

# *The River*

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A Guardians of Magni Short Story

Grace A. Johnson

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*The River*  
A Fantasy Short Story

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They were fools to have come this far.

The girl stood, barefoot on the dock, anticipation etched in the quirk of her rosebud mouth and the curious tip of her brows. Her dainty feet were poised to take another step, blades of grass and smudges of dirt pasted to her toes with dew—I could see it clearly through the water. I could see the wonder alight in her amber eyes, taste the faint aroma of lavender and vanilla which clung to her thin shift. Even the murky river and the overcast dawn could not conceal the excitement—and the serenity—surrounding her lithesome form.

Did she not know of the risk? Did she even care? Or was her Guardian enough?

No one dared to come—not since the flood had wiped out all prosperity the first year of the Reign. Not since the Guardians had forbidden it, all for the sake of the girl.

The danger was too great. I should know.

And yet here she was.

A fox, as small and intrigued as the little girl herself, perched himself on the edge of the boat, peering into the water as though he could see me. I knew well that he couldn't, but I leered at him anyway, snapping my fangs and watching him rear back in shock. With a yip, he tumbled into the boat, landing inside with a thud. Just for good measure, I slapped the underside with my tail and sent it rocking.

The girl jolted, falling to her knees and reaching out to her pet. Her face was so delicate from this angle, a portrait of tranquility and innocence. A sure sign of her heritage. If only I could touch the silk of her cheek, feel something other than water and brick, stone and scale.

“Ambrosia,” the Guardian growled, tone so low and gravely the words were barely distinguishable, even in the common dialect. His hands, more slender and gentle than any man of his rank could possibly possess, slowly closed around her waist, less a vise than I'd imagined. He spoke no more, his touch warning enough as he lifted her into his arms, tucking her legs 'round his waist.

The girl—nay, *Ambrosia*, a name of legends and myths, the embodiment as mysterious and charming as the stories—whimpered softly but didn't protest.

If only she would. If only she bid him to turn back.

Surely a Guardian would know better. The granite in his eyes was testament enough to his reluctance, his knowledge, the hard life he'd lived. Would he really take her down the river, into the City?

I couldn't let him, if that was truly his intention. I couldn't let him risk the only hope of our salvation—whether anyone in Magni knew Ambrosia held that power in her hands or not. Oh, where was my mind? Of course they knew! It was only a matter of whether the Guardians—and the Regent—would let her use that power or abuse it for her. Would they raise up a queen to save us, or another to destroy, as little Ambrosia's predecessors had?

Only I had hope, in this child queen rather than the influence of her elders. None else in the City did. Which was why I would not—*could not*—risk the girl and her Guardian falling prey to the tempestuous Naiads and my sister Sirens.

Except making my presence known would only endanger them more. Nothing escaped the watchful eye of the Naiads, and my sisters would be shamed even further because of my disobedience and then the nymphs would force the queen, her Guardian, and even her fox into our small alcove, leaving them there to die.

Well, the girl and the animal would die. The Guardian would suffer a worse fate at my hand.

Unless...nay, that was too outlandish, too far-fetched, too wishful.

But there was a chance. The Magni were known to be a fair people, the younger, less political ones, at least. If I did them a favor, they would repay their debt. If they wanted their lives, that is.

I flicked my tail, curving around the small boat and appearing at the edge of the dock. The air sang to me a tantalizingly sweet song as I slowly lifted my head into it. Frissons of cool morning mist bathed my face, tickling the hairs at the nape of my neck and sliding between my scales. I shivered, emitting a soft gasp that quickly garnered the Guardian's attention. When his gaze, suddenly devoid of the warmth reserved for Ambrosia, met mine, I was filled with regret.

And desire.

"This is your only warning," I hissed, infusing my tone with a strength and intensity I didn't really possess. "You can either leave or die."

## Author's Note

I've been wanting to try my hand at fantasy for years—how could I not? I grew up reading dystopian fantasy, high fantasy, and speculative/apocalyptic middle-grade fiction. So, of course, fantasy is as natural to me as historical romance, but despite many months of outlining stories and many attempts at fantasy, I've never found *the one*. The story that clicked.

I'm still not sure if I've found it yet, or if the Guardians of Magni are it, but I had a lot of fun writing this short story, and I hope you have a lot of fun reading it!

I do want to give a special thank you to the inspiration behind this short story (and possibly a series of books to follow): my friends at Kingdom Pen. Their picture prompt contest brought this little story life, so I owe it all to them and the picture that I based this story on. You can check it out [here](#)! Thank y'all for everything—your encouragement, your friendships, your healthy debates on the merits of *Gone with the Wind* (you know who you are), and your love and support!

And, of course, thanks to my wonderful parents and siblings (who have a ton of faith in the above 799 words) and to God, Who has blessed me with the gift of writing!

Thanks, also, to YOU! (You know you're there!) I appreciate you taking the time to read this book, and I sincerely hope that you enjoyed it. I have several other short stories available on Amazon, along with a Christmas novella and two full-length novels, if you're hungry for more. And, if you're hungry and broke at the same time, do me a favor and leave an *honest* review of this short story on Amazon and/or Goodreads, then let me know. I'd love to give you another story in return!

Would you like to see more of this story and the world it's set in? Please let me know! I'd appreciate any feedback and ideas. You readers are who I write for and why I write!

May God bless you and keep you!

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