

Chapter 3

The Happy Plan Begins

The horses were ready to start their “Happy Plan”, as they were calling it, of things to do to keep learning, moving, and having fun while Coronavirus continued. Thankfully, Tulie and Annie had been coming by to play with them... But that could hardly replace the joy of having lots and lots of girls and boys to play with everyday! Everyone came up with an idea, and they decided to put their ideas into action the very next day. Sparks was first up. As soon as Annie left the ranch mid-morning, the horses congregated in the mare’s pasture to hear what Sparks’s idea was.

“I propose we start doing a morning stretch circle. We’ll all stand in a circle, and when it comes to your turn, come up with a stretch or exercise that we all have to do.”

Paddy and Brushy had their heads together snickering. “Kind of a boring idea... Just wait till you hear mine!” Brushy whispered. A fierce look from Buttons, however, stopped them dead in their tracks. They meekly turned their attention back to Sparks.

“Okay, spread out.” Sparks said, and the horses spread out in a large circle.

“How are we old people supposed to do a stretch circle?” Grumbled Little Black.

“It’ll be fun, Little Black! I love stretch circles,” was Homer’s jolly reply.

“You’ve never even been to a stretch circle!”

“Well I know I love them all the same.”

Little Black rolled his eyes. Typical Homer!



“We should start by warming up our muscles a little, shouldn’t we?” asked Ginger. “When I read, *Healthy, Happy Humans: Exercises to Keep Your Person in Top Riding Shape*, it said to have them warm up their muscles first before stretching. I assume the same principle would apply to us horses!”

“Right, good thinking Ginger. Everyone, three laps around the pasture at a walk or slow trot.” The horses set out, Willy grumbling along the way.

“I didn’t know this was a workout routine!” He looked longingly down at the grass under his feet. Such a waste to trample it like this, without eating it first!

When the three laps were up, the horses reformed their circle. Everyone was a little embarrassed by how hard they were breathing... Some of them, like Paddy and Buttons, had even started sweating a little. Sparks pretended to be busy observing a passing car. She wanted time to catch her breath before she started talking again!

“Okay, I’ll go first.” Sparks shifted her weight backwards, and stretched her front legs out in front of her, into what some may call ‘downward dog.’ In this situation, a more accurate term would be ‘downward horse!’ The horses all copied her, moans and groans could be heard as they felt the stretch.

Next was Berry’s turn. Berry stood on her hind legs and did a sort of funny wiggle with her belly and front legs.

“What was that?” Asked Little Black.

“My dance move.” Responded Berry, who carried on doing the move.



“That counts, up you get.” Buttons ordered, and all the horses grudgingly stood on their hind legs and wiggled their bellies and legs.

Brushy had them lie on their backs and twist their hips in the opposite direction as their heads. Forest had them stand up tall, stretching their hooves to the sky and taking a deep breath. Wall*E’s turn came, and he showed them how to do ten ‘burpees.’ They had to jump to the ground, do a push up, then leap in the air as high as they could, and repeat. It was exhausting!

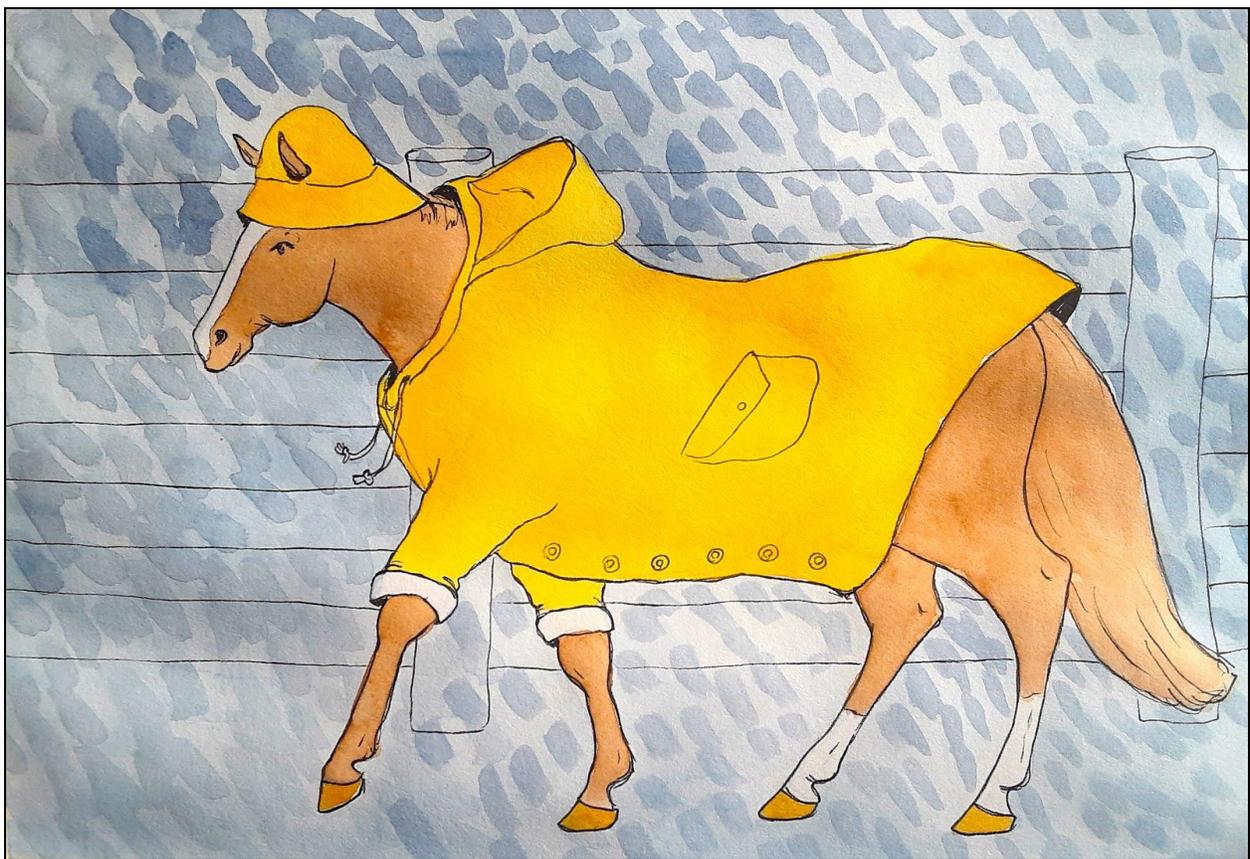
Little Black resolutely sat down after the first one, and said that it was too much for his old joints. Homer hobbled along best he could, although he was still only on burpee number three when all the other horses had finished ten. Suddenly, Finn looked over her shoulder and gave a little gasp. “Look at that cloud!” She said. The horses all looked. There was certainly a huge, black cloud scooting over the hills in their direction. As soon as she said it, the wind began to blow, and a few raindrops beat against their fur.

“It’s going to be a big one! Quick, back to your loafing sheds everyone!” The horses all scurried

for cover, and not a minute too soon. As soon as they were all back in their sheds, the storm hit. Hail pounded down on the roofs, and the wind whipped their manes and tails into knots. "Oh no," fretted Berry, "I'm never going to be able to get these knots out of my tail without the help of my girls!" No one, however, heard this petty complaint. The wind was too loud!

The storm didn't last long in its full force, but even after the hail and strong winds had abated, heavy rain continued, steadily and drearily. Sparks was feeling particularly disappointed. Her first "Happy Plan" session had been ruined by the rain. None of the horses would want to continue in the rain, she felt sure, and by the time the rain stopped Annie would probably be back for PM chores. She sighed. It looked like it would be just another long day waiting and dreaming.

Ginger, however, had other ideas. "Where are you going?" Finn called, her voice full of apprehension. "I'll be back," said Ginger, and she dashed out into the rain and towards the hay barn.



She returned several minutes later, wearing one of the spare raincoats from the office. "Come with me!" she called to all the horses. The first showing starts in five minutes!" The horses looked questioningly at each other. The first showing? The first showing of what? They followed her to the office, some more willingly than others. They didn't all fit into the office, so some gathered in the tackroom, and others in the breezeway, where it was at least dry. "We are going to watch a movie!" Said Ginger. "What better way to spend a rainy day? And maybe we can learn something from it too."

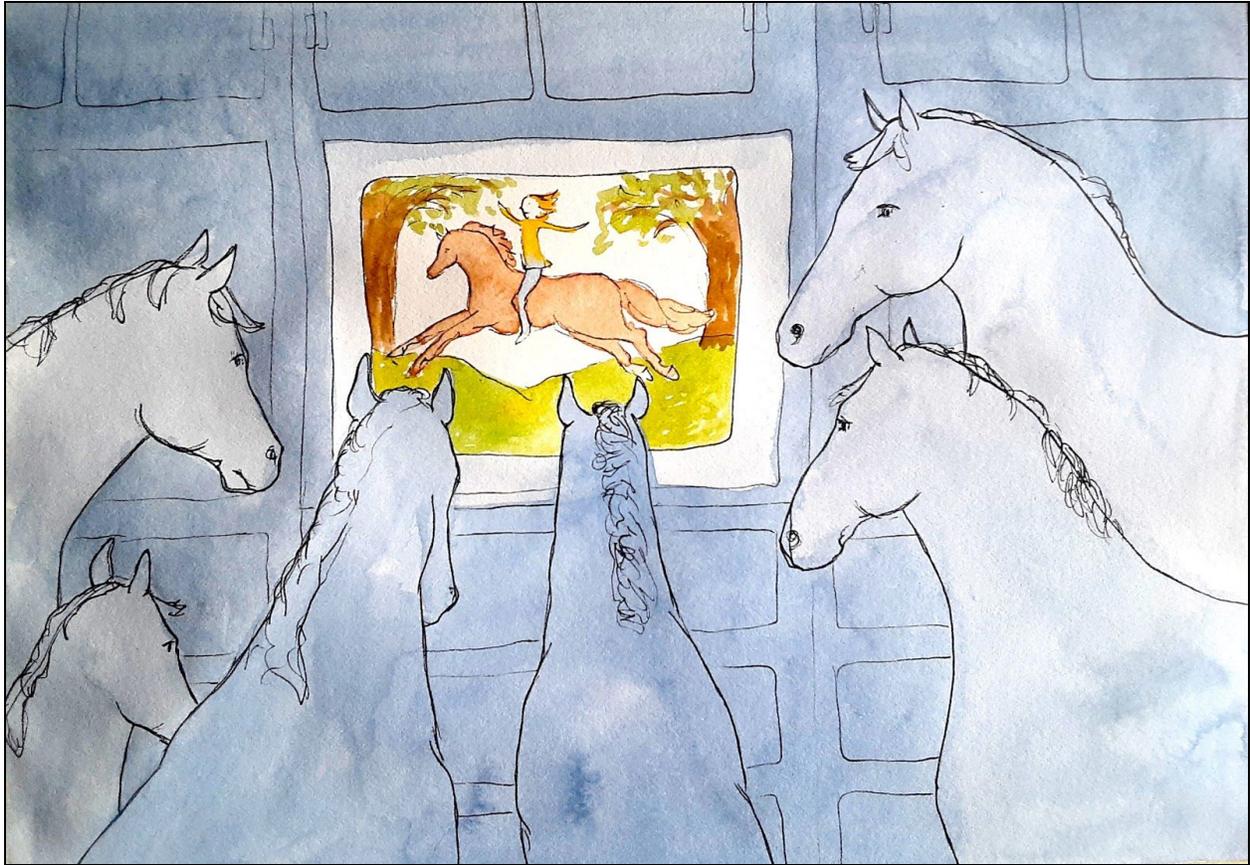
"Ooo! A movie!" Berry squealed.

"Is it the vaulting one?" Buttons wanted to know.

"No, it's *Wild Hearts Can't Be Broken*."

“Oh boy! I love that one. It always makes me cry.” Homer said smiling.

“But where will we all sit? We don’t all fit in the office.” Asked Myles, looking doubtfully at the rain pouring down outside.



“I’ve already figured that out. Wall*E and Berry can sit on the floor by the TV. They are small so they won’t block the view. Willy, Sparks, Myles and Little Black will be in the next row, here by Kam’s table. Then Brushy, Paddy, and Homer, you three here by the computer. Buttons and Forest can stand by the mounting ramp-- it’s out of the rain too-- and put their heads through the windows. Finn and I will stand on the mounting ramp and look in through the windows too, above Forest and Buttons’s heads. Everyone excitedly got into position, and Berry pushed play. All snuggled up together, they were warm and dry. And watching a movie is such a cozy thing for a rainy day! They laughed at all the right parts, and many of them cried too. Brushy was crying, although he tried to hide it from Paddy. Little did he know, Paddy was crying too! Even Little Black shed a few tears. Homer was bawling, and didn’t even try to hide it.

Despite disappointment, the horses once again pulled through and had a good time together. They all felt happy and content. Afterall, the only thing that could have made it better, as Willy thought wistfully, was if they had some popcorn...