

ADAM PARSEC'S  
**YOUNG GUARDIANS  
& THE DAWN OF DARKNESS**



UNCOVER THEIR FAMILY'S SECRETS

When their grandmother comes crashing back into their lives, twins Tilly and Tom know their twelfth birthday will be anything but ordinary.

The twins are left with a mysterious gift and a warning, it must not be opened before midnight. But in a house where shadows have eyes and dinner guests harbour dark secrets, following their Grandmother's rules might prove harder than expected.

They are about to discover that their Grandmother's magical stories might not be so fantastical after all. As ancient family secrets begin to surface, the twins discover that some gifts come with a price—and some doors, once opened, can never be closed again.

Embark on a spellbinding adventure into other realms where anything is possible, as Tilly and Tom uncover their family's secret legacy, forbidden magic, and find the courage to face the unknown when darkness comes calling.

ADAM PARSEC'S

# **YOUNG GUARDIANS**

**& THE DAWN OF DARKNESS**



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## The Unexpected Arrival

The Summer sun hung low over Terrence Manor as the shadows stretched their way across the manicured garden. It was the afternoon of the twins' twelfth birthday when Grandma Tessa arrived at the door in the most unusual way.

A loud crashing sound came from downstairs as a motorcycle with *a* sidecar came smashing through the front door and came to rest on an expensive white rug. Gripping the handlebars was an older woman, her hair was grey, and the lines on her face were full of dust and dirt. As she brushed debris from her jacket, the last of the door frame fell to the floor with a thud.

Tilly and Tom raced downstairs as fast as their legs could carry them. Both were surprised to see Grandma Tessa removing a pair of riding goggles and laughing as hard as she could. Straddled on her bike, she stretched her arms out wide and yelled at the pair of them, "Don't just stand there with your mouths open, come and give me a kiss!"

"Grandma!" They both screamed as they jumped into her arms.

"Now children, what have I told you about calling me Grandma?"

"Not to call you Grandma and to call you Tessa. Because Grandma makes you sound old," they chanted in unison.

"That's right, and don't you forget it," Tessa mumbled as she adjusted her false teeth.

As far as brothers and sisters go, the twins were the best of friends. Double trouble would be the most accurate way of describing them. Born only seconds apart, they

shared luscious brown hair and big brown eyes that could charm their way out of any situation. Yet somehow, trouble always had a way of finding them.

At that moment, the twins' father, Tim, rushed in to see what all the commotion was about.

Tessa gently released her grip from the twins' embrace, and slowly got off her bike.

"Mum!" Tim yelled disapprovingly. "Why can't you park outside like everyone else?"

Tessa handed him her helmet and goggles, then replied. "It wasn't my fault son. You had squiggle-whirls running rampant in your garden. I had to swerve a number of times just to make it to your front door."

Tessa put her hand on his shoulder and continued, "No need to worry, I think I got every last one of the little critters for you. I even think there might be one stuck under my back tyre."

Tilly and Tom stood there smiling. They loved Grandma Tessa's stories. Unfortunately, their dad did not.

"Mum, you know very well that there is no such thing as squiggle-whirls, and I won't have you poisoning my children's minds with your crazy made-up stories!"

"Very well, son." Tessa said in a defeated voice as she took off her jacket. "Can you put my things away and have someone park my bike for me?"

Tim's face turned red as his body started to tense up. He had to stop and take a deep breath before replying. "Is there anything else I can do for you, Mum?" He said through gritted teeth.

"Why yes, you could get your front door fixed, it's letting in a draft."

She turned to the twins and whispered, "Meet me in the library in five minutes. There's something I want to give you."

Unable to hide their excitement, the twins promptly left the foyer and disappeared down the hallway.

Tessa turned and started to walk towards the kitchen. "I hope you have plenty of food, I'm starving."

"Mum!" Tim said, pointing at the door. "Look what you've done!"

Tessa didn't look back. She continued to walk towards the kitchen and out of sight.

Tim stood there in shock and clenched his early greying hair in both fists. Looking out through the hole that once was their front door, he saw his beautiful garden was in ruins. Tyre tracks weaved through his prize-winning roses, remnants of his favourite gnomes lay scattered around the yard. Not to mention the skid marks on the driveway that lead into his beautifully shaped hedges.

Tim walked slowly to the door, ready to let out a scream of frustration. He paused for a moment when he heard a quiet groaning, coming from inside one of the hedges. He walked forward to get a closer look. Suddenly an arm stretched up out of a mangled shrub, followed by a body as it climbed from inside the bush and fell in a lump on the ground.

It was his fiancée Sara, the children's stepmother-to-be. She slowly stood up, trying to regain her balance. Her short blonde hair was a mess of twigs and leaves, her dress was torn, and the heel of her right shoe had snapped clean off. She did not look happy at all.

"Tim! Your mother is an absolute lunatic! She could have killed me!" She yelled furiously. "Don't you think there is something you forgot to tell me?" As Sara stood there with her hands on her hips, Tim realised he had not seen her this angry before.

He thought for a second and said cautiously, "Did I forget to tell you, honey?" He forced a smile and continued, "Mum called yesterday, she said... that she's coming to visit for the twins' birthday."

Sara stormed past him through the broken doorway and hobbled up the stairs, stopping only for a moment at the top, so she could have the final say. "Well, don't just stand there! Fix the door! It's letting in a draft!"

Meanwhile, the twins were in the library eagerly waiting for their grandmother. It was one of the few rooms in the manor that they loved to play in. Every story they read was a journey in itself, inviting them to experience exhilarating quests, heart-pounding battles, and spellbinding magic. The room radiated a sense of history and grandeur. Large wooden shelves filled with leather-bound books and ancient scrolls lined the walls. A magnificent fireplace dominated one side of the room, its stone mantel featuring intricate carvings, and above it, two empty spaces—one for a sword, the other for a shield—a hint at the family's fabled past.

Tessa walked in, in a bit of a hurry, noticing the twins staring at the empty mantle. "It used to be home to our family's guardians. I have long felt their echoes, and they have guided me through visions and dreams. But their voices have gone quiet. Two very special friends I miss more than I care to admit." She sighed.

The twins turned to the sound of her voice. "Tessa!" They screamed as they ran to her again. Their arms wrapped around her, not wanting to let go.

"Why has it been so long since you last came to see us?" Tom asked, enjoying the embrace of his Grandmother.

"Oh Tom, I've had a lot of family business to attend to, but this is a very special birthday, and I wouldn't miss it for the world. I promise that you will be seeing more of me from now on." Tessa assured them both.

"We've missed you." The twins said in unison.

"I've missed you both too, but for now we need to get down to business." Tessa's voice dropped to barely above a whisper. "What I'm about to give you carries strict conditions. You must not - cannot - open it before midnight, and only when you're completely alone. Wait until the house falls silent, until every last soul is asleep. Opening it even a minute too soon..." She paused, letting the weight of her words sink in. "The consequences could be catastrophic."

Tilly and Tom exchanged uneasy glances but nodded their agreement.

"There's more." Tessa leaned closer, her eyes darting to the shadows as if something or someone may be lurking just out of sight. "You must hide it where the Rogains will never think to look. If it falls into their hands..." Her voice cracked. "It would mean the end. Not just for our world, but for all worlds."

"Who are the Rogains?" Tilly whispered.

Tessa drew a sharp breath. "Now that you're both of age, there are things you need to know." She took a moment to gather her thoughts. "I can't shield you from this anymore - they'll be coming for you soon enough. The Rogains..." Her voice trembled slightly, "they're shapeshifting reptilian beasts, able to wear any form they touch like we wear clothes. Trust becomes a luxury when they're near. Anyone - a teacher, a neighbour, even your best friend - could be one of them."

From beneath her shawl, she withdrew a small wooden box. In the dim light, the carved scene on its lid seemed to ripple with mystery. A monstrous creature with ancient crocodilian features raged behind a wooden door. On the other side stood a small boy, his young frame braced against the barrier. His hands told two stories - one gripping a glowing sword, the other clutching a key. At his feet lay a shield, its surface etched with an impression of a tree.

The twins exchanged glances, their eyes wide with questions. They stared at the tiny box, wondering what secrets could be worth such desperate measures.

Tessa pulled them close into her protective embrace. Her whisper was barely a breath against their ears.

"This must stay between us. Your father - especially your father - can't know." She pressed the box into Tom's trembling hands. "Now quick, into your pocket. Go straight to your room and find somewhere safe - somewhere they'd never think to search." Her voice hardened with urgency. "Remember, midnight, and not a moment before. Everything will become clear to you then." She gave them a gentle push toward the stairs. "Now go. And for heaven's sake, make sure that no one follows you."

The children left the library in a hurry, feeling a little anxious and scared at what their grandmother had just told them. As they walked through the foyer to the stairs, they dodged around the groundskeeper and staff as repairs to the front door commenced. They saw two workers wheeling the motorcycle carefully out the front door and down the stone steps. Trying not to look suspicious, the twins made their way upstairs to their bedroom. Tilly turned the key in the lock, securing the door behind them.

Tom removed the small box from his pocket and whispered to his sister, "Tilly, where do you think we should hide it?"

They walked around the room slowly, thinking very carefully about the safest place to hide such an item.

"I have it!" Tilly said with excitement, "We should hide it in the wall!" Tilly, being the thinker of the two, remembered a loose board on the wall. She scrambled onto her knees and pushed and pulled every board until one moved.

"Found it," Tilly boasted. "This is perfect."

Tilly pulled the bottom of the panel away from the wall while Tom slid the box into place. It was done. The small, mysterious wooden box was now out of sight, and no one would ever find it there.

Thump, thump!

The twins almost jumped out of their skin at the unexpected knock at the door, "Tilly, Tom? I want you both downstairs in half an hour for dinner," yelled their dad. "Oh, and Sara said to wear something nice. She has friends coming over to celebrate your birthday with us. And one last thing, please try to behave yourselves tonight. Sara has put a lot of work into this party for you. Don't let me down."

The two children both looked at the door and replied together, "OK Dad, we will be down soon."





## Strangers at the Feast