

## Leila's Book #1 By K. M. Shea

I was on my way out the door from my parents' house on a hot June day, eager to launch my long-cherished plan to become a Productive Member of Society, when I glanced over at the horse pasture and saw it. A night mare.

It was a skeletal creature that was only vaguely horse-like. Even from this far away I could see the bulges and indents of its bones. Its ribs and spines stuck out uncomfortably so, and its neck was too thin it made its head look huge and blocky.

And it was standing about three feet away from Bagel, our pet donkey.

I dropped the folder—which contained three copies of my resume, which I was going to drop off at a small marketing company in downtown Magiford—and ran to the fence, almost face planting when the dewy grass combined with my flats, which I had busted out for this hopeful occasion, made me slip.

"It's fine. It's fine—it's fine!" I smacked into the wooden horse fence. Shock was starting to numb my brain, so when I vaulted over the fence I vaguely noticed the white fence paint was starting to peel.

Once inside I slowed to a fast, tense walk—running up to the thing would probably triple my chances of getting trampled—and called out to Bagel in a raspy-but-hopefully-not-too-scared-sounding voice. "Bagel!"

Bagel peeled his lips back and smiled at me, totally unconcerned with the creature standing behind him that was capable of killing him in seconds.

I slowed down even more when I was almost within reaching distance of Bagel.

"Come on, Bagel. Let's go back to the barn and get some treats!" I called.

Bagel swished his bony tail, flicked his enormous ears, and didn't move.

The killer horse didn't seem worried about my floundering arrival.

It flicked its wispy tail—and its mane was just as thin and limp, though its coat looked crusty and dull. Pupil-less eyes that were a curdled yellow added to the animal's ghastly appearance, especially because it stared me down with the vicious intelligence of a fae creature. Obviously—there was no way this thing was natural.

Bagel took a step closer to it.

"Oh, yes, I see you have a *friend*. But let's not annoy her and go back to the stables," I said with fake brightness.

The fae horse snorted at me, showing the red of its nostrils and pulling its skin taut so I could see the lines of its skull.

Bagel—the idiot donkey—hee-hawed happily at me, then grabbed another mouthful of grass.

I wiped my sweaty hands on my black slacks— even if I was just dropping my resume off, I figured it would be most professional to dress for success. "It's fine. This is fine. I can totally get you safely out of here before your friend kills us both."

Bagel didn't look up from grazing, the gluttonous pig.

"I'm glad one of us is calm about this," I sourly said.

The fae horse took a step closer to Bagel, and my stomach belly flopped.

*How am I going to do this? That thing looks capable of murder!*