'd you expect,* he wanted to say but contented himself with just thinking it.

James stuck his sausage to his roasting stick and sat back down in his chair. He held out the sausage over the fire and stared at the flames.

“James,” Grandpa Joe prodded.

“I'm fine, Grandpa.”

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Grandpa Joe shrugged his shoulders and finished getting his own sausage ready. James focused on his sausage but watched in his peripheral as Grandpa Joe finished laying everything out on the table, grabbed his roasting stick, and sat down just a little off to his side.

“How should I be acting?” James asked.

He wasn’t going to say anything else. It almost bugged him how Grandpa Joe had this way of leaving a conversation hanging that made you want to finish it.

“Well, you just buried your parents. . . .”

“And you just buried your son,” James countered.

“Touché.”

James took a deep breath. He appreciated that Grandpa Joe never pressured him to spout out his feelings . . . despite his innate ability to make one want to. He would just wait patiently until James was ready to talk.

“I guess I don’t know what to think . . . or feel,” James finally said. “I mean—I’m definitely sad that they’re gone. But I think I’m just glad it’s all over and I’m ready to move on.”

Grandpa Joe nodded in agreement. “I feel the same way.”

“Are we weird?” asked James.

Grandpa Joe looked at him perplexed. “What do you mean?”

“I mean . . . we just got done with the funeral of my parents and your son, but here we are, roasting hotdogs and acting like . . . well . . . not what I’d imagine someone in our situation would act.”

Grandpa Joe didn’t say anything. He just stared at the fire like he was weighing his words carefully.

“I suppose you’re right,” he finally said. “But then again, we’re not like other people—are we?”

James shrugged. *What did he mean by that?*

“Your father and I . . .” Grandpa Joe suddenly began after a long pause. “He and I never really saw eye to eye.”

“What do you mean?”

“We never really got along very well.”

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James was surprised. He knew *he* didn't get along very well with his father, but it was the same for Grandpa Joe?

"Actually . . . now that I think about it . . . I felt the same way with *my* father," Grandpa Joe added.

"Wait, you didn't get along with your father either?"

Now James was really surprised. There were only two male family members in his life—his dad and Grandpa Joe. And it was Grandpa Joe who was the one who seemed more the father-figure of the two. In fact, the only times in which he felt that he was "bonding" with his dad was when he spoke of Grandpa James and how great of a grandfather *he* was. That was at least something he and his dad had in common . . . they both seemed to like their grandfathers more than their fathers.

*I'm seeing a pattern here*, James thought to himself.

Why was it that the father-son relationships in his family weren't the best?

"But I'm glad that you're ready to move on," Grandpa Joe interrupted his train of thought.

James hadn't even noticed that Grandpa Joe was at the table dressing his sausage. He hadn't even noticed that his own sausage was a burning inferno. He quickly pulled it away from the fire, blew out the flames that engulfed it, and joined Grandpa Joe at the table.

"What do you mean by that?" asked James as he dressed his sausage.

"I mean," Grandpa Joe said with a mouth full of sausage and a bun, "that we have a lot that needs to be done now that it's just us two."

James stopped with his sausage halfway to his opened mouth. He looked at his grandfather with utter confusion. What else needed to be done? It was in the middle of summer. School wouldn't start for another five weeks. Grandpa Joe was retired and just living up here in the canyon. What was he talking about?

Suddenly, James remembered the strange visitors at the viewing. "Does this have anything to do with that group that showed up today?"

"Yes indeed," Grandpa Joe said with a slight twinkle in his smile. "I am officially coming out of retirement to continue the . . . family business . . . until you're ready."

"Until I'm ready?"

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Up to this point in his life, James had no desire for any business. All he wanted to do was what all of the other eleven-year-olds wanted—to play in the major leagues.

“I don’t want to do what my dad did,” James protested.

“Oh, I think you’ll like this,” Grandpa Joe answered, his smile shifting to a more playful curl. “Your father thought the same thing when I introduced him to it. But once he learned about it, it was all he ever wanted to do—every single day.”

Now James was really confused. *What on Earth was he talking about?*

“Hurry up and finish your dog,” Grandpa Joe ordered.

“You’re not going to tell me what it is?”

“I find it best to just show you rather than telling you. Besides . . . you wouldn’t believe me if I did tell you what it was.”

And with that, Grandpa Joe winked at James and hurried off to the cabin. James stood dazed at the picnic table, a half-eaten sausage in his hand, his mind racing with all sorts of confusion. What is this family business? Why hadn’t he heard about it before? And what about it made Grandpa Joe seem so giddy?

The only thing he could do was follow. He quickly stuffed the rest of his sausage in his mouth when he heard Grandpa Joe’s truck rev. He bolted around the cabin to see Grandpa Joe backing out of the carport in his old pickup, an eager expression on his face.

James—still majorly confused about the sudden change and eagerness of his grandpa—shrugged his shoulders and chuckled to himself as he jumped into the truck.

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~ Michael ~

