

Unseen Guardian

I walked across the dais to receive my commission from Commander Kodis, vice-chancellor of the Guardian Academy. It took four grueling years of exacting training to develop the latent talents that initially tagged me for the academy by the Council of Protective Security. Upon interviewing me, they deemed that I had a favorable disposition to be a life-long service guardian.

I am filled with pure excitement to face my future as a guardian. I know that I am highly trained so I'm fully capable of meeting the challenges that my sworn allegiance will require. But.... I do have a measure of trepidation not being familiar with the person named in my commission, and the special circumstances I will encounter because of who they are. I can only hope that whoever my protectorate is, they are a person of integrity. A protectorate is what we call our assigned person even though a protectorate is meant to be a country. Protecting our charges can be as far-reaching as needing to protect their contacts and connections.

After the graduation ceremony, I am funneled into a meet and greet pavilion where I will meet my designated protectorate, Kira Harness. A page leads me to a secluded spot where Kira awaits. We attempt a conversation, but it is very

awkward and we have precious little time to visit with each other before we are escorted to the Temple of Oaths

“I’m Kira Harness.”

“I am Nathan Hawk, Kira. That isn’t my true identity, but I don’t want to compromise you in any way by making it obvious that I’m your guardian.”

“So, do you have a checkered past or what, Nathan?”

“No, no. I just want to be completely nonentity in order to best give you the protection that you might need.”

“What form of protection will you be giving me, Nathan?”

“My special powers include winking, a form of self-teleportation, and I can render myself invisible.” I didn’t tell her about my talent for reading intentions.

It’s better to let her think that I am extremely perceptive so that I don’t completely unnerve her. The talent of intention reading is frowned upon by the world, and I haven’t had a chance to develop it since the college certainly doesn’t offer any training involving tabu talents.

“So, will I know when you’re near if you’re invisible? That’s a little unsettling.”

“Our bond will always alert you to where I am, so you have no need to fear your privacy. What are the plans for after our bonding?”

“We will leave immediately for Dashwood. My father will be expecting us shortly after nightfall.”

With that, we were interrupted and ushered into the Temple of Oaths where I will take my oath of fealty, and Kira and I will receive our life-long commitment bond. The bond ceremony is irreversible and sealed with a death entanglement that will unite us for the rest of our lives.

The ceremony was short and rather nondescript. I swore to protect Kira with my life, and she swore to honor and provide for me. It was when we touched foreheads and grasped each other’s arms that the bond linked us together. It was a very magical moment when we felt joined to each other’s being.

Kira and I left immediately following the bonding to head for her carriage. As we started to board, I began to sense a threatening intent emanating from the area surrounding the coach. The driver’s eyes darted around the vicinity as well.

I suggest to Kira, “Why don’t you board the coach, and I’ll wink aboard after you depart so that you can experience how winking works?” There was no use

in alarming Kira because when I sense intentions, they don't always come to actualization. This will give me a chance to search the surrounding area to see what threats might be lurking.

"Oh, by all means. Let the fun begin!" said Kira enthusiastically.

If given time, I would have scrutinized what Kira meant by, "Let the fun begin!" I didn't know whether Kira was being flippant or whether she was simply being immature. She is only sixteen and she's been raised at the Dashwood estate which I surmise to be far removed from town since we won't reach it until nightfall. Its seclusion would have offered a protective cocoon for a family who might have dangerous liaisons.

I popped off down the way we just came before veering off to the side. In a little alcove, I became invisible in order to discreetly pursue my uneasy feelings. They lead me to two horses tied to some bushes beside the road and two men peering through the undergrowth. I can't act on intentions alone. They haven't actually done anything yet. I don't want violence to be the start of my service to Kira and to become the hallmark of how I protect her. Instead, I find a cocklebur plant and pick some of the burrs to stick under the saddle of each horse and cut the cinch straps so that they're barely keeping the saddles

in place. Hopefully, that will deter the riders and allow us to safely travel to Dashwood without further engagement. It may be putting off trouble, but it will give me the chance to get a better understanding of what I'll be dealing with. I've gotten a good look at them so I can be wary of them if our paths cross again. Now, I need to hurry before the coach moves too far away and I won't be able to bridge the distance through winking.

Kira jumps with a start even though she knew to expect me. She giggles because, although she feels that I am present, I am still invisible.

"Oof, I'm sorry," I say as I appear. "I sometimes forget that I stay cloaked even though I've winked." Changing the subject, I say, "Let's try to make it home in record time so that I can meet your family and servants before everyone scatters for the night."

"Driver, onward at a good stiff clip if you please."

"Now, why don't you fill me in on who I'll meet and who I can trust, Kira. Let's start with the driver." (I wanted to be assured of his loyalty.)

"The driver's name is Tobias. He's been with our family long before I was born. Dad trusted him to drive me today because he's been guarding me up until now. Kira continued with her discourse of her immediate family and servants.

By the time we reached Dashwood, we were both tired. It was later than we expected even though the driver had pushed the horses. Everyone had retired for the night, so Kira went to the kitchen to drum us up something to eat, and then Kira led me to my quarters which were located close to hers. It had been a long day, so we went right to bed.

Sometime during the wee hours of the morning, I awoke by internal bells going off that something was amiss. Was that a pebble I heard hitting Kira's window? I peeked out my window to see a lone gentleman standing in the courtyard. Before long, I saw Kira slipping out the front door and running toward him. That little minx! I winked to stand next to the gentleman. Kira screeched to a halt in front of both of us and sheepishly reached out her hand to the gentleman.

“Nathan, this is my betrothed, Sampson Woodward. According to our customs, the bride-to-be is whisked away sometime during her formal engagement which we announced at my 16th birthday celebration. It's an elaborate ruse where my dowry is paid as ransom in order to officially finalize the engagement. When I wasn't absconded on the way home because you foiled the snatch, Sampson came in person.”

“So, you knew about the men that were waiting to take you?”

“Well.... yes.”

“And you didn’t enlighten me?”

“You were very interested in showing me your skills so I thought I’d let it ride and see what would play out.”

“Tobias knew?”

“I’m sure he suspected. The long ride home would have been an opportune time to enact the traditional bride-napping.”

I took a minute to think. I couldn’t derail the custom of bride-napping again. I insisted on going along though. Kira would know that I was there, but I would be invisible so no one else needed to be aware of my presence. This way I could thwart any devious plan against Kira if one did exist.

A ransom note was sent and Kira’s father delivered the dowry money and land deeds to Sampson’s estate the very next day. Kira was escorted home safely and the engagement was official. The wedding could go forward.

I guess I was too much of an eager beaver to prove my capabilities. I must refine my skill of reading intentions. So much for my first scrape with danger!

Ha!