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Save Magic City

Book Excerpt

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Chapter 01 -- The Discovery

USA, Late Spring of 2007.

"Mom! Mom! Come see what I found!"

The eight years old boy stopped at the door of their little house. He knew she was his adoptive mother, but for the past two years she had been all the family he had and he loved her so much...

"Mom, you must!"

"I must what, little lion?"

"Roar!" The boy immediately fell into their game, imitating the jungle king with much enthusiasm. He knew the meaning of his name, Leonard was '*Strong Lion*', and he was proud of it. It was also a good means for Leona to make him eat and go to bed at an early hour, so that he could grow big and strong as his namesake.

"Roar! Mom, you must come and see what I found. May I keep it? May I? Please?"

"Well, I suppose you might, if it is not a wild animal -- you know -- it may be sick or bite, and it might even die if you take it in captivity..."

"I know, I know. I promised I won't bring any more to the house, and I kept it, didn't I? Didn't I, Mom?"

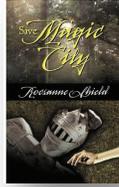
"You did, and you did."

"I did and I did what?"

"You did promise and you did keep it."

"So, may I keep it?"

"Keep what?"



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"Dunno... It's big, and made of steel, and it's in the forest, and we need the truck to bring it home..."

"Bring what home?" but Leo was already rushing away from the house, intent on getting back to his find.

"Leo, come back! First you wash and sit down to eat, then we go."

"Mom, but what if someone finds it and takes it away?"

"You said it is big; if it is that big, nobody can take it away without a truck. It will wait till you finish eating. But first, go and wash, now!"

"Mom, if I wash and promise to eat all on my plate, but later, when we come back..." Leonard stopped to reconsider, and added, "We could take sandwiches and bottles with water and have a picnic. Wouldn't it be fantastic?" He had learned a new word and now everything was '*fantastic*'.

"We-ell... You win!" She laughed with joy at her -- yes -- *her* son's happy yell. They both enjoyed going for picnics, but they didn't always have the time... No, that wasn't entirely true -- Leo had always time for fun and games. It was his job to be a happy child. She was the one without time on her hands... She worked at a jeweler's shop, and customers were getting fewer by the day, so much so that Leona was afraid that the store would close.

"Mom?" Leonard, her little Leo, was back, water sparkling in his hair, which he had slicked back much like a grown up.

"Yes, my dear, I lost it again..."

"I'll help you find it, Mom. Now can we go?" It was another of their games -- when she was lost in her thoughts, Leo would '*help*' her find the elusive '*IT*', asking funny questions and making her laugh.

Several sandwiches and two water bottles later, mother and son were in the cabin of their truck, driving on the routed forest road, toward a place as yet hidden by foliage.

"Stop here, Mom... It is not far, but not on the road."



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"What were you doing here alone? Don't you know that on the other side of the hill there's the old military camp? We are not supposed to wander about..." The abandoned place retained an aura of danger and adventure for the town's children, and in truth, dangerous things might still be around, therefore Leona did not like to know her little lion was playing close to those grounds.

"Awww, Mom, I just was Tarzan in the jungle and was flying from tree to tree, and then I found it, and then I came home to tell you..."

"And?"

"And take it home. Please? Mom?"

"If it can be taken home, and does not belong to the military..."

"Awww, Mom..."

"What is this mysterious IT? You remember what I said about guns and any weapons you may find..."

"Mom, if it is not a gun, how do I know if it is a weapon?"

"Well, anything that may be used to harm another..."

"No, I am sure it is not a weapon. It is too big to be moved from its place... At least, I don't think it's a weapon. Come, I'll show you", and as soon as the car stopped, Leo was out and running into the undergrowth.

"What am I going to do with you?" but her question remained unanswered. She had no choice, but to follow in her son's steps. Luckily, she was not dressed for work in the store, but for the kitchen. She had changed her slippers for sturdy outdoor walking boots, but otherwise she had remained in her light pants and summer blouse, which put her pleasantly plump silhouette to good advantage.

The low branches she had to push out of her way, returned with a slap after her passage. But soon, the branches were no more in the way -- they were broken, the young forest growth squashed by a heavy weight. A metal weight, with points of brilliance where the sun touched it. It was quite long, about six or seven feet, wider at the shoulders... Shoulders?! She looked again and held her breath, astonished at what lay on the forest floor before her.



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A metal body -- an armor of some kind... A man of steel... Military, definitely military. Probably one of those newfangled space suits, made to look like a medieval armor... Even down to the sword detail...

"Leo, we cannot take it with us. It is military in nature and we have no right to cart it away.

"But, Mom..."

"No but! We are leaving it here and forget we ever saw it. For all we know, it may still be active."

"Active? What do you think it might do?" A young boy's curiosity, to which she had no answer. Then she had an idea.

"Remember the story of the alien robot?"

"Of course!" It was one of several among his favorite movies. But all robots in these movies were fighters from another Galaxy, with powers they could not even start to understand, and who in the end learned to love human beings. "Cool, Mom. Let's take him home and..."

"No, Leo, we must not touch it..." but she was already too late. Her curious son was opening the visor of the metal helmet.

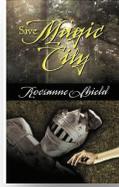
"Wow! Mom, there is somebody inside!"

"What are you talking about? Leo, let's go."

"No, Mom, truly, there is somebody inside -- I see the eyes -- they are open and looking at me. Mom, how cool could this be?!" Leo's words acted like a fist clamping on her heart. Was a live somebody inside, or a robot with extraordinary powers? Leona did not want to discover the truth, but she knew that if alive, that somebody might be in trouble and in need of help. She could not just leave without trying to find out...

"Mom? It is looking at me... It wants to speak... What should I do?"

"Well, order it to talk, order it to tell if it needs help. Then we should know what to do."



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"Mom? You order it. You know how, not me..." Yeah, she knew how... Sometimes she had to order her son to eat, to wash, or to simply come in the house at night...

"OK, I'll do it. But just in case it might jump up and attack us, you better go back to the car and wait for me there."

"Mo-om... I found it, you cannot chase me away! I want to see what will happen. Please?"

"Sure. As if I really expected you to obey!"

<"Obey... Must obey... Only for the good..."> The voice seemed to exist inside her mind.

"Leo? What did you say?"

"Nothing. I was just thinking how to take the helmet from the rest, and..."

"No! Don't touch it again! Wait for me to see what it's made of..." She took two more steps to close the gap between herself and the mysterious armor and bent over the open visor. A pair of black dilated pupils surrounded by the thin, grey rings of the irises, stared fixedly at her.

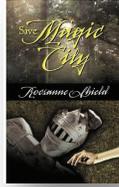
"Are you hurt?"

<"Order me... must obey... The pain..."> again the voice inside her mind.

"Are you a ventriloquist?" As Leona stood slightly bent to look inside the helmet, she could see part of the face and a mouth contracted in a grimace of pain. She was already accustomed with the moving shadows under the trees, but even with their random changes, she was sure not even a single muscle of the metal encased face had moved.

<"Vetri-loquist? You mean... Forget... Pain... Must obey... You must order!"> The strange sequence of ideas made Leona understand one thing -- the robot needed someone to order it to perform, or something akin to pain would wreak havoc with its circuits.

"Can you move? Oh, yes, order... I order you to answer. Blink once for No, twice for Yes. Do you hear me?" A double blink signaled to her that the hearing circuit was functioning OK.



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"Mom, is it cool, or what? Like the robots under orders! 'Obey, Obey'" and laughingly, Leo imitated the robot from one of his favorite programs on TV. Surveying the robot's face, Leona concluded the pain must have receded, for the grimace was less fierce. *Should I try again?*

<"Yes, pray order me...">

"Can you move?" One blink. The answer was No.

"Then, I order you to move your right hand." *His right hand -- big mistake -- was the sword hand!* But to her surprise, the metal fingers of the gauntlet moved letting the sword fall to the ground. "Now move the left!" She was starting to enjoy the game. A robot, which needed orders to be acting -- she could order anything...

<"Not anything -- only for the good.">

"I did not speak. How could you tell what I thought?"

<"'Tis complicated...">

"I order you to stop reading my mind. 'Tis... Ha! *It is not nice.* What if I think I like to have a robot and you take advantage... No, a robot cannot do that. You are not human, you cannot do such dirty things to humans."

"Mom, mom, may I order it too? Pretty please?"

"Sure, try and see what happens. But think what you ask, or you may regret it..."

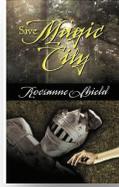
"Like the story with the genie? Three wishes?"

"Something like that, yes. But remember what happened in the story with the wishes?"

"The one with the sausage? Do you think if I ask for one, you will wish it to stick to my nose? And then I wish it gone and we have used all three wishes? Cool!" The image of a sausage glued to his nose was so hilarious, that Leo took his time to laugh and think what to wish for.

"I know what I wish! Robot, I order you to speak. Tell us your story!"

"Could you wait... till you order me... to take... my armor off?"



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"Wow! He does obey. 'Obey, obey'" and he launched back into his imitation of defective but submissive robots.

"Who is 'Robot'?... I am Edmund," the robot's voice interrupted the game.

"You are? Why do you need us to order you to move? Only robots need orders. Robots are metal men, like you, and they have circuitry and stuff, and they are programmed. Is your suit programmed? Did you fall, or did you burn a chip? Do you need oil to get the rust out off the joints of your suit?"

"What be circuitry... or chip... I know not. I be... a knight in armor... Needs must... get it off. Pray, order me... to do so..." Several more orders and his headache would be gone -- of this he was pretty sure.