

THE TALE OF ARAGORIA



BECOME A PATRON

~ CHAPTER 7 ~ THE BACK-TO-SCHOOL DANCE

James took his time changing out of his clothes and into a fresh t-shirt and jeans. He much rather preferred to stay in his dorm that night than go to the dance. But perhaps with the McCannons and Ms. Smith it wouldn't be so bad.

He might as well make a fresh appearance.

Truth be told he had already hung up his calendar and counted down the days until he turned eighteen and could leave this place. When he could be his own man with no adults, teachers, or grandpa's who would tell him what he could or couldn't do.

What would I do? he wondered.

He liked the idea of setting out on his own. He especially liked it more and more since the whole, "we're stepping down as Guardians," fiasco. But he knew deep down that no matter where he went, it would never measure up to what *could* have been.

"How could he say that that wasn't my decision to make? Or that I didn't get a say in the matter?" James mumbled as he tossed his dirty clothes in the hamper.

Every time he had replayed it in his mind his blood boiled. But tonight had been so unexpected with the McCannon's and their brief talk about his father . . . he didn't want to spoil the mood. He banished the thought for another time and committed to at least trying to have a good time for the night.

The night was cool and clear as he made his way across the campus to the main gym—just the way James enjoyed it. However, he felt a small twinge of sadness when he looked up but could only see a few dozen stars. He had been with the fairy-folk for so long and they didn't use lights at night. He had always loved going out on the mountain slopes late at night with Alden and Theya to just stare at the stars and listen to their legends. Stories of their ancestors and their ancient homeland in the stars.

A low and penetrating thrumming interrupted James's thoughts. He looked around, unsure of where the noise was coming from. At first, he thought it sounded like

THE TALE OF ARAGORIA

the drums before a battle. He hadn't ever fought in one, but the tales that Alden and Andel told of battles long ago had been so vivid that he could almost see, smell, and hear the different elements to the story. Plus, a little fairy magic goes a long way when used to tell stories.

At the far end of what James heard everyone call the quad, stood a large, square building. He remembered his tour from earlier and knew that it was the main gym. Despite it being a large structure and even filled with the latest fitness equipment, he thought the outside looked pretty bland compared to the rest of the campus.

He could see lights flash and pulse from inside the windows that lined the building. He took a deep breath as he paused outside of the gym and watched as a few groups of students darted into the building laughing and shouting as they went.

"This is not going to end well?" he said to himself.

Slowly, he let out his breath and plunged into the dance.

The overload of lights, sounds, and the stuffy air made James hesitate for a brief moment. He had been trained to fight in battles against goblins, trolls, and other various magical creatures, but nothing had prepared him for this.

At the far end of the gym stood the DJ booth with all sorts of flashing lights and loudspeakers attached to it. The DJ danced in the booth, large earphones bouncing around his neck and another pair on his head as he bobbed his head to the beat.

"So, this is a high school dance," said James, surprised that he could hardly even hear his own voice. "This is nuts!"

One large group of kids danced—more of jumped up and down, flailing their arms in the air—in the center of the gym. Other small groups no bigger than half a dozen kids were scattered throughout the gym swaying and bobbing to the beat, but not really dancing. If you could even call what any of them did "dancing".

For a brief moment, James seriously considered leaving and going back to his dorm. Maybe staying there . . . even just lying on his bed absent-mindedly . . . would be better than this.

The only thing he could think of was, *these kids are weird.*

THE TALE OF ARAGORIA

More students came rushing into the gym, pushing past him and causing him to stumble to the side. One young man nearly knocked him over in his haste to join the jumping crowd.

“I’m sorry,” the kid shouted over the din of the music as he grabbed James’s shoulders to keep them both from falling over.

Before James could answer that he was alright, the young man had already darted away and rejoined his group of friends.

James shook his head. Irritation flared up within him, but he couldn’t be too mad at the kid. He didn’t mean to bump him . . . and he did apologize. He shook it off and made his way to the side of the gym. He noticed a long table with various refreshments.

“At least there’re treats,” he said.

James paused at the table as he realized that it had been years since he had regular human treats. He could hardly remember what a cookie or brownie tasted like. Small cups with colorful liquid were clustered at the end of the table. What type of juice was that?

Training to be Guardian required a strict diet of foods that were good for your strength and endurance. If the food didn’t meet those requirements then he wasn’t allowed to eat them . . . unless it was a special occasion. Now he had the freedom to eat practically whatever unhealthy human food he wanted.

James reached for a small plate that had a brownie on it. He hesitated, almost afraid to eat it for fear of Dagget or his grandpa reprimanding him for eating something so unhealthy.

A smile crept across his face. “I’m no longer preparing to be the Guardian. And . . . they’re not here to stop me.”

Relishing the idea that the old rules which he lived by were no longer applicable to him, he stuffed the entire brownie in his mouth. The rush of rich, chocolate flavor erupted in his mouth. His eyes bulged as the overly-satisfying morsel melted in creamy goodness. Without thinking, James grabbed another brownie and stuffed it in his mouth. Quickly he grabbed two more, one for each hand. He couldn’t seem to get enough.

“Hey, you’re the new kid, right?”

THE TALE OF ARAGORIA

James turned to see a cute girl standing at the end of the table picking up a small cup of juice. She had a small round face with a cute button nose and blonde hair that looked to be unnaturally bright from either it being dyed or the light of the DJ . . . or maybe both. She smiled cheerfully at him as she skipped over to him. He wanted to answer but his mouth was too full with brownies. He gulped as best he could, but quickly nodded in response when he couldn't swallow the now sticky cakes fast enough.

"I'm Bethany," she said, still smiling and placing a hand on his arm. "Save a dance for me?"

Not sure of what she meant—nor did he have the ability to think straight at that moment as a rush of emotions surged through him as she gently touches his arm—James just nodded again.

Bethany's smile widened and she darted off, disappearing into the crowd.

"That was weird," James finally said as he swallowed the last bits of brownie.

Was she expecting him to find her? When would he know to dance with her? Was it dancing with her or for her?

I am definitely not dancing for anyone! he thought resolutely.

James stood there, baffled and even more confused about this whole "dance" situation. Fairies were not like this. Whenever there was a celebration that involved dancing there was more often than not a traditional dance that groups would follow. Dances that they had learned from childhood. And fairy dancing was nothing like this. It was fluid, smooth, and graceful—movement that would put any ballerina to shame.

James had heard of stories where fairy couples would dance together. Perhaps what the girl was asking was similar. But stories that he had heard were far different than what he was seeing here. Stories told that when a fairy couple met for the first time, if they were right for each other, their hearts would sing and the couple would dance together to the harmony of their hearts . . . even when no music was playing.

James always liked that notion. He even met one fairy who claimed that that's how her parents met centuries ago. But nothing like that had ever happened in a long time.

Suddenly, something caught James's eye.

THE TALE OF ARAGORIA

Through the crowd, James could see someone dancing that looked very different from all of the others.

Right in the middle of the crowd, danced a girl. Her white shirt and golden hair glowed from the lighting of the DJ booth which only made her stand out even more. James suddenly found himself mesmerized. This girl did not dance like the others. Her motions were far too fluid. She moved with the grace of one who danced to her own rhythm.

James had always noted that the fairy-folk were some of the most beautiful with their lean and graceful figures, but in that moment, this young lady seemed to put all of them to shame with her beauty and perfect form.

As soon as James noticed the girl, the DJ suddenly changed the entire atmosphere of the dance. The music softened. The lights changed from flashing to a gentle spin. Kids quickly started pairing off and while holding each other in their arms, they swayed back and forth.

“This is what Bethany meant,” James muttered to himself while slapping his palm to his forehead.

He suddenly had a rush of memories of watching his parents dance together in the kitchen when he was a little kid. How could he forget what dancing was to humans? He had always enjoyed watching his parents dance when they thought he was asleep. They always looked so happy.

Suddenly, all he could think about was dancing with that girl and making her smile like his father made his mother smile. He was surprised to see that with all of the couples that paired off, no one was asking her to dance.

“Hey you,” James heard Bethany to the side. “You promised me a dance.”

“Um . . . excuse me,” James said as politely as possible.

He didn’t catch the gaping expression of Bethany as he left her standing there. All he wanted to do was dance with that girl.

Not wanting to waste any time or even appear sheepish—or especially miss the chance before someone else got to her first—James quickly, but not hastily, approached the girl. She swayed back and forth to the music. Her eyes closed as if not even expecting someone to ask her to dance, and a smile that only melted James heart even more.

THE TALE OF ARAGORIA

James suddenly realized he didn't know what he was going to say when he reached her. So he said the only thing that came to his mind.

"May I dance with you?"

The girl opened her eyes with a small hint of surprise. She looked at James's outstretched hand, then slowly she looked up and met his eyes.

James felt his knees suddenly go limp, but he forced himself to not shake. He tried to smile with confidence, but the urge to run in embarrassment churned inside of him.

Her deep, dark eyes studied him for just a brief moment. Then she smiled.

"I would love to."

Gently, she accepted his hand and James felt his stomach flip. For the first time in his life, he felt something amazing. All he could think about was that he just wanted to spend every day with this angel.

He pulled her back a few steps away from the crowd and found that he didn't know what to do next.

Do I hug her like everyone else is doing? Should I make the first move or wait for her to do something?

"Um . . ." James stammered.

To his relief, the girl smiled patiently. But to his dismay, she stood obviously waiting for him to do . . . something.

James quickly recalled, again, watching his parents when they danced. Slowly, he reached for her right hand with his left, and while holding it out, placed his other hand at her waist.

He smiled . . . and even a boyish giggle escaped his throat. He snapped his mouth shut, his cheeks suddenly feeling warm. Despite his embarrassment, it felt so good to dance like that.

The girl also smiled with a touch of surprise. As if she fully expected him to employ the hug method, but appreciated that he didn't. She easily slid her free hand up on his shoulder and they slowly started swaying to the music.

"So . . ." James started. "What's your name?"

The girl smiled. "I'm Bailey."

THE TALE OF ARAGORIA

“Bailey . . . ?” he had a faint memory of the name Bailey.

“You’re James Nielsen . . . the new kid,” she said, interrupting his thoughts.

“Yeah. I guess word spreads pretty fast.”

“That’s what usually happens here.”

“Don’t you get more than just one new student every year?”

“Well,” Bailey shrugged her shoulders. “Usually we do. But surprisingly you’re the only new student this year. That’s probably why everyone’s acting . . . differently . . . with you.”

“Comforting,” James mused.

Bailey giggled. “You really don’t remember me?” she said after a short pause.

James scrunched his mouth. “I’m sorry. Your name sounds really familiar. But I can’t place where from.”

“I’m Bailey . . . Bailey Porter.”

She paused as if to see if that’d make any more sense. James still stared at her blankly.

“You used to let me hang out with you and your friends when we were younger.”

Memories flooded into James's mind of before his parents died and his gang of friends. How had he almost forgotten about them? He had spent more time with them than with his parents combined. Memories of bike-rides through town to the various playing fields, the ice-cream parlor, and the cheap-seats theater seemed to emerge almost out of nowhere. Accompanying many of those memories there was always Bailey—the skinny little tomboy who would always hang around the back of the group or off to the side, waiting for a chance to play any game with them.

“No?” James exclaimed as it all came together. “You’re . . . but you . . . when . . . ?”

Bailey smiled. It was more than her warm, friendly smile that she had shown so far this evening. It was that little girl smile that she had when James remembered her hanging around his group of friends. She always had that smile when she knew she got the upper hand on them—either by getting a chance to play with them because they needed an extra player or whenever she had pulled one of her crazy pranks to get back at them . . . which she did often.

“Wow . . . Bailey . . .” was all James could say.

THE TALE OF ARAGORIA

“It’s been a while, James,” she said, still smiling.

“I didn’t think that I’d see any of my old friends here.”

“Why not?”

“Well . . .”

James couldn’t think of why. Honestly, when literally all you’ve been thinking about—dedicating your time and every ounce of energy—to a specific goal for the last five years, it’s easy to forget many things.

“It’s funny you should mention old friends,” said Bailey. “Because, as a matter of fact, guess who else is here?”

James’s brow furrowed as if to ask ‘who?’. But before he could even say anything, Bailey flew into the air. Some crazy kid slightly bigger than James had wrapped his arms around her waist from behind and, lifting her high off of the ground, spun her around in several circles.

Bailey gripped his arms and squealed in delight. The boy placed her gently back on the ground, both of them laughing heartily. James stood there confused as he watched the odd pair. Then he felt his stomach tie itself in a large knot as the boy kissed Bailey full on the lips. She returned the gesture, smiling as they openly showed their affection for each other. James ground his teeth in frustration, embarrassment, and a slight twinge of jealousy.

“As I was saying before I was rudely interrupted,” Bailey continued as she playfully elbowed the boy in the side. “James . . . you remember Tony, right?”

James’s mouth gaped wide open. “Tony? You go here too?”

He couldn’t believe it. His childhood best friend. . . . The one he had like and had always hung out with more than any of the other boys in their little sandlot gang. It was always James and Tony.

The guy had grown. He stood a good three inches taller than James. His dark brown hair was immaculately cut and cropped to near perfection. With his lean build, he looked like a lead singer to a boy band.

James didn’t know what to think now. His long-time best friend stood there, smiling that dopey grin that he always had—despite his strong, square jaw. He wanted to

THE TALE OF ARAGORIA

be happy to see him. But for some reason, he only felt jealous that he and Bailey were obviously a couple and that she wasn't available.

"James Nielsen," said Tony as he quickly looked James up and down. He gave a boisterous laugh and immediately wrapped James in a bear hug, flinging him around just like he did Bailey.

James grunted and couldn't help but smile. Despite his jealousy, Tony was first and foremost his friend.

"Oh, wow! It's so good to see you again," Tony as he stepped back.

"It's good to see you too."

"When I heard that we had a new student named James Nielsen I thought to myself . . . 'no, it couldn't that James, could it?' And look at us now. How crazy is this?"

"Very," James answered blandly.

Beyond 'very' crazy, he thought. This is insane.

But was that because his childhood best friend was there at the school too, or that he was in a relationship with the girl that James had completely fallen head-over-heels for in an instant?

He wanted to say more. He wanted to talk to his friends. But the realization and embarrassment that Bailey was in a relationship with Tony just made him feel befuddled. Watching Tony grab Bailey's hand certainly didn't make him feel any better.

"Well, I better . . . I guess . . . I promised Bethany a dance." For the first time, James was glad he promised that other girl he'd dance with her—he had a good excuse to get out.

"Okay," Tony said as he slapped James on the shoulder with his free hand. "We'll catch up later for sure. Man! It's so good to see you again, James."

James forced a smile. "You too . . . buddy."

With that, James made his way out of the crowd. He didn't even bother to find the girl, Bethany. He quickly left the gym and headed straight to his dorm room.

"You're such an idiot, James!" he chided himself. "Thinking of making a move on someone in a relationship."

He knew that he didn't really *do* anything wrong or embarrassing. But the constant replaying it over and over in his mind as he made his way back to his dorm

THE TALE OF ARAGORIA

only clouded his thoughts even more. He certainly would *not* be making an effort to reconnect with his old friends again any time soon.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law.

Note: This is a work of fiction. All characters, places, and incidents are a product of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to actual people, living or dead, or to businesses, companies, events, institutions, or locales is entirely coincidental.

THE TALE OF ARAGORIA

Hope you have enjoyed this week's installment of The Tale of Aragoria. Join me and our hero's every Saturday as I release a chapter every week.

If you'd like to have more content and would also like to support me so I can bring more fun-filled adventures to you and your family, please click the icon below and support me on Patreon.

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

~ Michael ~

