

Horse Power: A Kyle Shannon Mystery by Linda Mickey

www.lindamickey.com

[Horse Power on Kindle](#)

Also available for Nook, Kobo, and from Smashwords

Bam-whack.

Sunny's hindquarters seemed spring-loaded his hooves hit the wall so fast. Driven by twelve hundred pounds of raging equine, the kick connected with such force the vibration traveled through the cement and tingled in my legs. The gelding tossed his head, his nostrils flaring with each exhale of hot breath.

Thump-thwack.

I stood frozen.

His hooves battered the stall wall again. Ears pinned, his eyes rolled back until the whites showed. When the volley ended, Sunny's chest heaved like he'd won the Preakness.

"What's going on? What the hell did you do to him?"

Isabella Villano, second in command at Bright Hope Equestrian Center, charged around the corner and came to an abrupt halt in front of me, her hand on the hilt of a knife attached to her belt. She wasn't tall enough to look me in the eye but her anger propelled her to nearly my height. I backed up a step.

"I didn't do anything. I swear."

"Look at him! He's freakin' goin' nuts. Did you go in the stall? What's that you're holding?" She grabbed the rectangle of paper from me, nearly cutting my palm as the edge pulled across my hand. "You waved it at him, didn't you?"

She glanced at the black text surrounded by a border of purple and gray. It read Sunny Disposition, Owner: Sal Fabrini.

"Very nice. Very la-de-da," Izzy glared as she crunched the paper and dropped it to her feet. "Now explain what got Sunny all upset."

"I was about to slide that into the frame on his stall door. When I got to here, he started kicking."

Izzy rubbed her cheek while she looked at Sunny. "That makes no sense. He doesn't go goofy just because a person is nearby. For all he knows, you're bringin' him sugar."

Sunny circled away and stopped in the back corner of the stall, lather glistening on his chest. Speaking in a low monotone, Izzy stepped gradually into the stall, her right hand extended. She kept up the soothing babble as she approached and touched Sunny's neck. He dropped his head and let her rub his muzzle. As suddenly as it began, his raging ceased; here and gone in minutes like the passing of a midday summer storm.

"Kyle, leave slowly and calmly. Bring me a rub rag and the bottle of witch hazel, please."

I had no idea where they kept rub rags but when I looked into the tack room, I spotted a pail stuffed with cloths sitting on a bench. I grabbed several, then went to shelves full of fly spray, hoof polish and other equine care products and read labels until I found the liniment. Running back to Izzy, I slowed to a walk as I approached the stall door.

Cross ties were hooked to his halter, holding Sunny in position so he couldn't turn around while Izzy inspected him for injury. She kept one of her hands on him, patting him gently as she moved from his head to his hindquarters. Then she squatted at his side.

"Did he hurt himself?" I asked.

Izzy unwound Sunny's protective leg wrap bandages and then carefully cupped her hands around the horse's legs, sliding slowly knee to hoof. She repeated the maneuver on each limb.

"I don't find heat or swelling," she said. "That's a good sign but I'll check him again in an hour or two and I'll give him a good rubdown now, just in case."

She poured witch hazel into her palm and then rubbed his legs briskly, her hands making a slap, slop noise as a minty, menthol astringent odor filled the stall. When Izzy had massaged each leg, she rubbed Sunny with a rag, starting on his neck just behind his ears and working back to his hind quarters. When she reached his hip, he flinched. She stopped immediately. Then slowly, barely touching him, she placed her hand on his rump. Again Sunny shrank from her touch.

Izzy brought her eyes level with Sunny's hindquarters. After a moment, she stepped away from him and moved slowly around the stall, her boots pushing shavings out of the way. She was near the stall door when she gasped and bent down. Uttering one expletive after another in quiet, even tones, she stood again. Then, after unclipping the cross ties, Izzy patted Sunny's shoulder, gave his neck a hug and came out of the stall, pushing the door latch into place.

A bruise blossomed on my arm the minute she clamped her fingers around it and dragged me down the aisle.