

A HORSE NAMED ALADDIN

By Natalie Estelle Marsan

CHARACTERS

JASMINE, 15, high school student who's been sent to the guidance counselors office for the second time this week

MS. WILKES, 20's, high school guidance counselor who is new to the job

SETTING

Ms. Wilke's windowless office which is adorned with carpet stains, furniture, and other remnants of the previous counselor. A clock is on the wall above the door.

TIME

12:09PM

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Lights up on MS. WILKES as she sits at her desk, resting her head in her hands. She's startled by the sound of a knock at her door. She opens it to JASMINE. They did this little dance yesterday.

MS. WILKES

Hi, Jasmine.

JASMINE

I got bored.

MS. WILKES

You got bored yesterday, too.

JASMINE

I don't like biology.

MS. WILKES

You don't have to like it. You do have to go to class and stay there the whole time. You can't walk out five minutes after it starts.

JASMINE

My friend gave me her notes.

MS. WILKES

We talked about this. I know the transition from middle school to high school classes can be hard. If you need extra support, I'll help you find a tutor.

JASMINE

I have one.

MS. WILKES

In biology?

JASMINE

In every subject. I have straight A's.

MS. WILKES

Well, then, why are you leaving class?

JASMINE
(Sighs)

I'm adopted. My parents give me everything and expect me to be grateful about it.

MS. WILKES

...And that's challenging?

JASMINE

Sort of. They only do it because they're trying to scare me.

MS. WILKES

What makes you think that?

JASMINE

Two weeks ago, I came home from school and there was a picture of a horse on my bed. I was like, why is there a picture of a horse on my bed and my mom was like, it's yours.

MS. WILKES

That's Godfather-esque.

JASMINE

What does that mean?

MS. WILKES

Nevermind. That's really generous.

JASMINE

It's fucked up. Can I say that in here?

MS. WILKES

No, you can't.

JASMINE

Ask me how many times I've ridden a horse.

MS. WILKES

How many times have you ridden a horse?

JASMINE

Never. My mom made me watch Black Beauty with her and I said I *might* want to go horseback riding one day. Now, I have to go to a horse barn every other Saturday and take care of Aladdin. My white parents adopted me from India, named me Jasmine, and then bought me a horse named Aladdin. Jasmine's not even Indian.

MS. WILKES

I can see how that might be confusing.

JASMINE

They're confused. Oh, and if I say I don't want the horse, my dad will be like, if I were you, I would take advantage of the opportunities handed to me. I'm like, you go ride Aladdin.

MS. WILKES

Do you have any siblings?

JASMINE

My sister. Mulan.

MS. WILKES

Wow.

JASMINE

I'm joking. My parents couldn't have kids so they decided to buy me. Just me.

MS. WILKES

I'm an only child, too. I get it.

JASMINE

You do and you don't.

MS. WILKES

Right, um...what did your mom say after I called her yesterday?

JASMINE

She was like, did you leave class because you "got sick"?

MS. WILKES

I hope you said 'no'.

JASMINE

My answer's always 'yes'.

Ms. Wilkes gets out of her seat and sits next to Jasmine.

MS. WILKES

I don't know you that well yet, so I talked to your mom again right before this. She's concerned about you. She said you've been giving her and your dad the silent treatment.

JASMINE

Yeah, well, I need space.

MS. WILKES

(Nodding)

Every 15-year-old needs space from their parents. But, you haven't been sent to my office all year, and you haven't skipped a class before this week, as far as I know.

JASMINE

I haven't.

MS. WILKES

We just met yesterday, so I let you sit here in silence and not explain yourself, but that's not going to happen today. What's going on?

JASMINE

I told you. My parents are trying to scare me.

MS. WILKES

In what way?

JASMINE

Like, I'll get a zit—a big whitehead in the middle of my forehead—and my mom'll take me to this spa to get it injected.

MS. WILKES

I had horrible cystic acne when I was your age. I couldn't afford all those fancy medications, so I covered my face in toothpaste—

JASMINE

I *barely* made the freshman golf team, and my dad makes me work with a swing instructor and a putting coach after every team practice.

MS. WILKES

He must really believe in you—

JASMINE

I want to get my permit but my parents don't want me to stress about driving so they hired a chauffeur to drive me around.

MS. WILKES

It sounds like you come from incredible privilege—

JASMINE

I come from an orphanage.

MS. WILKES

You have access to resources your classmates, the faculty and staff, could never dream of—

JASMINE

I know. I'm a Disney princess in a perfect little world where nothing bad happens. They give me stuff and I say 'yes' and 'thank you' to most of it but—

MS. WILKES

Most of it?

JASMINE

It's a bribe. If I said what I was actually thinking, I'd say 'I don't want to be your daughter anymore'.

MS. WILKES

What did they do? Jasmine?

JASMINE

I can't roll my tongue. I guess it's a recessive trait. One or both of my biological parents have the recessive gene and gave it to me. Found that out on Monday. Yesterday, we had to fill out this chart with our dominant or recessive traits, and then for homework last night we had to fill out one for each of our parents to try and figure out which one of them gave us our traits and—

MS. WILKES

And you couldn't do it.

JASMINE

My parents can roll their tongues. They have blue eyes. They have freckles. I have dimples. I have a cleft chin. I have brown skin.

(Pinching the skin on her arm)

Why am I like this?

(Looking at Ms. Wilkes)

Do you know?

There's a knock at the door.

MS. WILKES

(Checking the clock on the wall)

That's—they're early. We've got a few minutes.

JASMINE

(Standing up)

It's cool. I have to go to my locker before geometry.

MS. WILKES

I'll write you a note.

JASMINE

I'll go to biology tomorrow. I promise.

MS. WILKES

Hold on. I have some more questions.

JASMINE

About what?

MS. WILKES

What did your parents do?

JASMINE

I meant, like, the horse. Giving me the horse.

MS. WILKES

You don't want to be their daughter anymore because they gave you a horse?

JASMINE

They didn't just *give* me a horse. They gave it to me so I would talk to them.

MS. WILKES

Talk to them about what?

JASMINE

The reason I'm upset.

MS. WILKES

Why are you upset?

JASMINE

They lied to me.

MS. WILKES

About what?

JASMINE

Everything.

MS. WILKES

C'mon, Jasmine.

JASMINE

I already have a therapist.

MS. WILKES

Fine. How long have you been in therapy?

JASMINE

Since I could talk.

MS. WILKES

Good. I'm glad you have someone you can talk to about the hard feelings you're grappling with.

JASMINE

That's a weird way to say it.

MS. WILKES

What? Hard feelings?

JASMINE

I know how to have feelings. It's not hard.

MS. WILKES

Some people struggle with their feelings, especially when they feel two contradictory things at the same time. For example, I feel sad that you and so many of your classmates are struggling with their identities, but I feel happy that I'm not entirely responsible for helping you cope. Your turn.

JASMINE

I'm annoyed that I have to be here talking to you because you're a bad guidance counselor.

Beat.

MS. WILKES

(Walks to the door of her office and opens it)

Could you give me five more minutes? I'm finishing up with a student. Thanks.

(Closes the door)

Has your therapist ever talked to you about primary and secondary emotions?

JASMINE

Yeah.

MS. WILKES

(Walking back to her desk)

Do you know the difference between the two?

JASMINE

Yup.

MS. WILKES

(Opening her top desk drawer and grabbing a chart)

Then you'll know that 'annoyed' is a secondary emotion, which follows your primary emotion, your initial, gut feeling. Take a look at this chart for me—

JASMINE

I know how to read.

(Looking at chart)

My primary emotion is anger. I feel very, very—

(Starts crying)

—angry.

MS. WILKES

I know it's scary to ask for help—

JASMINE

I'm so sick of EVERYBODY telling me I need help. I don't need help or special treatment or anything. She needed help, and they left her there. They only took me.

MS. WILKES

Who?

JASMINE

My twin sister. We were up for adoption together.

MS. WILKES

(Takes a deep breath, then)

Why—I mean—Do you know where—

JASMINE

They didn't adopt her because she's disabled.

I went into my dad's office to get my birth certificate so I could secretly apply for my permit and there were all these emails printed out with my adoption paperwork. The adoption agency told him we were both available, and he emailed back that they STRONGLY preferred a child without special needs. They said they "would be most qualified to provide a home for a healthy baby."

Like, what if I'd been disabled? Would they have left me there too? Why couldn't they love her?

MS. WILKES

I—don't know.

JASMINE

If they couldn't love her...they can't love me. Oh my god.

MS. WILKES

Hold on.

JASMINE

If I'm not loved—

MS. WILKES

I don't think it's helpful to think like that.

JASMINE

—then why am I even here?

MS. WILKES

I think you should take a deep breath. Do it with me. In—

JASMINE

I can't breathe. I'm feeling really claustrophobic.

MS. WILKES

—and out. Plant both feet on the ground—

JASMINE

Can I go?

MS. WILKES

—and name five things that you see in the room.

JASMINE

Why?

MS. WILKES

Because I said so. Name five things.

JASMINE

Your metal desk. Your black pen. Your desk lamp...

MS. WILKES

Start over. No thinking, just naming. Go, go.

JASMINE

Um. Uhhh. Carpet. Radiator. Trash can. Door. Clock.

(Beat. Jasmine checks her phone.)

Your clock's wrong. By like, a lot.

MS. WILKES

(Looking at the clock)

Well, shi—oot.

JASMINE

You can say shit. I said fuck.

MS. WILKES

I keep meaning to change it, but I get distracted by—

There's another knock at the door.

JASMINE

That.

Ms. Wilkes attempts to grab the clock above the door, but misses.

JASMINE

Give me a boost.

Ms. Wilkes interlaces her hands and Jasmine steps into them, reaching for and grabbing the clock off the wall. She hands it to Ms. Wilkes, who starts winding it to correct the time.

MS. WILKES

Thank you. We accomplished one thing today. The truth is: adults don't know what they're doing either. Everyone is surviving today. You and me, we're doing the best we can with what we've got. I don't want to sugarcoat anything. If I could go back in time and get your sister—

(Jasmine starts laughing)

—I what? Oh. Ha ha. Yeah, okay. You got me. I was trying to be serious, but—there are moments when we can fall apart and moments when we can't, and we can't fall apart right now. Naming five things and breathing are helpful when we have to put our feelings on a shelf, kind of like a book we can pick up later. We're not gonna ignore them forever; just until we have the time to unpack.

JASMINE

Could I come back tomorrow maybe?

MS. WILKES

(Placing the clock on her desk)

Mhmm.

JASMINE

Thank you.

Jasmine collects her stuff and leaves. Ms. Wilkes cautiously looks out the door and doesn't see anybody. She sits back at her desk, takes a big deep breath, and tears roll down her face. There's a knock at her door. She wipes her tears away.

MS. WILKES

Come on in.

Blackout. **END OF PLAY.**