

The Unicorn

By Jeff Dunne

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## CHARACTERS

JACOB	A man who is trying to find a way to share how he feels about...
HELEN	A woman who already knows (because they always do).

## SETTING

Any contemporary setting

SCENE

*(Jacob is sitting in a room – any kind of room, on any kind of seat. He is lost in thought, a pad of paper on his lap and a pen or pencil in his hand. He appears to be suffering from writer’s block. Helen enters)*

HELEN

Jacob, there you are. I’ve been looking for you. I was going to go for a walk in the park and was wond...

*(She stops, aware that Jacob is staring at her, an odd look on his face.)*

What? Do I have something on my face?

*(Jacob smiles at this, and shakes his head.)*

JACOB

No. You’re good.

HELEN

Then what? Why are you looking at me like that?

JACOB

No reason.

HELEN

There has to be some reason. Are you okay? Did something happen? Come on, it’s me. Helen. I can see that something’s bothering you.

JACOB

No. Not bothering me. Not really. Just...

HELEN

What?

JACOB

It’s hard to explain.

*(She considers him for a moment, then...)*

HELEN

I'm sorry. Just know that I'm here if you want to talk. I didn't mean to intrude. I'll go, and—

JACOB

*(Almost fearful...)*

No!

*(She turns back.)*

HELEN

What is it? *(She goes over and sits next to him.)* What's the matter?

JACOB

Sorry. I didn't mean to... to interrupt your plans. You were going for a walk. I'm fine.

HELEN

It's just a walk. I can go later.

*(They look at each other, there's a discomfort, him not wanting to burden her, her not wanting to push.)*

Jacob. Talk to me. If you want to, that is.

JACOB

I've been thinking...

*(He pauses for a hair longer than the pause of a normal sentence.)*

HELEN

Yes, I've notice that you tend to do that.

*(He smiles, and she returns the smile.)*

JACOB

Thinking about how to handle a situation.

HELEN

So something did happen.

JACOB

Yes and no.

*(She shakes her head at him.)*

It's not a specific event, not a *thing* that happened, per se. Just... like when you wake up one morning and realize something has been sitting on the living room table for the last month and you're not sure ... like you've never really noticed it before.

HELEN

Like a lamp.

JACOB

Sure. Whatever. Call it a lamp.

HELEN

*(Dramatically...)*

It's a lamp. *(Then, realizing this was not the time for it...)* Sorry.

JACOB

Did you ever... you know... want something?

HELEN

Sure. Everyo—

JACOB

No. Did you ever *want* something?

HELEN

Jake...

JACOB

You know, like as a kid. You saw something, or heard about something... something incredible. Something that no kid ever gets. Maybe just some kid who's got billions of dollars or something, but not real kids. Not everyday kids in school or around the block. Nobody gets something like that.

HELEN

Like a unicorn.

JACOB

*(With surprising fervor)*

Yes! Yes! Like a unicorn. It starts off one day when you see a pony, and you say “Oh, *I’d* love to have a pony.” Because that’s almost in the realm of possibility. Some kids get ponies. Rich kids. Not normal kids. Not you, you know? And you think of how great it would be to have a pony, how much fun it would be, and you really want it. You think about it all the time, because it’s almost possible. You can almost believe that one day you’ll come home and your mom will say, “Jake, guess what. We just discovered that your great uncle is the prince of Guberstein” – or some weird little country that no one knows. “He’s the prince, he just found out about us, and to welcome us to the family he sent you a pony as a gift.”

HELEN

I thought it was a unicorn.

JACOB

Wait. So you have this fantasy, and the days go by, but... there’s no lost uncle. And you look through all the maps; no Guberstein. And slowly it seeps in that no matter how long you wait, no matter how much you wish, that pony isn’t showing up.

HELEN

I—

*(He waves her to silence.)*

JACOB

And it’s sad, you know? But at the same time, as you come to accept that it isn’t going to happen, it’s sort of liberating in a way.

HELEN

*(Nodding...)*

Because now you can let the dream grow.

JACOB

Right! Exactly! If you aren’t going to get a pony, why have it just be a pony, right? Why not a unicorn? Or a pegasus? Or both. And so the dream, it grows. What started as this cool but simple brown and white pony is now this amazing, prismatic, magical... uni-pegasus, with a horn and wings and it can... it can do whatever!

HELEN

Can it make you breakfast?

*(He stops, and she suddenly feels bad.)*

I'm sorry. I didn't mean...

JACOB

It's alright.

HELEN

Honestly, I didn't. Please.

*(He shrugs.)*

Please go on.

JACOB

*(Taking a deep sigh, then...)*

So you build up this wonderful thing in your mind. It's... so amazing. It's *perfect*. As perfect as only imagination can make something. You know it's not real, but it came from... you know, it grew out of this thing that was real – the pony. And somewhere... deep down, no one ever told your heart that it wasn't real. And so your heart still...

HELEN

Thinks it's going to find that unicorn.

JACOB

Right.

HELEN

But your mind knows better.

JACOB

Yeah...

HELEN

And that's what has you down? Coming to grips with a childhood dream?

*(Jacob stares at Helen for a long time, a sad smile on his face, then...)*

JACOB

No.

HELEN

You are such a pain in the ass, Jake.

*(Jacob's smile softens a bit, but there remains a hint of... something.)*

Okay. So what is it? What has you so...

JACOB

Remember I was talking about the lamp?

HELEN

Right. The lamp that you suddenly find on the table.

JACOB

Yeah, but not exactly. More like... Well, since we were talking about the unicorn, maybe we should stick with that.

HELEN

It could be a unicorn lamp.

JACOB

Fine. You have this unicorn lamp. You got it at some flea market or an antique shop, and you bought it because—

HELEN

Because it looks just a little like that unicorn you used to dream about as a kid.

JACOB

Right.

HELEN

And if you look at it just right...

JACOB

Right. But then one day you wake up, and you look at it... differently. No, not differently. It's that you finally *look* at it. Like *really* look at it. Every individual detail. You look like you never really looked before, not even when you first bought it. Every... hair, every... And you suddenly realize...

*(His voice falls off, and he stares at her again.)*



HELEN  
(*Laughing a little in confusion.*)

What?

JACOB  
You realize that... that it's not a lamp. It never *was* a lamp.

HELEN  
Not a lamp...

JACOB  
It... just seemed to be a lamp. Your mind told you it was a lamp, because it was the only thing it could comprehend, but...

HELEN  
But?

JACOB  
What would you do?

HELEN  
What would I do about what? I'm not follo—

JACOB  
If suddenly you realized that... that what was right there in front of you... was that unicorn. But not just the unicorn. It's everything you ever thought the unicorn would be... could be... but... b- but lifted up and somehow... I don't know, maybe by the hand of God or something...

HELEN  
Since when are you religious?

JACOB  
You realize that you had only barely imagined... barely scratched the surface of just how amazing... how utterly magical and wonderful... a unicorn could be made to be. Like the image that you had in your mind was... well, just... just that. An image. It's like you fell in love with a waterfall from looking at a photograph of one. And then suddenly it's there. It's real. And you can see the motion of the river... the sounds, the smells... the flecks of water that reach out and kiss your skin... All these dimensions that had never even occurred to you before.

HELEN  
It sounds wonderful.

JACOB

But more than any of that... is that somehow it's real. Or it seems to be. That unicorn of your childhood, but so much more than you ever imagined it, is actually right there. And you can see it.

*(He stops again, staring at her. After a time...)*

HELEN

What? Why are staring at me like that?

JACOB

Because I want to remember.

HELEN

Remember? Remember what?

JACOB

You. The way you look. The way you smile.

HELEN

I look like a mess. And I smile the same way every time.

JACOB

No. You don't. Every one, every single one, is slightly different.

HELEN

You're crazy.

*(She takes his hand to pull him up, but he stays.)*

JACOB

It's like looking at a waterfall. I mean the basic waterfall is there, but the nuances are never exactly same.

HELEN

Well, you still don't have to stare, you know, hon. It's not like I'm going anywhere. You can still look tomorrow.

JACOB

But you see, if you look away, you're going to miss some moment of it, some moment that's never going to come again.

*(Helen smiles, moves closer, and puts her head on his shoulder.)*

And there it is.

HELEN

You're so bizarre, Jake. There what is?

JACOB

That impossible moment.

HELEN

Jacob...

JACOB

That moment when... when that unknown uncle appears and... no. Not the uncle. That's the thing. There never was an uncle. Just the unicorn. That impossible unicorn, that gift from beyond imagination, perfect beyond your ability to conceive or design... It walks past all the rich kids... walks up to you... and says "hey, do you want to go for a walk in the park with me?"

*(Lights out)*