

Old Blood, Proud Blood

by Emmy Kuipers, © 2004

“No mean feat, man. That was a gem of a party!” Gideo crashed on the couch, managed to stay on it and made it look as if he really had meant to sit down in that particular way. Blood-red wine sloshed over the brim of his goblet, staining the cream-coloured covers. Tiego watched his friend with ill-disguised annoyance.

“You really are a pest, Gideo, a horrible, corrupted, good-for-nothing spoilt brat.” There was little humour in his voice but his face was set into a small smile, encouraging Gideo to giggle rather than to protest.

“You are the king of all parties, my friend; although I’ll bet you that you cannot throw another one that will even remotely come close to this one.” Tiego lifted an eyebrow, twisting his mouth into a wry smile.

“I am not prepared to lower my standards even further just to please you, Gideo. I will not even throw another party that is this base and revolting anymore.” Gideo giggled again and drained the last of his wine.

“Then there’s only one thing to do: the absolute opposite.” He laughed loudly at his own wit but Tiego wasn’t amused. His eyes stared past Gideo towards an old painting that had belonged to his mother but that he had never particularly cared for. The small canvas depicted a lovely white horse-like animal with flowing manes and on the middle of its head stood one single horn. It had its head gently placed into the lap of a beautiful young maiden, seated with her back against a tree.

“A unicorn, pure and chaste, stately and virtuous,” Tiego mused softly, ignoring his friend who was still trying to recover from his bout of laughter.

“Aye? What was that?” With a last hiccup, Gideo stopped laughing and tried to concentrate on what his friend was saying.

“I said, a unicorn, just the exact opposite of you, old boy.” Tiego turned his attention on his friend, smiling broadly. “If ever I could find a unicorn, I have found the exact opposite of you. Better than that I couldn’t do.” Gideo stared at his friend with a mixture of admiration and suspicion. He clearly wondered if he had been insulted or had been offered a great compliment indeed. Eventually he decided his friend had made a capital remark and

grinned in satisfaction.

“If you could find a unicorn, Tiego, I’ll pay you its weight in gold.” Gideo smiled at his own generosity, knowing that offering money always worked wonders when challenging his poor but noble friend. He could afford to be generous; there were no unicorns, surely. Then he chuckled once more. You’ll find a unicorn before you’ve found a virgin maiden though.”

Poor Tiego might have been, but he was a resourceful man, enquiring among his friends and acquaintances to the possible whereabouts of a unicorn. Initially he was laughed at for chasing after such mythical creatures, but finally he got a lucky breakthrough. A friend’s brother returned home after spending years travelling the wild and uncivilized areas of the realm and brought back many tales of both fabulous and unbelievable experiences. One tale in particular caught the interest of his friend, aware as he was of Tiego’s search. His brother had recounted the sighting of a unicorn, far into the western forests of the realm. When alerted, Tiego spend long hours questioning the man, making notes of every detail and pinpointing the place on a specially commissioned map.

When Gideo heard of his friend’s progress, he became genuinely interested in the project and soon an expedition was mounted to this remote habitat of one of the world’s most beautiful and magical animals. All Tiego needed to do now, was to find a virgin.

Tiego walked the deserted hallway until he reached the door of his sister. He knocked softly and entered at her cheerful admission. He paused near the doorway, watching the pretty girl fondly as she sat in front of her mirror, combing her long, shiny blond hair. She was the only family left to him and caring for her was no easy task. The death of their father had left them with a very small income to live the life of luxury as befitting the last descendants of such an old and distinguished noble family.

“How pretty you look this morning.” Tiego smiled at the girl who looked up at her brother through the mirror. “I have a surprise for you, my dearest Jera that will make all your friends positively green with envy.” The girl turned to look at her brother and a spark of curiosity kindled.

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Jera giggled nervously as Tiego sat her down on the grass in a small clearing at the heart of the forest. “You just sit there quietly, Jera. Read your book if you like, because I think it will be a while before the unicorn senses you.” Tiego smiled reassuringly at his sister. Then he left her there, alone in the pale morning light while he found a secure spot to hide and wait, expectation riding high within him.

Arrrgh, this pain, no creature like me should be tortured by this pain! Its fire scorches my soul, burns at the boundaries of sanity. Fire! Pain! Madness! Why did they abandon me to this? I cannot help this madness raving in my head! They should have cared for me! They should have let me stay! I am no shame to my race, I am just a half-breed, none of it my fault! I AM A UNICORN! I deserve to be among my brethren. I AM A UNICORN! Do you hear!

Jera caught her breath as she heard an animal approach through the forest, breaking twigs, rustling small branches. From the corner of her eyes she caught a glimpse of cream-white animal skin, drawing nearer as she waited in growing anticipation. At length, a flash of sunlight was reflected from a single, beautifully twisted shiny horn, standing proud and dominantly on the forehead of a huge horse-like creature. Its coat gleamed; its manes flowed long and graceful. Oddly, it shook its head incessantly, sending its manes waving frantically, entangling themselves on the branches of nearby trees.

Oh tainted heaven and cursed forest! That is what has drawn me here! A maiden, a dark cursed maiden! And I thought it was the call of a fellow unicorn! You see, I am a unicorn. I’m drawn to it like we all are! I AM A UNICORN! Cursed trees and heartless souls, I am, I tell you, I AM!

Tiego saw the animal approach and frowned in surprise. Impressive as the creature looked, something just did not seem right. It tossed its graceful head most ungraciously; those virtuous, pure eyes bore a most hateful expression. He broke his cover in alarm and shouted at his sister: “Watch out, Jera. Something’s wrong here. That’s no real unicorn!”

Jera looked up startled, glancing from her brother to the animal that drew closer with each uncertain step. Its eyes rolled in its head that still shook ferociously. Suddenly it stopped and stared at her with such unmasked hatred that she froze to the spot, halfway between sitting and standing up. Tiego’s shout came from far away as she stood enthralled by the unicorn’s

stare.

NO REAL UNICORN! Curse you, bi-pedal monsters! Have it your way then. NO UNICORN AM !!

The forest seemed too quiet as the creature stepped purposefully closer, head no longer shaking, eyes still locked on the frozen Jera. It stopped just in front of the girl, lowering its head with deadly intent.

“No!!!” Tiego’s cry rang out through the forest as the animal lunged at his sister with unerring accuracy, burying its gleaming horn deep into her unprotected belly. It bent its head even lower to dislodge the motionless body and release itself, blood dripping from the horn unto its cream-white coloured forehead as it lifted in proud hate. It caught sight of the brother, who stood in anguished horror, watching the limp body of his sister. It turned its head towards Tiego, bowing to take careful aim. Without haste but with ruthless determination, it began to close the distance between them.