

Ritual

Uncle Tommy wouldn't tell us what branch of the service had trained him. But he always had plenty of stories for my brother and me—before that night he agreed to teach us about unicorn fighting style. He took us to a local cemetery, because, he explained, we must know the scent of death if we were to become equine champions of enchantment. We taped plastic butter knives to our foreheads, then circled one other, whinnying and snorting. We blocked out everything else, fixated on the opposition, waiting for the perfect moment to strike. But Tommy wasn't impressed by our performance. "Enough," he barked. "You boys have no magic. This was a big mistake." Yet when he tried to come between us, we remained focused, like good soldiers. Tommy squealed as we charged, bringing him down between us. We butted heads, again and again—even after the knives snapped. That night was all about the purity of blood.