

EPISODE 12 - Myntini - Fairies and Dragons, Ponies and Knights

Performed Live Aug. 8th, 2021

Podcast released Aug. 14th, 2021

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The unicorn didn't stop. It kept charging, right through the fire, as if it didn't even feel the heat. Beatrice clearly was not expecting to see the unicorn emerge from her flame unhurt and steadily approaching. It was almost upon her, its horn aimed directly at her heart. She only had time to shift her body slightly, turning her chest away from the attack, before the unicorn slammed into her.

"RRRRRRRRRAAAAAGGHH!!" Beatrice screamed in pain. She reared back, raised her front leg, and swiped furiously at her attacker, her clawed foot connecting with the unicorn's side. The unicorn went flying through the air like it had been launched from a catapult, sailing over the nearby bushes and landing out of sight. Beatrice crashed to the ground and was still.

"Beatrice! Beatrice!" Talora called as she and Tom ran up the slope towards the dragon's still form. Suddenly, Tom stopped. He knew what he had to do, and he knew he didn't have a choice. Without pausing to explain, he left Talora and ran into the woods, in the direction that Beatrice had hurled the unicorn. He could hear Talora behind him, screaming, "Tom! Where are you

going?" He didn't have time to explain. He had to find the unicorn, he knew, or Beatrice would die.

Cue: forest loop

Tom Thomas was the head stable boy for the Stone, the great Castle of Durga. His mother and father ran the stables, a vast and sprawling set of buildings that housed over two hundred horses. One day, Tom had been told ever since he could remember, it would be his job to take over for his parents. His family had run the stables for as long as there had been a Durga, maybe longer. The Thomases were somewhat unique in Durga, as few members of their family throughout the generations had ever aspired towards the honor of knighthood. Instead, they were content to care for the horses. What most people didn't know, however, was that they had a secret.

This secret had been kept from Tom for most of his life. Tom did know that his Grandparents had been Seekers, people obsessed with unicorns and pegasi, who spent their lives seeking them. He knew that his grandparents had left on a journey to find these rare and magnificent creatures, and had never returned, leaving Tom's father alone to manage the stables when he was a teenager, like Tom. Tom's father had never recovered from this loss, and forbade the mention of unicorns or pegasi in his presence. And that was all that Tom knew. Until one day, he had received a letter from his great aunt. Tom had never met her, but he knew she lived far away, and very ill. Inside the envelope was a drawing. It looked ancient. It was a simple drawing of a girl sitting easily on the back of a... unicorn. At the bottom of the drawing, in the barely legible flowing script Tom recognized from old, old books, was a name: Arla Tomasi. With the picture was a note that said simply, "I thought you should know. Look in the attic. Don't tell your father. With love - Rosemary ~~Thomas~~ Tomasi." But Tom had noticed that her last

name, "Thomas," had been crossed out, and written above it was "Tomasi," just like the girl in the picture.

Besides it's age, the picture wasn't particularly remarkable. Tom had seen countless illustrations of the legendary Tomasi, an ancient race of humans who had once lived among the fabled herds of horses, unicorns and pegasi who, during the time of giants, had all lived together, in one giant herd, as the ponies did today. Some even believe that the ponies were descendants of these ancient horses. The Tomasi were part of the herd, living with them, riding them, and caring for them, for hundreds of years. No one knew if the Tomasi actually existed. But what child hadn't imagined themselves riding on the back of a unicorn or flying on a pegasus, or running with the herd, like a wild Tomasi! But none of this explained why his great-aunt signed her own name as Tomasi and crossed out Thomas?

Tom had raced to the attic. And there he found the books, the crates of notes, drawings, and maps, that not only belonged to his grandparents, but went further back. Hundreds of years, more even. The history of his family. He read them voraciously. Tom's grandparents had not simply been Seekers. As Tom tore through all that was written, he was slowly able to piece together the truth.

The legends were real. The Tomasi were real. And Tom Thomas, stable boy of Durga, was one of them. Tom Thomas. No... Tomasi. Tom's ancestors had been the last of the Tomasi, the great Riders.

Until... The Drift. The Drift was a time of great change across all of Duniya. No one knew exactly when or why or how, but everything began to slowly change; rifts were formed, the weather patterns shifted, and some species disappeared, never to return. The unicorn and pegasi slowly began to dwindle

from the herd, leaving the horses behind. Years would go by without a human sighting of either a unicorn or pegasus, and when they occurred, encounters were often deadly. The remaining herds of horses fractured, dwindled, and dispersed. Many of the Tomasi abandoned the wild and spread across the land to live with humans, in houses, villages, and towns. Slowly, they became nothing more than legend.

Tom's ancestors had stayed with one of the small remaining herds of horses and settled in the lush land that eventually became the city of Durga, changing their name to Thomas in order to put their past behind them and maintain their secret. It was because of Tom's family that Durgan horses had always been the finest, as they were descended from the remnants of the Tomasi's herd. But though their lives had changed, Tom's ancestors had never stopped looking for the unicorns and pegasi. With each generation for hundreds of years, they searched. It was an obsession, passed down from one generation to the next. They kept detailed notes of every encounter, maps of the migratory patterns they observed, and drawings of whatever creatures they could find. It was their dream to someday heal the rift that had occurred between the unicorns, pegasi, and the horses, and to live amongst them again.

Generation after generation of Tom's family had pursued this goal - that is, until Tom's father. When Tom's grandparents disappeared, Tom's father was left alone to care for his younger siblings and the stables. He vowed never to chase the unicorns again. He hid the books and papers, and he never told any of the stories. For this reason, out of respect for his father, Tom kept his knowledge secret and never told his parents what he had discovered. But he couldn't deny his own voracious curiosity, and after years of studying the books and papers left behind by his ancestors, Tom Thomas was now perhaps the leading expert on horses, unicorns, and pegasi in all of Duniya - not that anyone knew it, of course.

Thanks to the education he had given himself, month after month in the dusty, dimly-lit attic, there was one thing that he knew for sure. Nothing, not even the strongest magic, could cure a wound made from a unicorn's horn, except for the unicorn itself.

And so, when Beatrice had been stabbed, he had known instantly that somehow he must find that unicorn. And.... and.... he didn't know what next, he just knew that without that unicorn, Beatrice would die. And so, he had run, knowing he had only seconds to catch it before it bolted into the woods, lost forever. He had been lucky the unicorn was wounded and therefore slower, and he had managed to catch up to it just as it disappeared into the brush heading deeper into the mountains. He had stayed silent, and kept his distance, as he had begun to track the unicorn. Cue: forest sounds

Now, it was a day later, and darkness was falling again. Tom was rubbing a handful of stinging nettles against his arms. It was the only thing he could think of to keep himself awake. He hadn't slept last night, and he couldn't afford to sleep tonight, either. It had been over twenty-four hours since Beatrice had been stabbed, and even though it was unlikely she was still alive, he couldn't give up. She was a dragon, after all, and he was certain she would last longer than the humans he had read about. He might still have time.

Right now, the unicorn was about thirty yards ahead of Tom, asleep for the moment. It was the closest it had allowed Tom to get during the last twenty-four hours, and he felt a small surge of victory when he realized it meant that it felt safe enough to sleep in his presence. It was badly hurt; Tom could see long gashes along its side from Beatrice's talons, and one of its ankles was at least sprained, if not broken. When the unicorn had first sensed that Tom was following, it had taken off running, but Tom had been able to keep it in sight. It

clearly hated being followed and wanted badly to charge at Tom, sometimes facing off towards him, snorting and stamping its hooves. So far it hadn't tried to charge, probably knowing it was too weak. Tom had doggedly pursued the unicorn, getting more and more tired, but refusing to give up. Finally, it had paused to rest near the rocky mouth of a canyon. There was a small waterfall, and a large shallow pool leading to a stream that ran out into the woods where Tom was trying to stay hidden. This was Tom's chance. He had to make friends with this unicorn. But how? Humans and unicorns had had nothing to do with each other for maybe a thousand years! But... he was a Tomasi, he reminded himself. Maybe he could do this.

As Tom slumped against a tree, his eyes trained on the unicorn's sleeping form, he considered his options. He had noticed that it was having trouble eating, being unable to bend its head much - perhaps it had pulled a muscle in its neck. There wasn't much grass here, so the unicorn had to lift its head to pull leaves off of bushes or low trees, and when it tried, it looked like it was straining painfully. Tom made a decision: he would bring the food to the unicorn! He wandered the woods, collecting anything he thought it might like to eat - leaves, a handful of berries, a small tuft of grass. But how would he get the food close enough without spooking the unicorn? He tried to think what he would do if this were one of his horses back in Durga. Tom was one of the best trainers at the Stone, and getting a young horse ready for the saddle was his speciality. He often drew an audience while he was training because his method was so unique. Tom would pretend he was a horse, mimicking a horse's submissive or dominant behaviour in his eye contact, his body language, and in his rewards and reprimands. He would do this for as long as it took until he gained the trust of the horse he was training.

So maybe he should just... be a unicorn. That shouldn't be too hard. Just... be a unicorn. There was a large rock about halfway between himself and

the unicorn. If he could drop the food there, the unicorn would have no trouble eating it off of the rock, and Tom would have gotten closer than he had been yet. He took off his shirt and bundled the food inside, then studied the sleeping creature. "If I were a unicorn, what would I do?" he thought. Ignoring his human instinct to creep softly forward, Tom summoned up his courage and boldly stepped out from behind a tree, neighing loudly to get the unicorn's attention.

Cue: Tom Neigh Then he stomped his foot hard. *Cue: Tom Horse 2* The unicorn woke and turned to face him. Its ears lay back on its head. Not a good sign. If Tom wasn't careful, and the unicorn charged, he might not be able to get away in time. "But wait, I'm a unicorn, too!" He reminded himself. "I'm the one who charges." He stamped his foot again and snorted. *Cue: Tom Horse 3* Glaring at the unicorn with all the anger and ferocity that he could muster, he took a step forward. The unicorn didn't budge. Tom neighed again *cue: Tom Horse 4* and took another step forward, stamping and snorting, shaking his own hair like it was a mane *cue: Tom Horse 5* . The unicorn rose and took an aggressive step toward Tom. "Uh oh," he thought. "Ok cool off, cool off." He wanted the unicorn to think he was confident, but not that he was challenging it. He took a step sideways, and pretended for a moment to ignore his quarry. He could feel that it was watching him very closely. Tom opened up his shirt bundle, took out some leaves, and stuck them in his mouth, chewing them extravagantly, so that it would know what he was carrying. They did not taste good, but Tom continued bravely. He looked at the unicorn again, neighed loudly, *Cue: Tom Horse 6* shook his hair, and stamped his foot. The unicorn surprised him by repeating his actions, *Cue: Myntini 1* and then suddenly charging. Before he could stop himself, Tom screamed, but then quickly tried to turn it into a roar. "AAAAHHH.... uuuhhhh....RRRRAAGGHH!!!" The unicorn stopped. Tom's heart was thudding so loudly he was sure the unicorn could feel his fear.

A squirrel skittered across the rocks near Tom. It stopped and looked at it. "You're a unicorn," he reminded himself. He looked at the squirrel, then charged at it. "Aaaaaggghhhhh!!!!!" The squirrel tore away, and Tom stamped and snorted, as though satisfied. He sneaked a look at the unicorn; he thought he could sense its surprise, and maybe even amusement?

*Carefully, Tom placed the bundle of food on the ground, and did his best to make his way back to the cover of the trees in as unicorn-like a fashion as he could manage **Cue: Tom Horse 7**. He slipped behind a tree so that he could watch. Slowly, suspiciously, the unicorn made its way to the food, and ate. Ha! It worked, thought Tom triumphantly.*

Tom repeated this whole routine throughout the night. Each time he dropped off a pile of food, he didn't retreat as far, so that as dawn approached, he was fully visible to the unicorn as it ate. But it wasn't enough; Tom needed to get closer, and quickly. He was worried about Beatrice, and he was also nervous about the gashes on the unicorn's side- they looked like they were getting infected. He wanted to clean them out, but that would mean getting close enough to touch it. As the unicorn dozed, he gathered a few plants he knew for their healing properties, and mashed them between two rocks with some mud, creating a thick paste for a healing poultice. "Okay," Tom said softly. "Here goes nothing."

Tom took his shirt off and again made a bundle, this time holding his poultice supplies. He had a new plan to get closer to the unicorn, close enough to touch it. He knew it was crazy, but he was too tired to come up with anything else. He looked around until he found a rock with a sharp edge. Taking a deep breath, he pushed the rock into his skin just below his collar bone until he started to bleed. Wincing, he drew the rock across his chest, creating a long, shallow

scrape. "Ow ow ow ow ow ow," said Tom quietly. It wasn't deep, but it hurt like crazy, and it bled a lot. Good, though- that was what he needed. He walked to the edge of the clearing where the unicorn lay, and then he pulled out all of his theatrics. He groaned loudly in agony, startling the unicorn awake.

"Aaaaagggggghhhh," he moaned, stumbling forward, making a great display of his pain and his bloody chest. He did his best to not to look at the unicorn, acting like it wasn't there. He headed towards the pool beneath the waterfall. He was now closer to the unicorn than he had been so far, close enough for the unicorn to stab or trample him, no matter how hurt it was. He kept going, moaning pitifully and making every step seem difficult and painful. The unicorn didn't charge. It seemed to be staring at him in amazement and even took a few steps back to let him pass. He passed within an arm's length of it, and even though he was bleeding from his chest and covered in welts from the stinging nettle, he couldn't help feeling pretty good about things so far. He was standing closer to a unicorn than any human had in recent history, and he hadn't been stabbed or trampled.... yet. He made it to the water and clumsily waded in **Cue: water.** "Oh, sun and stars!" It was cold. "Cold cold cold cold cold." Once he was waist- deep, he faced the unicorn, and made a great show of washing his chest. Once he'd cleaned off all the blood, he carefully unwrapped his shirt, and pulled out a bit of the paste he had made. He smeared it across the cut on his chest, and dramatized the soothing feeling it gave him. "Ahhhhhhhh.... so much better. Ahhhhhhhhh."

Once he was finished, he looked directly at the unicorn. The unicorn looked at Tom. Tom nodded his head towards the wounds on the unicorn's side. He took a step toward it, but the unicorn's ears went back, and it stamped and snorted **Cue: Myntini 2.** Tom took another step. The unicorn stared at Tom, then, slowly, miraculously, took a step towards him, putting its hoof in the water. Then,

something strange happened. Tom felt very, very cold. And he couldn't move. He looked down and realized that the unicorn had turned the water, the whole pool of water, into solid ice. Tom was trapped waist-deep in a block of ice. "Hey, that's not fair!" he said to the unicorn. The unicorn slowly walked over the frozen surface of the pool until it was towering above Tom. He could be trampled or gored easily now, but... somehow, he wasn't afraid. He was in awe. This is what his family had been searching for for thousands of years. He felt a kinship with this creature, and without pausing to think, he reached his hand up. He could see now the unicorn was male, and as he extended his hand outwards, the unicorn thrust his neck out and began sniffing Tom all over, finally lowering his head to sniff the poultice on Tom's chest. The two-foot long unicorn horn was pointing directly at Tom's face, and he examined it closely, his heart racing. It was the color of the inside of a clam shell, and not smooth as he had assumed. Rather, the surface was uneven and somewhat rugged looking, like it had been roughly hewn from rock. It ended in a tip so sharp it hurt just to look at it. Tom summoned up his courage, raised a finger, and touched the horn. **Cue: horn music** As he did, a surge of energy rippled through his body, searing into his consciousness. For a moment, Tom lost track of his own breath, his own heartbeat, and could only feel the unicorn's heartbeat thudding in his chest, and the pain from the unicorn's injuries pulsing through his own body. He had been right, there was a flash of pain shooting through the unicorn's neck, and his ankle was certainly sprained. In addition to the physical sensations, there was a swirl of emotions and visions. There were beautiful landscapes, herds of horses, unicorns, pegasi, and other creatures that Tom didn't recognize. There was peace and happiness, but also loneliness, and anger. Tom realized suddenly, with wild exhilaration, that while he was touching the horn, he was somehow linked to the unicorn, and could see and feel all that the unicorn had ever seen or felt. Gasping, he pulled his hand away. He had only touched the horn for a moment, but it felt as though he had seen a thousand year's worth of turmoil.

*The unicorn looked at Tom for a long moment before resting his nose against Tom's cheek. Then he turned and walked slowly to shore. The ice melted, and Tom was free. He looked down at his body and saw that the welts from the stinging nettle had disappeared, as had the wound he had made across his chest. The unicorn had healed him. Tom wondered why couldn't he have done the same for himself? Tom walked out of the water, holding out his poultice bundle. "Hey there," he said. "Come on. Let me help you now." The unicorn dipped his head and moved closer to Tom, who cupped his hands in the water, pouring handful after handful over the unicorn's sides, wiping away the dirt and blood. He tried to be gentle, but at one point he must have pushed too hard, and the unicorn snorted and shoved his body against Tom, **cue: myntini - water** knocking him into the cold water. "Hey!" spluttered Tom. "I'm sorry, I'm doing my best. I've got to get it all clean." He could have sworn that the unicorn was laughing at him as he emerged, dripping, from the pool to resume his cleaning.*

Once he had finished, Tom ran his hand softly down the unicorn's nose. "Good job. I know that wasn't easy. You were very patient. Now let me cover those up. That will make them feel better, okay?" The unicorn was still as Tom applied the healing poultice to the gashes. "I'm sorry, I don't know how to help you with your sore neck, or your ankle right now. You should try to rest them both. I can keep getting you food, until they feel better, okay?" The unicorn nudged him gently in response.

Tom took a deep breath. "Listen. I need to talk to you about something. The dragon that did this to you, she... she was just trying to protect her baby. She's actually... well... she's a really nice dragon. She's on a mission to, to talk to the ponies. She wants to fix, well... she wants to find out whatever's going on that's making these creatures not like each other, I guess. And... that's good

right?" The unicorn just stared at Tom. "Well anyway... I know that... well she's probably going to die, unless you help her. Do you.... do you think you could help her? I know that's a lot to ask. If there's anything I can do for you, I will. I swear I will." The unicorn looked at Tom in silence. Tom felt as though he was thinking, considering things. Considering Tom. Then he turned away from Tom, walked to the edge of the water, bent his head down and touched his horn to the surface of the small pond.

A silver ripple radiated outwards from the unicorn's horn. He raised his head and looked at Tom, who looked down into the surface of the pool. He gasped. Instead of his own reflection, he saw Talora, laying on her back beside a curled-up Smudge, her eyes open and looking up at the sky. "Talora?!" yelled Tom. But of course she couldn't hear him, this was some kind of vision. How was he seeing this? He wrenched his gaze from Talora and Smudge and saw Petra and Azrael sleeping nearby. They were near a river, the Crystal river, it must be. And then he saw Beatrice, laying on something that looked like a kind of sled. "This... this wasn't the camp I left them at," he thought out loud. "They must be further downriver. But how? Beatrice must be unconscious, how did they get her..." Then it dawned on him. "It isn't a sled, it's a raft.... oh no... they're downriver...if they traveled by river that means they've been moving quickly, they're days ahead of us, how can I, how can we, get to them in time?" He looked up at the unicorn, who stared blankly back at him.

Then the weight of it all came crashing down on Tom. "No. No! This can't be! I... I found you, and we're friends now! I was supposed to help her, I was supposed to save her, but there's no way we can get to them now! No. No. It's all my fault." Tears welled up in Tom's eyes and fell as he blinked. "What am I even doing here?? I'm just, I'm just a dunder-headed stable boy, aren't I? I'm not a knight! I'm not even a knight in training! I just thought... maybe... maybe... they

could use someone like me.... and then I made it through the contest! I made it! And she chose me! ME! She chose me to help them, and what do I do? I get her killed over a little kitten! AAAAAGGGGGHHHH!!!! It's not fair.... It's not fair, Myntini, it's just not fair!!"

Tom crouched by the pool, his head in his hands, and sobbed. The unicorn watched him silently. After a moment, he pressed his nose against Tom's shoulder. Tom raised his arm, curling it around the top of the unicorn's head. "I don't know why I called you Myntini. It just, came out, it...it seemed like your name. Is it... your name?"

The unicorn pulled away from Tom and started to paw the ground in agitation.

"Oh sorry," Tom said. "If you don't like it I can call you something else."

As Tom studied the unicorn, trying to figure out why that name had sprung to mind and if it was somehow actually the creature's name, he noticed that the unicorn's horn had begun to glow. It was getting brighter and brighter as he watched, to the point that he had to squint against its light. The glow spread to the unicorn's whole body, and then the forest and canyon around them was illuminated in a pulsing white light. Suddenly, there was a flash of even brighter light, and then everything was dark again. cue: fairy music

Well... not completely dark. It took a while for Tom's eyes to readjust, but as he blinked furiously, he began to see tiny pinpricks of light around him, and as he watched, these pinpricks grew more numerous and intensely bright, until there was light everywhere, fluorescent light in hundreds of different colors. It was as if all of the plants, insects, and rocks were glowing vibrantly, lit from within. In his

peripheral vision, he thought he detected small, flying shapes around him, but when he turned to identify them, they were gone. Tom gasped as he realized that he was seeing, for the first time in his life, the fairies.