

# THE TALE OF ARAGORIA

## ~ CHAPTER 3 ~ THE FAMILY BUSINESS

James had lost track of where they were. For a brief moment, he thought they were headed back to town. But just before they would have exited out the canyon Grandpa Joe made an abrupt turn off of the road. It looked like they were on an old dirt driveway leading to a cabin or a camping ground further up a deep ravine in the canyon wall. But surprisingly, the small but well-maintained path just continued up and up.

At one point, James struggled to keep his focus on the road and wanted nothing more than to just go back and roast more hotdogs. But then suddenly he was acutely aware of the road, the foliage along the path, and even where they were.

“Why are we heading up the backside of the mountain?” he asked.

Grandpa Joe smiled. “You’ll see.”

James thought Grandpa Joe’s driving speed was just a bit too reckless.

Any semblance of sunlight had now left the canyon, and the dark night sky made everything impossible to follow. All James could do was sit tight and watch as the trees and bushes of the forest blurred into view of the headlights then streak past into the darkness.

Nearly an hour had gone by and James’s head began to bob with drowsiness.

“We’re here,” Grandpa Joe exclaimed as he practically slammed on the breaks.

James felt his stomach lurch to his throat as the truck halted to a stop. He waited for just a few seconds while his heart quieted down before he tried anything. When the dust settled he looked out of the windshield and saw . . . nothing.

“Um . . . Grandpa? I thought you said you were going to show me the family business.”

“I am,” Grandpa Joe said as he eagerly jumped out of the car. “Follow me.”

When he said “follow me,” James initially thought he meant just a little further. He didn’t realize they would be hiking another two miles. He was certain this wasn’t safe, hiking up a strange trail in the middle of the night with just two plastic flashlights. But then again, it was only strange to him. Grandpa Joe, on the other hand, moved

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along the trail with as much ease as if he were walking through his own home; and pretty lively for his age too.

James did his absolute best to keep up with the old man as they moved through thick groves of trees, switchbacks, and even a few mountain streams. Suddenly, Grandpa Joe stopped just as they crested a small ridge while emerging from a tree line. James had to bend over to catch his breath momentarily. He thought he was in great shape whenever he played sports with his friends, but hiking with Grandpa Joe left him exhausted beyond anything he'd ever experienced.

"You okay?" Grandpa Joe asked with a chuckle and a slap on the back.

"I'm fine," James answered between deep breaths.

"Good. Because we're almost there."

"What?" James gasped. "You mean we're not there yet?"

Grandpa Joe again chuckled. "We've got to get all the way up there."

James looked to where he was pointing. If he wasn't so tired, he'd be able to appreciate what he was seeing. They stood at the bottom of a small mountain valley . . . small—but still big enough for several football fields. He hoped that it was just the moonlight that distorted his depth perception. Knee-high wild grass stretched across the entire valley floor. A few hundred yards up the slopes on all sides of the valley stood more groves of trees that climbed up and up the mountainside. The peak of the mountain did just that . . . *peek* over the tops of the trees. And that was where Grandpa Joe was pointing.

"You've got to be kidding me," James protested.

"Come on," said Grandpa Joe. "I promise . . . you'll thank me later."

"I'm too tired," James complained—and not in the usual eleven-year-old complaining tone. He genuinely felt that he couldn't go on any further.

"Here . . . eat this," said Grandpa Joe. He handed James a small biscuit-like cookie.

*What's this going to do? James thought. Dry my mouth up and kill me faster—that's what.*

He bit into the flakey biscuit. Suddenly, everything seemed energized and vibrant. He felt a rush through his entire body like blood rushing into sleeping limbs.

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His eyes widened as he seemed to see more colors than before. They weren't really new colors, but all of the colors of the mountain began to reflect the brilliant moonlight. He suddenly realized that he no longer felt fatigued. In fact, running to the top of the mountain seemed like a good activity right then.

*Why didn't he give this to me before?*

"Race ya," said Grandpa Joe with a smirk as if he read James's thoughts.

James grinned. "Bring it . . . old man."

He bolted across the mountain valley laughing out loud. Within seconds he heard a rustling beside him. His jaw dropped in total surprise to see Grandpa Joe overtaking him.

"Old man, eh?" said Grandpa Joe sarcastically.

Before James could even finish registering what was happening, Grandpa Joe bolted ahead, leaving him in the dust. James kicked it into gear chasing after the old—but surprisingly spry—man.

They raced through the grass, up the far slopes, and through the woods. It must have been hundreds of yards, but James felt that it was only a short distance. Before he knew it, he caught up to Grandpa Joe who was standing as still as a statue.

"Caught you," he cried out as he tumbled into his grandpa.

Grandpa Joe didn't answer. He hardly moved from James running into him.

"Okay . . . so we're here?" James asked. "What's this family business?"

Grandpa Joe didn't look down, he continued to stare forward with a warm and reverent smile. "It's right there," he nodded forward.

James looked up to where Grandpa Joe was looking. Thirty feet in front of them stood a large, gaping cave. The wide mouth could easily allow a dozen or more men to walk through shoulder to shoulder. Off to either side of the cave stood tall braziers with brilliant fires that lit the entire clearing. James wondered how he missed it in all of his excitement. But the thing that caught him the most off guard was that the flames of the braziers were blue.

"Grandpa . . . ?" he asked. "What is this?"

Grandpa Joe didn't answer. Instead, he moved forward towards the cave. James's initial gut reaction was to pull him back and ask if he was crazy, but instead, he found

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himself following. Suddenly, five figures emerged from the mouth of the cave. Dressed in silvery robes and tunics that glowed in the light of the braziers and moon and with long silver and golden hair, James first thought of aliens.

*They're gonna eat my brains*, he thought, recalling all of the alien-zombie-ghost stories he and his buddies told each other on campouts.

As the five figures neared, James suddenly had an overwhelming feeling of peace and calm rush over him. These weren't weird aliens. If anything they were angels. They were . . .

"Wait a second," James nearly shouted, causing everyone to jump. "You're the guy who came to my parents' funeral. You all were there."

The figure in the lead smiled and James instantly remembered. Andel! His name was Andel. And he *did* say he was eager to work with James. Was this it?

"It took you long enough to get here," said one of the five who stood off to the side.

"We came as quickly as we could, Rosden," said Grandpa Joe as he slapped James on the back. "Someone is not quite yet conditioned to run in the mountains."

The others gave a light chuckle.

*Was he meaning me?* James wondered

He felt his cheeks flush with both embarrassment and a slight twinge of anger at the comment.

"No matter," said Andel. "We're just excited that you've come back."

"Come back?" asked James. "Would someone please tell me what's going on?"

"Father—may I?" said the only lady with them as she stepped forward.

Andel nodded. James remembered her as well. What was her name again?

"James," she began. "Your family, for the last four generations have worked with our people in a position known as our Guardian."

"Your people?"

"We are not like humans," she continued.

*No kidding.*

"We are fairies. And we have lived here under this mountain for nearly two-hundred years."

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James didn't know what to think. His mind raced a million miles a minute trying to process what he just heard. The lady—he now remembered her name to be Theya—smiled warmly at him, then gently closed his hanging jaw.

“I think it'll be better if we just show him,” said Grandpa Joe.

James, still lost in Theya's words, felt his grandfather's arm around his shoulders giving him that reassuring squeeze that everything would be okay.

“I agree,” said Rosden.

“Alright then,” Andel concurred. “To the city.”

James looked up at Grandpa Joe as the others turned and made their way back into the cave. “The city?”

Grandpa Joe winked at him. “Don't worry . . . it'll all make sense. I felt the same way when my father showed it to me.”

James and Grandpa Joe caught up to the five as they began to descend in the wide tunnel. It sloped downward at a steady decline, but never like any of the caves James had ever been in before. The path was smooth but not slippery. Torches placed in sconces every ten yards lit the passage with the same blue flame of the braziers. This was definitely not a normal cave.

“Our ancestors carved this place out of the mountains centuries ago,” said one of the other fairies; Alden, James remembered, was his name.

“Your ancestors?” Andel corrected.

Alden shrugged his shoulders. “You are pretty ancient, father.”

“You were alive when this place was made?” asked James in astonishment.

“We do not age like you humans do. We're not immortal either—if that's what you're thinking.”

“So . . . how old are you?” asked James.

Grandpa Joe coughed in embarrassment.

“It's fine, Joe,” said Andel. “We use several different measurements of time. But to keep it simple for now . . . I was born—according to your calendars—in the year 1002.”

It wasn't that hard for James to do some quick math. “You're over a thousand years old?”

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The others all laughed.

“Told you,” Alden joked. “He’s ancient.”

They continued laughing and joking as they descended further and further down the corridor. James was a torrent of questions and they all, in turn, answered his questions patiently.

No—fairies are not the little tiny creatures in modern stories. Those are pixies . . . very real and related to the fairy-folk but not the original fairies.

Yes—they can do magic . . . it is a real thing.

Yes—they have pointy ears, but to those who don’t believe in magic or the fairy-world, they’re easily dismissed so fairy-folk could easily interact with humans.

No—they don’t have wings of any sort. That’s simply a Victorian England creation. Although there were rumors of the fairy-folk having wings anciently, but only as a gift from their mother goddess, Danu.

Yes—there are hundreds of other kinds of magical or mythical creatures throughout the world. They often can hide in plain sight. But more commonly, they simply live their lives in other worlds or realms that humans don’t know about nor can they access unless through special means.

“So, are you the king?” James asked Andel.

“No,” answered Andel. “I am the chief of the clan and lord of the city, but we do not have a king in the sense that you’re probably thinking. We have a mortal queen.”

“She’s a human?”

“Yes. You see . . . when the Danann, the ancient fairy-folk, were driven underground by the humans, the humans came very close to infiltrating the magical world. That would have caused world-wide chaos and destruction for both races. Since our forefather’s kingdom was initially destroyed, we were given the chance to return to our ancient home. But our ancestors had come to love this world so much that they asked to stay. So we became the guardians between the human and magical worlds.”

“Okay,” James interjected, putting on a show of understanding though it wasn’t making much sense.

“They need to be able to be in both places,” Grandpa Joe chimed in. “Magical and mortal.”

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“Exactly,” Andel confirmed.

“Which means . . . ?”

“They discovered early on with each clan that if they have a mortal queen and a mortal guardian, the combination of the two worlds added strength and power to their role as guardians of the two worlds,” Grandpa Joe explained. “And that’s where we come in.”

“We?” asked James.

“Many years ago,” said the fairy named Rosden, “your great-great-grandfather, the first James of our family, discovered the fairy-folk living here. He became their guardian and the job has been passed down from father to son ever since.”

“Wait, you’re saying my dad was the guardian of this fairy-city?” James couldn’t believe the words that were coming out of his mouth.

“Exactly,” said Grandpa Joe. “I was the guardian from the time I was sixteen until I passed it on to him when he turned sixteen.”

“And you’re passing it on to me now that he’s . . . dead?”

“Not yet.”

“Your grandfather has agreed to . . . how do you humans say it? Come out of retirement . . . while you train to become the next guardian,” Andel explained.

Just as he finished they rounded a bend in the tunnel and James’s eyes widened with shock. Exiting the tunnel, he saw a vast cavern larger than he could have ever imagined. He had seen on television some of those sports domes and arenas . . . this made them seem like backyard playing fields in comparison. Large buildings of sparkling white granite spread throughout the cavern, each unique and beautifully decorated with elegant carvings, motifs, statues, and mosaics depicting strange fairy-folk. Massive pillars lined major corridors to provide support, but even the pillars looked to be gigantic towers built to be dwellings for the bustling population.

Overlooking the city, James could see the streets crowded with people all dressed like his five fairy companions. Bright robes, dresses, and tunics of silver, blue, and green looked to be the common fashion. He almost thought that he had stepped into a strange medieval world.

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At the far end of the cavern rose a single structure that dwarfed all others. James instinctively knew it to be the palace. It stood grander and more elegant than all of the others, with towers and high walls and bright banners that hung in a colorful array.

“Welcome, James,” said An del. “To Aragoria. Home to the fairy-clan Aragor.”

Excitement welled up inside of him, and James began to smile from ear to ear at what he was seeing and hearing.

“This is our home, James,” said Grandpa Joe. “This is the ‘family business’ we mentioned earlier.”

“Are you serious?” asked James.

Grandpa Joe smiled and placed a loving hand on his shoulder. “Are you ready to begin your training to be the next guardian?”

James looked at his grandfather and smiled.

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From my family to yours...thank you so much!

~ Michael ~

