

Yet Another Unfortunate Isekai

By The Dragonheart Collective

She is born in the spring, and named Maria. On her third birthday she Awakens a transmigrated spirit.

“Oh *come on*,” She says with a scowl at the ground, “Not this again.”

She Knows the way she knows how to breathe and blink that she has lived before- not just once, but twice.

The full remembering is earlier this time, she Knows. Much earlier, and much more complete. Less like the fragmented dream of her first life, and more like it happened last week.

She clenches her terribly human hands. Her previous life was *just fine* until a car accident landed her here. In some presumably medieval fantasy world with elves and wizards.

She had a community of people like her, and now shes in a place without the miracle of hot showers! She had to go through being a teenager again. *Ugh*.

“Well, I’m a unicorn cursed into human shape,” she declares when she is eight to the elven lady named Shael who asked why she wants to learn about when unicorns still walked the land.

Shael hums and squints at her before nodding, "Alright, young unicorn. Fair enough."

Maria blinked at the easy acceptance and settled down to listen.

"Before The Corrupted King invited the Taint fully into the world and sealed the unicorns that could purify it away, unicorns walked the world healing the sick and injured wherever they went. It is said the unicorns will be freed and the Taint destroyed when the King is defeated, but he is a powerful wizard, so many have tried and failed."

Right then. This really was shaping up to be a very unwanted isekai, wizard king Evil Overlord and all.

She is fourteen when she starts reaching her breaking point of living in this new world in a human shape again. She cries herself to sleep most nights.

Her family is worried, for she has never been an easy child, but now she is hitting despair. The species dysphoria is getting bad again, without even the 21st century fixes of VR and fursuit gear to dampen it. It is that night she has a very strange dream.

She knows she is dreaming. Her body is human one moment, and another gives her the ghostly impression of what she *should* be. She flickers between the two- her current neurology fighting her spirit in

what shape it wants to be.

A voice speaks up, "I felt it was time for a check-in, but it seems I should have done so sooner, you aren't doing so well, are you?"

Maria whips around, a woman has appeared. She is tall, glowing, and very clearly not human at all. Her legs are like that of an ungulate with cloven hooves. A long tufted tail sways behind her and she has a horn upon her forehead.

She smiles and says, "I am Qrosoi, the Goddess of Purification. I am the one who transmigrated you here."

Maria ducks her head like she still has a horn to threaten with.

"You did this," She hisses.

"Ah," Qrosoi says as her tail stops moving for a moment, "I *really* should have gotten here sooner. Before you get too heated, I must explain."

"I'm listening," Maria said with the tone of someone who was one poor sentence away from starting a fistfight with a god.

Qrosoi begins, "My primary servants are unicorns. When they were locked away, I could no longer effect the mortal plane by acting through them. The Taint runs rampant- as unicorns are what cleanse it and there are none to do so."

She gestures in Maria's direction, "So I looked beyond my world, and

there you were. A unicorn in body was no option, but a unicorn's *soul* is enough of a unicorn to work, and for me to act. A loophole.”

Qrosoi shifts to a less casual stance, “I ask of you to go to the Corrupted King's castle. Inside you will find a barrier. There you will be able to free the other Unicorns from where they were sealed.”

“To sweeten the pot,” Qrosoi continues, “I will return you to your true shape if you succeed.”

Qrosoi has Maria's attention now.

Maria crosses her arms, “That's a lot of dangerous work beforehand, how do I know you will do what you promised?”

“I have a shrine halfway to the castle.” Qrosoi says smoothly, “Go there and activate it and I will be able to gift you a day in the form you ought to be, its all the power I will be able to inflict upon the world beyond appearing in your dreams right now, I am afraid. Will you accept?”

“I'm still mad.”

“I didn't expect you not to be.”

“...But I'll do it.”

“Excellent!”

Maria unceremoniously bangs her head on the headboard of her bed

as she wakes up.

Right then.

Unicorn Quest.

The work to learn where the shrine is exactly is the hardest so she does that first. The castle is on top of a mountain, which is much easier. No sense going haring off without directions.

On the day she decides its time to leave, Shael comes to her.

“Thought you might be leaving.”

It's not like Maria was subtle about wanting to go to the shrine.

Maria huffs and continues to pack as she talks, “You going to tell my family?”

“I should and you should, but I'm not going to stop you.”

“Oh?”

Shael hums, “I figure this will go more smoothly if you have someone more used to travel with you, so I'll be coming with you.”

Maria looks over at her in surprise.

Shael laughs- but not in a mean way, “Little Unicorn, do you even know how to use that dagger?”

Maria scowls as she straps it to her belt.

“Maria, *when* we tell your parents you are leaving so you can say goodbye, having me as your chaperone will help make them more amenable to the idea, and ease their worries.”

Well *fine* then.

Saying goodbye wasn't as terrible as first thought. Her parents were sad, but sent her off with their blessings.

“You were going to go whether I wanted you to or not. You always were a wild thing, but I'm glad I can send you off,” her father says.

Her eyes were just stinging because of the dust in them, honest!

“I'll come back,” She promises, and Maria finds with some surprise she actually means it.

She gives him another hug, her three siblings ruffle her hair, and off she goes.

When they arrive at the shrine Maria is so tired of barely seasoned fish she could cry.

It is at the foot of the shrine Maria decides they should set up camp for the night and look at the shrine in the morning.

Shael agrees, but asks Maria why.

Maria wanted to see if Qrosoi would give more instructions, but she hadn't actually explained the Situation yet to Shael. Now is as good a time as any, she figures.

"I had a dream," Maria says after a moment, "Not like a normal one. It felt *different*. I was told to come here to activate the shrine, and then go to the Castle to free the unicorns. All I'd have to do is touch a barrier holding them in. If she wasn't lying I'll get to be a proper unicorn for a day when I activate this shrine. If I finish this I get to stay that way. Sounds completely mad though, so I'll see how this goes. If it checks out then I'll do the rest."

"You've always been a strange child, Little Unicorn," Shael says after a moment of thinking, "A message from the gods would not be unheard of for one such as you. Would you know who asked?"

Maria prods the fire with a stick and replies, "Called herself Qrosoi. Looked halfway between a lady and a unicorn."

Shael nods, "And that would be why you are at her shrine. Very well then."

And that was that.

Quite early that morning, Maria steps into the stone room at the heart

of the shrine. A short carved stone obelisk sits in the middle. Qrosoi had just laughed the night before in her dreams and told her to touch the 'activator'.

Maria assumed that was it.

When she touches the stone it feels warm. Then, the carvings begin to glow. With a flash, suddenly Maria's body feels warm too, and she feels it begin to change and shift.

Its a split second change, but it feels like it lasts longer as her bones rearrange. Its like stretching after sitting still for a long while as she assumes the stance that feels *right*, her new tail lashing. When she opens her eyes again, she a unicorn on the outside now too.

Qrosoi *wasn't* lying, and that was a fragile, beautiful hope. She could be what her soul begs to be.

Her legs feel right now, her vision range feels *right*, she has a tail! A horn!

Shael laughs in wonder, "Well done little unicorn!"

Maria trots over to her, attempting speak but realizing she can't as it comes out in neighs. She flattens her ears in annoyance.

Shael walks over, still smiling, "Something to say?"

Shael put an arm on her flank, and Maria thinks loudly while wishing Shael could hear, '*Not being able to talk is very inconvenient.*'

“Indeed! But this is a fine alternative.”

Maria snorts in surprise.

Well, that makes things easier, Maria supposes.

“Go play, little unicorn, I should think you'd want to enjoy your proper body while you have it.”

Maria dips her head and trots out of the shrine. Slow at first, then switching her gait to go faster and faster until she hits a full gallop.

Yes, this is what she was missing.

She slows again and circles the shrine, the burn of euphoria like feeling the sun for the first time in years. Beautiful and precious.

When she returns to the front, Shael is outside again. Maria walks over to her and nudges her with her muzzle.

'I have a question,'

“Yes?”

'Why did you believe me? You've never once told me I was wrong or silly about this.'

Shael laughs again, “I've met unicorns long ago before they were sealed away, and they always were about as grumpy as you.”

Maria whinnys in surprise and responds, *'That's it?!'*

Shael, “That, and you know elves can see auras- yours never was quite shape of your body.”

Maria huffs. She did not know actually.

It was usually said that they 'see the light differently', and Maria had assumed that meant they could see Shrimp Colors.

She will just keep that fact to herself.

It is then that Maria starts to feel a strange sensation. Like an itch in her brain but in a physical location outside her body. Something that feels truly *wrong* in every way possible.

And its getting closer very quickly.

'Shael, I can feel something coming,' Maria says.

Shael pauses.

'It doesn't feel right-' Maria remembers what Unicorns do, *'I think its-'*

There is crashing in the underbrush, and Shael unsheathes her twin short swords.

“Taint!”

When it careens into view, so does another figure with a staff.

The Taint itself is evershifting- it isn't any particular color that can be pinpointed, and it doesn't seem to be made of any real substance

either- more of a tear in the fabric of the world than a living thing.

It simply looks *wrong* to Maria, and she is filled with a white-hot desire to rid the world of its presence.

She snorts and lowers her head.

The figure that came with the Taint cried out to Shael who had run forward, "Run, I can hold it off!"

Maria paws the ground. *No way.*

The Taint stabs an appendage towards Shael and she dodges it.

Brandishing their staff, the newcomer causes an appendage to draw back from them as sparks erupt from it.

A wizard, Maria notes as she charges forward.

The wizard gasps at her appearance, but Maria's attention is on her opponent.

This is something to be fixed, she knows suddenly, like a wound in the world made into something that hunts and hurts but is not quite alive.

She is a Healing Horse, so she heals.

Killing the Taint is impossible. It can be delayed and it can be encouraged to leave to hunt elsewhere, but pieces of the Taint do not die because they were never alive in the first place.

The unicorns were an exception, people said, but technically, she didn't kill it either- she simply healed it until it ceased to be.

Magic is fueled by emotions, she knows, and it is the fierce desire to help another that wells within her alongside a force she instinctually recognizes as magic.

With a flash of golden light the hole in the world knit itself closed at her bidding.

Then it was just her, Shael, and the mystery wizard.

The stranger, still panting, drops to their knees in exhaustion. They wore multicolor robes, and their ornate staff had a glass orb in the top.

The stranger finally looked up, their startling gold eyes gazing at Maria in awe.

“A unicorn,” they say, their voice quavering.

Shael sheathes her swords again, but does not relax.

Clearly realizing the suspicion, the stranger puts up their hands, “I mean no harm, fellow travelers! I am just happy that a unicorn walks these lands once more. I am called Basil, and I am a wizard who has been searching for a way to end the nightmare that the Taint brings.”

Shael decides to return introductions, "I am Shael, and this is Maria."

Basil finally finishes catching their breath and gets back up again, running a hand through their hair.

"As far as my research tells me," They say, "The only thing that can kill the Taint is unicorns, and they are all sealed away- except for you," Basil nods in Maria's direction and continues, "I want to end this all, I cannot keep letting my- The Rot King continue to do this. I ask much of you, but might you aid me in my quest?"

Maria figures they need all the help they can get, and Basil seems like decent help. Maria walks to Shael and butts her head against her to communicate, '*Hear them out?*'

Shael dips her head, "Our goals are much the same, we are willing to hear you out."

Basil straightens, "Right, so I should explain further. It starts twenty years ago. I was born in the western part of the land, when the nobles of the North and West went to war."

Maria settles in to listen as they continue, "The nobles of the West conscripted many men, among them my father... And my uncle. In that war, though it only lasted a few months, the death toll was high and neither side won. Among the dead was my father. Uncle returned a

changed man, angry and driven. He became a wizard when previously he had no care to use his knack for magic, and started experimenting with the Taint.”

Basil rung their hands, “My mother tried to beg him to stop, to at least settle down in a nice well-paid tower job, but he refused. Not long after, he set off to the North. He massacred the people of the north without care for guilt and toppled their castle. He pulled the Taint fully through there and became the Rot King. Before, the Taint never fully manifested in roving solid bodies, it had to have an anchor.”

Basil continued, “Mother grew ill soon after and passed, and having nothing else, I went to my uncle. He was... The unicorns were coming in droves to destroy the taint, but he sealed them away in some barrier. I could not bear his cruelty, so I ran when I was fourteen. I learned wizardry in hopes one day I could put an end to this, and while I feel still yet unready, I cannot run any longer. Something needs to be done.”

Basil turns their gold eyes back to Maria, “You might be the only being that can put a true stop to this now so I ask, *please*, help me put this to rights.”

Maria neighs softly and flicks an ear. Its not Basil's fault their uncle was a jerk. They seemed alright.

Mind made up, Maria nudged Shael to message her approval and

desire to share their story too.

“Maria approves, so yes, we will aid you, though you should know our story too,” Shael says.

Glancing up at the sky to judge the time, Shael then continues, “How about we pack up our camp and fill you in.”

Like Shael, Basil takes Maria's story quite well. Likely because they saw her as she currently was and it made the mystical elements feel more believable, but Maria appreciates it anyway. Shael introduces herself as Maria's escort and babysitter.

Rude but fair.

As they then journey on, Maria delights herself along the way in grazing all the little plants she can find. Her tastebuds were different now, and she wants to try all the things she could like this.

The next morning, she returns to a human shape- the light flashing around her once more.

Right then, back to work.

Later, when they return to the road again, Basil asks, “Is it not strange to be in such a different form?”

“As a unicorn?” Maria replies.

Basil nods.

“No, It feels right,” Maria says, “It feels like... Like coming home. Like I'm finally as happy with how I look as I can be, with how others see me.”

Maria shoulders her pack, “It's better than this form. I was never *really* happy with it. It... Feels *wrong* to walk on two legs and flat feet and have no horn or tail. It always has. This quest gives me a chance to not feel like that anymore, how could I not?”

Basil makes an agreeing noise and runs a hand through their hair again before replying, “I can much understand that sort of sentiment. I am neither a man nor a woman and with the application of magic I can alleviate my own discomfort of that sort well enough, but you cannot for something so extreme as your species. I am glad that there is a path for you to have the body you want.”

“I do have another question, though.” Basil says.

Maria tilts her head and responds, “What?”

“How is it that unicorns kill the Taint? Do you know?”

Maria shakes her head, “The Taint isn't alive, I'm not killing it. Its a wound in the world, so I'm healing it.”

Basil makes a noise of comprehension and asks again, “Whats that

like?”

Maria shrugs and replies, “Whats it like for you to use magic? Its probably the same.”

Basil flicks some little lights between their hands, “Maybe...”

Shael calls to the both of them that they are falling behind, so the conversation becomes abandoned in favor of jogging to catch up.

After roughly a week of hiking, they hit the base of the mountain that the Rot King lives atop.

“We will have to be extra careful now,” Basil says, “This is where the majority of the Taint resides. We will have to be stealthy. I can work illusions for us to be better hidden from its senses, but that is not foolproof.”

Shael crosses her arms, “Lets see what you can do then.”

Basil twirls their staff, and then they mostly fade out of sight. There's a bit of visual distortion, but otherwise they have vanished from sight.

“Well?” Basil asks, sounding muffled.

Shael nods, “Quite good. It should help. Maria?”

Maria responds, “Yeah I'll take it.”

After everyone is put under the spell, they continue up the mountain. Maria having to be held back by Shael from Taint on a few occasions as she had been unprepared for the instinctual impulse to purify the Taint that persisted even in human shape.

She supposes she had a better appreciation now for the carnivorous nonhumans she knew in her previous life complaining of an overactive prey drive. She imagines that this instinct to purify was much like that.

They could not light a fire without drawing attention, so Maria supposes it was fortunate that they managed to reach the castle nearing sundown.

The castle's entry is caved in, clearly by magical means. Whole sections of the floor were blackened, gouged, and smashed. There was also more Taint roving about. It is clear that this place was once the site of a fierce battle.

Creeping through the dimly lit halls, Maria wonders how anyone could live in a place so miserable.

Basil speaks up again when they are in front of some very ornate doors. These ones were intact.

“This is the place. Let me handle my uncle, just get to the barrier,

alright Maria?”

Maria murmurs her agreement. That was as good as a plan as any.

Basil then removes the illusion from only themselves- taking a deep breath to steel themselves for what comes next. They then turn to open the door.

Showtime.

This room, unlike the others, is lit. Part of it is the green fire on the torches around the room, but part of it is also the giant bubble in the far right of the room giving off a bright mint-green glow.

This room also bore the scars of magical warfare. However the most notable thing in the room is the figure on the throne.

The figure is an older man, much of his body marred with glowing green crystals sprouting from him. He looks like he is partially encased on the throne by those crystals.

The Rot King, Maria realizes, looks so much more pathetic than she had imagined.

“Basil.”

The Rot King sounds more resigned than surprised.

“Uncle,” Basil says, “Uncle, don't you think that this is enough for father?”

The Rot King sighs, “Of course it is.”

Maria starts to slowly creep towards the bubble with Shael.

Basil starts to respond, but the King cuts them off, “Its not about him anymore, its about me.”

“What could you possibly *want* with this then? What are you gaining here?” Basil asks, voice rough.

“It is far too late for me to be anything else but what I am, and I am simply giving the world its just desserts,” Replies the King grimly.

Maria now felt well and truly pissed off, what a self-fulfilling prophesy of terrible jerk behavior this guy was!

She keeps moving towards the bubble even if she really wants to tell him where he could shove is '*just desserts*'.

Basil crosses their arms, “Do you *really* think the innocent people on the countryside who had nothing to do with all of this deserve to have their crops destroyed and to be hunted by unkillable monsters?”

The King shakes his head like a disappointed parent, “Humans and elves are never innocent. We are all already tainted. It is in our nature to do evil, so we do not deserve this world. I've said this before, Basil. You know this.”

Maria is now approximately sixty paces from the bubble. Just a little more than this misanthropic jerk wouldn't be their problem anymore.

Basil sighs, "I was just hoping you had changed your mind. So that's it then?"

The Rot King sighs and puts a hand out. A staff then flies out from the ceiling and into his hand. It has the same ragged green crystal on it that covered him, "That it is. But really Basil? Don't you want to introduce your friends?"

He taps his staff against the floor and a rippling field sweeps through the room, causing the illusion around Maria and Shael to fall.

Shael snaps into a ready position and unsheathes her short swords.

The Rot King inhales slowly, and then suddenly rippling appendages of that not-substance that the Taint are made from erupt from his body, "I'm afraid I will have to show you why I am right."

Basil conjures a flickering golden shield to deflect an appendage as it sweeps at them, before calling out, "Uncle! What have you made yourself!"

They dodge another swipe, and Shael deflects a second strike at her and Maria with her swords.

The Rot King gestures with his real hands, "Don't you see now? It's too late for me. I have embraced what it is people *really* are- I am what

the world made me, and I will be its undoing.”

Basil twirls their staff and sends several fireballs ricocheting around. The King merely blocks them with the Taint, sparks dissipating on contact.

“Come now,” The King says in response, “You can do better than that.”

A snaking bit of Taint that was sort of an arm and sort of a tentacle slams down at Maria, forcing her to jump back.

Shael comes forward to cover her, deflecting another swipe with her swords, before darting away again and shouting, “There is always a choice to make! You aren't embracing anything but your self-wallowing!”

Maria slinks forward to use the distraction while the King turned his attention briefly to Shael.

“On the contrary,” he says, “I have become enlightened! Really, shouldn't you be more polite with the family of your friend? That's bad manners. This just furthers my point!”

Then the King turns to Maria, now quite close to the bubble, and narrows his eyes, “Ah- Can't have that.”

All at once, several tentacle-arms rocket towards her, so she unsheathes her dagger for defense and makes a run for the bubble.

She is *so close*, a few steps more-

She gets her dagger up in time to block skin contact, but the appendage with a not-hand still forces her to the ground. Trapped.

To the side, Shael is likewise pinned.

Shael says something that was presumably very rude in elven. Maria never did get Shael to teach her cuss words. Shame.

“Again,” He says, “Such *rudeness*. The two of you are a bit too much of a problem to be allowed to run about. Now we can talk properly, like you wanted.”

Basil grips their staff, face set, “I’m listening.”

“Excellent,” The King says, “You want to know why I do this, all of you? How I am what I am?”

The King gestures, clearly getting into the monologuing spirit, “Long ago, when my brother was killed I discovered something that fateful day. See, before I brought the Taint fully into this world, it was still here- but it was weaker, more confined. Magic that pain was poured into would mutate and become partially autonomous. That is Taint. It is why the magic schools and towers insist one should never cast with negative emotions as the fuel behind it. It is not just that the backlash of a disrupted spell can kill, no, it is that if you are too good- or too

unlucky, Taint will form. That requires unicorns.”

Maria grits her teeth and stares at the bubble as the man talks, so *close*.

If she could just-

The King continues, “When my brother died, I casted an augmentation spell entirely from my anger and grief- instead of elation. It worked- it made me stronger and faster, but Taint clung to me forevermore after. I realized that the Taint gave me power. That I could cast from it.

Wizardry accesses the True Plane where our spirits reside and where the gods walk. Wizardry is accessing the true nature of the world and people, and if my Taint is so much stronger than my usual magics, and its so unkillable in general, then this must be the real true nature of people- the desire to hurt and do evil.”

He gestures again, really getting into his monologue, “The Taint is then just an expression of what people are *truly* like! So I took my revenge for my brother, showed them a mirror of their own evil. All people do is poison the land and kill each other, so I am wiping them out with the hurt they have wrought upon the world made manifest. Poetic, isn't it?”

Basil who had been looking down this whole time replies, “No.”

The King was clearly caught off guard, “What?”

Basil looks at their hands for a moment before taking a steeling breath and continuing, “Its *not*. Its not poetic, *its selfish, narrow minded, and wrong!*”

“People are not inherently anything,” Basil continues as they pick up steam, “Why is it then, if the true nature of people is to hurt others, that most magic is protective or helpful in nature? Almost *half* of the recognized uses of magic are wards used to aid people!”

Basil starts to smile, “The Taint is hurt made manifest, but do you know what defeats the emotion of hurt in people?”

Basil's hands start to glow with a warm golden light.

A spark of comprehension and alarm starts to gleam in the King's eyes, but its too late, Basil reaches out and grabs a tentacle. All at once all the other bits of Taint seize and flicker and the King screams.

Maria sees her chance and darts forward to the bubble, hand outstretched.

Several things happen at once.

Basil collapses to their knees, Shael runs to cover Basil, The Taint appendages of the King stop flickering and seizing-

And Maria touches the bubble.

When her fingers touch it, the surface ripples, and then light flashes outwards in a blinding rush.

When Maria finishes blinking the flash out of her eyes, a pool is revealed in the floor.

There is a moment of stillness, then unicorns start pouring out of the pool, most run out the door, but a few raise their glowing horns and the Taint in the room starts to shrink and knit itself closed.

Hundreds -possibly thousands- pour out of it in a blur before finally there is a pause and a translucent figure of Qrosoi appears.

She laughs, and holds out a hand.

Maria takes it.

The flash happens again, and like before, she shifts. This time, for good.

“Thank you,” Qrosoi says, “Isn't that much better now?”

'Thank you', Maria presses out mentally, coating it in as much gratitude as she can.

This is exactly what she wanted.

Qrosoi was quite strange, but she gave her the body she wanted, and that meant everything. This was a god she was willing to follow, she supposed. She could do worse.

Qrosoi smiles and fades away.

Her moment done, she redirects her attention to the King.

He is sunk back in his chair, the Taint and crystals that were growing out of and encasing his body gone. He looks even more sad and pathetic than before, as tears stream down his face.

Basil gets up with effort, and walks to him.

“Uncle.”

The King responds, it clearly taking effort, “I suppose this is the part where you win.”

Basil's expression becomes pinched, “Uncle...”

“I'm *dying*, Basil, without the Taint to sustain me. I suppose its fitting. I see now. I have felt the truth in your words and magic and that of the unicorns.”

Basil clenches their fists and grits their teeth as the King continues, “I am a wretched thing, do not miss me. It is better off this way, without

the Taint I am nothing-

Maria walks over and starts to try to heal him. Even if hes a rude idiot, dying is the coward's way out, and Maria is *far* too petty to let him skip away with a tragic reconciliation farewell.

The King makes a soft noise of surprise, “You would try to even heal an enemy as vile as me?”

“Oh shut up!” Shael bursts out, drawing surprise from everyone, “Stop wallowing in your own self-pity and do something about how terrible you are then!”

Maria is more focused on her healing and fueling it with 'desire to make someone well' instead of 'punish the idiot', but she pays some attention to the conversation. Its tougher to heal a person than the Taint, she finds.

Shael storms over, patience well and truly snapped after the events of the last day, “Maria has seen fit to give you a second chance, use it. Don't just wallow! You know better now? Do something about it! You can't make up for anything if you're dead!”

Basil reaches out a hand, “Break the cycle, Uncle. It won't erase what you did, but you can make up for some of the damage. If not for yourself, then for me.”

The King quirks a small smile as Maria steps away- healing done as

well as she could, "I suppose I could try."

He takes Basil's hand.

Some time later, it is time to start heading home. Basil elects to stay with their uncle to help put things to rights, stating that there was still a lot of work to be done yet.

On the day Shael and Maria decide to head back, Maria asks Basil how they did what they did.

"You said that you were healing Taint, not killing it," Basil says, "That wasn't something in the books anyone kept in the tower I trained at, that wasn't something I'd heard anyone say about the subject. And believe me- I looked for everything about getting rid of the Taint. It got me thinking."

Basil continues, "Humans and elves are not good at healing magics, its why unicorns are so special. Minor spells can be done, but its quite hard, and casting must be done with the right intent for us to a much higher degree than regular wizardry to avoid backlash. Taint is such a scary, horrible thing, I figured, that its unlikely anyone tried to heal it before when its such a difficult spell to cast. It was worth a shot."

Running their hands through their hair, they finish their explanation, "So I gambled and it paid off. It didn't work all the way like a unicorn

might, but it was enough.”

Maria butts her head against them, *'It was brilliant. Pulled a miracle out of your robes there.'*

Basil huffs something that could have been a laugh, “I suppose so! You did the most important bit though.”

Maria whickers.

“No really,” They said, “I cannot thank you enough for all of this. You saved the world and my uncle, I suppose. You are, if I might be presumptuous, one of my most treasured friends.”

'You are a good friend too, so you better write!'

Basil nods, “Of course!”

Now Maria only had to worry about what to say to her parents about her new appearance and exactly where she was all this time.

Drat.