

CHAPTER VII

The Unicorn Ride

Niamh and Yurigel tell this story about their very first Unicorn ride and its unexpected consequences.

“Lili was grown-up,” began Niamh, “and I was a wee bairn, and I was the last of King Manannán and Queen Áine’s children. Lili was having romances and going on quests and fighting Humans, while I was still in my swaddling clothes. Sometimes she would come back home from her adventures and bounce me on her knee and put flowers in our hair, but she was to marry Merlin and travel to his realm, and I was often left alone, for she was in love.

“There was one particular young, red-haired Elf who would always get into trouble. He would run between the legs of men and try to trip them. He would sometimes pretend he was a hound and go about barking. He would run under women’s dresses and pretend he was hiding as a dog. Sometimes he would sneak up on a poor, unsuspecting person, and he would worry their cloak in his teeth, giving great tugs and growling menacingly, until the poor victim would cry out for help, at which point it would take several men to pull him off.”

“One of my guardian animals,” Yurigel remarked, “is a hound.”

“He would demand to be fed from the table,” Niamh continued. “Then I thought he was having so much fun that I should become a hound, too, so there I was on my hands and knees romping through the house like a playful, young puppy. My father did not think it was so funny. Yurigel and I would play together, scuffling beneath the tables at the feasts with many barks and yips, occasionally oversetting wine flagons on unsuspecting guests. As we played together at being hounds, we grew closer, and, after that, we did many things together.

“Yurigel and I would go out into the woods and play with the Unicorns. Yurigel would call the Unicorns, and these beautiful steeds would come to us. The Unicorns were very frisky, and they told us we were much too young to ride on their broad backs, for, at that time, we were only about the size of a four or five year old Human child. One day, my beloved Yurigel very determinedly climbed on a Unicorn’s back and would not get off. He