

## Shelby and the Ghost

*By Angela Dorsey, Lexi, Sara, Kara, Shelby, Nicole, Tessa, and Samantha*

“Come on, Sunshine! Hurry!” Shelby urged her beautiful Saddlebred forward. “Dad’s home!” The mare’s chestnut coat shone in the warm sun as she trotted down the long driveway toward the house.

“Shelby! Sunshine! So how do you like riding at your new house?” Shelby’s dad asked.

“I love it! We have hundreds of acres of land! There’s a beach, forest, meadows, mountains, and a lake!” Shelby had the biggest smile on her face. She leaned forward to throw her arms around her horse’s red neck. “We’re going to have a blast here!”

Shelby dismounted and with her dad at her side, led Sunshine into the huge stable. She put Sunshine in the wash stall and quickly tied and untacked her, then carried the saddle to the tack room across the aisle. She could just imagine all her ribbons and trophies in the display case, once she had them unpacked.

Her dad was stroking Sunshine when she came out of the tack room with her grooming kit in hand. “So tell me about today,” he said.

“We the most fun ride ever! We went to the lake and there were huge flocks of geese.”

“You didn’t go swimming in the lake, did you? It’s very deep.”

“I know, I know! We didn’t swim. There wasn’t enough time. There’s still so much to see here—and everything is just so beautiful!” Excited energy fuelled Shelby’s brushing and soon Sunshine’s coat was gleaming more brightly than ever. “And our house is so big! I bet it’s crawling with old mysteries!”

“Well, I’m glad you like the place,” her dad said, tousling Shelby’s short mop of golden curls. “I’ll leave you to finish up. I have lots to do too.”

After Sunshine was groomed, Shelby led the mare outside. They stopped in the doorway to stare across the green expanse. It seemed their land would never end. How lucky they were!

Suddenly a strange boy dashed around the corner of the stable. Sunshine half reared when he pushed Shelby back into the stable and slammed the double doors behind them!

“What are you doing? DAAAAAAAAD!” Shelby started to scream, but the boy put his hand over Shelby’s mouth.

“Shhh... I need to tell you something.”

“What?”

“This stable is haunted.” The boy pointed to the ground. “A phantom horse and rider appear every Saturday night. Legend says that a girl and her horse lived here and one night the girl went out for a ride in the forests to see her boyfriend. Her dad didn’t like the guy because he was outlaw, and when he found out that she was sneaking out to visit him, he called the sheriff. The sheriff caught the boy the next day and took him to jail where he was hanged for his crimes—the girl, furious, ran away with her horse. No one knows exactly what happened to her because she was never seen again, but sometimes you can hear her crying in her horse’s old stall.”

“What was her name?” Shelby had totally forgotten her fear. A mystery! This beautiful old place was even more wonderful than she’d imagined.

“Her name was Chloe and her horse’s name was Moonlight. He was he was black with white stockings, and had a unique crescent shaped star on his forehead.”

Suddenly the boy spun around to stare at the stall across from Sunshine’s. Shelby’s gaze followed his. No one was there. This guy was so weird! She moved closer to Sunshine and burrowed her face in her horse’s mane for a moment. When she looked up, her mouth dropped open in surprise. The boy was running toward the far end of the barn as if someone was chasing him. Moments later, he was out another door and gone.

That night Shelby couldn’t sleep. She tossed and turned, but came to no concrete answers. Was the story true, or was the boy just crazy? Finally, early in the morning, she relaxed enough to close her eyes—and she was suddenly inside the stable! Shelby shivered as the cold air danced around her bare toes and sunk through her pajamas and into her skin. How did she end up out here? Shelby looked down at her mud-blackened toes and pulled a twig out of her hair. Why was she so dirty? Had she been sleepwalking?

Sunshine was looking at her curiously from over her half door. Her sleek head was bridled... What? Nothing made any sense.

Quickly, Shelby removed the bridle and returned it to the tack room. Then she got a sugar cube for the mare and gave her a lingering hug—Sunshine was so warm!—and hurried back to the house in the early dawn light.

“So what did you do out in the woods?”

Shelby spun around. It was that odd boy again! “What?”

“You heard me,” he said. “I saw you coming back from the woods on your horse just a few minutes ago.”

“Who are you and why do you keep bothering me?!” Shelby snapped at him, avoiding his confusing question.

“My name’s Gabriel; I live in a cabin over there.” Gabriel pointed and though Shelby looked, she could see no cabin. “Your father hired me to help with the gardens. Didn’t you know?”

“No, I didn’t.” Shelby answered. She hurried into her house... There was something about Gabriel that she made her want to run and hide. He was just too creepy.

Once she was in the safety of her home, Shelby hung her feet over the bath tub to rinse them off. As the warm water streamed over her feet, she thought of what had happened. Had she really ridden Sunshine into the woods? Bridled her and everything? And she must have dismounted her at some point, because her feet were all muddy. Just what was she thinking?

Shelby yawned as she dried off her feet. She’d figure this out later. She was so tired. Back in bed, she felt her eyelids get heavier and heavier. Soon she was asleep.

*“It was just a stupid necklace! You can’t do this, Dad! You just can’t! I love him!” The girl threw herself into her father’s arms.*

*“Chloe, I warned you that I didn’t want you hanging out with this lowlife thief, and I meant it. I’m a man of my word, and because of you, he’s going to jail today.” The father flung his daughter to the ground. “Sheriff, do your job!”*

*“Don’t worry, Chloe... I’ll make it. I always do,” the handsome boy told Chloe.*

*“You evil people. You can’t do this to John! He’s changed!”* Tears gushed from Chloe’s eyes as her father grabbed her and picked her up. Helplessly, she screamed as he carried her back to the house...

Shelby woke up breathing heavily. Moments later, she was running to the stable.

“Sunshine!” Shelby hurried to her mare’s stall. In the daylight, she could now see what she’d missed last night. Sunshine was filthy! “Let’s get you cleaned up.” Shelby started to brush Sunshine.

“I know why she’s so dirty,” Gabriel said from behind her, making Shelby jump.

She turned toward him, her eyes cold. “Hey, quit following me! I’m telling you to back off or I’ll tell my dad to fire you!”

Gabriel rolled his eyes. “Don’t you get it? I’ve been trying to warn you! Chloe and her phantom horse visited you last night, didn’t they?”

“Like you know everything, Legend Boy,” Shelby said disdainfully, even though her hand was trembling. Quickly she dropped her brushing hand to her side, so Gabriel wouldn’t see.

“I know a lot. I’ve lived here forever, you know.” He winked at Shelby. “And one thing I know for sure, Chloe only shows up when there’s a girl around—she thinks that somehow they stand in her way of seeing her boyfriend again.”

“Shut up!” Shelby snapped. What right did he have to be scaring her all the time anyway?

Gabriel wouldn’t stop there. “A lot of the girls end up going out in the woods and not really remembering it, just like you.” He casually got a broom and started to sweep cobwebs down from the ceiling. When he saw Shelby glaring at him, his smile grew larger. “If you don’t want Chloe to haunt you, I recommend you don’t go to sleep.” And with a chuckle he disappeared around the corner.

“He’s just trying to scare me,” Shelby said to Sunshine, with a shake of her head. Another leaf, one that she’d missed from the night before, fluttered to the straw in the stall. Shelby couldn’t stop staring at it.

Someone whispered behind her, but when she spun around, there was no one there. For the first time, she wished Gabriel would come back. She looked both ways before stepping out of the stall. “Is anyone here?”

Silence.

“I heard you. You better show yourself. You’re trespassing, you know!”

She shrugged and tried to appear calm—which was pretty silly since there wasn’t anyone around. She ran her hand over Sunshine’s back and said soothingly, “It’s okay, Sunshine. He’s just telling stories—stupid stories.” Her heartbeat had returned to normal and she was almost smiling as she finished tidying up Sunshine. “He did have me going for a minute there—”

A sudden movement in the stall across from Sunshine cut Shelby off mid-sentence. Every hair on the back of Shelby’s neck stood up. A cold, spidery legged shiver crawled up her spine. She must be imagining things! She looked at Sunshine for reassurance, but there was none to be had. Her gentle mare had her ears pinned back against her skull and was staring just as wild-eyed as Shelby.

A mysterious glowing horse stood just feet away from Shelby. And even worse, the horse had a glowing girl-shaped person mounted upon it.

Despite the fear that was swirling in her belly now, Shelby couldn't help staring. Was that a crescent shaped star on the horse's forehead?

A sudden shriek cut through the air and Shelby realized with horror that it was her own scream. Powerless to resist, she was swooped from the ground by some invisible force and thrown onto the glowing horse's back. She heard Sunshine whinny—a thin nervous sound—behind her, then the ghost horse reared and galloped out of the stable, into the forest...

Shelby was losing control. She was aware of what went on around her, but it was as if someone else was controlling her.

"What's going on?" she tried to scream, but she couldn't move her lips or use her vocals.

"Quit yelling, you're giving me a headache!" a voice in her head whined. "The better you cooperate the sooner you can go back home, but for now I must see him!"

Who said that? Shelby was sure she'd seen a person on the glowing horse's back, but now it was only her in the saddle—yet she didn't feel alone...

"I want to go home!" Shelby threw her fists in the air trying to hit the unexpected guest.

"Stop your moaning!" the voice in her head said angrily. Shelby felt a sharp pinch in the tender part of her arm.

The phantom horse galloped faster until it reached a gate.

"Omigosh! We're not going in there are we?" Shelby choked.

"Who said we? Just to let you know. I'm here to pick up a guest. Now scoot over so the guest can sit."

Before Shelby's eyes, the invisible voice took form, a form very similar to Shelby's own. And the furious expression on the phantom's face made all of Shelby's questions die in her throat...

This must be Chloe and Moonlight!

"Where are we going?" Shelby asked when she had her voice back.

"I want to show you something," Chloe answered.

Moonlight galloped on until they got to a small tumbledown house. "This is where John lived." Chloe's voice wasn't angry anymore; it was sad. "He had a horse too. Obsidian!" she called.

A majestic black horse walked from behind the house. When it saw Chloe and Moonlight, it began to gallop toward them.

"Get on Obsidian," Chloe said, "and follow me." Shelby slipped off Moonlight and got on Obsidian. The two black horses began to gallop. They galloped all the way back to Shelby's stable.

"Why are we here?" Shelby slipped off Obsidian.

"Call your horse to come to you, Shelby," Chloe said. Shelby turned to look at her. Chloe's eyes were determined. "Call your horse."

Shelby thought she was crazy, but yelled anyway, "Sunshine! Girl, come here!" There was a loud kicking sound, followed by the noise of wood splintering, and Sunshine appeared at the door. Seeing her owner, she galloped straight toward her.

Chloe threw back her head and laughed a chilling laugh. "It seems I have another young Angel rider on my hands, but don't you worry, my beauties," she said to

Moonlight and Obsidian. “I made a mistake as an Angel rider, and Crystal killed me. I will find and destroy every Angel rider!”

A shiver ran down Shelby’s spine. This girl was insane! What was she doing? “What’s an Angel rider? What happened?” Shelby asked.

Chloe’s eyes glittered coldly as she looked at Shelby, but then she began to speak: “I was a young and alive once, full of happiness, then I met John and everything changed . . .” For a moment Chloe’s eyes softened, went almost misty, but then the cold look returned. “Dad couldn’t stand John. I guess you know the rest of that part of the story...

“I had heard of Angel riders—girls with strong bonds to their horses who help make the world better—and when I ran away, I found the Angel rider leader, Crystal, and her horse, Dawn Runner. Crystal made me an Angel rider, and for awhile life was good. But then I was accused of theft. I went to Crystal for help, but she thought I was guilty too and killed me for it. Dawn Runner lives with wild horses now—and I will find and destroy every other Angel rider too, then their horses can join Dawn Runner!” She let out her chilling, cackling laugh again. “And clearly you are a Angel rider. Sunshine broke her door to get to you; that means you have a special bond with her.”

Chloe motioned to Obsidian, and he strode over to Sunshine and pressed her up against the side of the barn, holding her so she couldn’t move.

“Sunshine!” Shelby called. Sunshine rolled her eyes back and neighed.

Chloe moved Moonlight so that they stood right in front of Shelby. “And as for you—”

But before Chloe could finish, Sunshine screamed and kicked out at Obsidian. The black stallion was knocked away. Sunshine galloped straight to Shelby. Shelby launched herself at her horse. Riding bareback, she and Sunshine raced across the meadow.

Chloe got up on Moonlight and gave chase. A few times Chloe almost caught up to them, but Sunshine seemed to know how important it was to get away.

The meadows gave way to the woods. Dangerous! Shelby thought. Chloe will know this forest way better than us. As if reading Shelby’s mind, Sunshine veered sharply, running a ragged trail to the river. Wouldn’t they be trapped by the water though? Shelby breathed out in relief when she saw the bridge—but her relief was short-lived.

Obsidian was standing at the other side of the bridge! Sunshine tried to vault over him, but the big black reared up, kicking the mare in the stomach. Sunshine fell to the ground; Shelby managed to jump off before she got crushed. She crawled over to Sunshine on her hands and knees, and started to sob.

“Your time’s up Angel rider,” said Chloe.

“I’m so sorry, Chloe,” Shelby said sincerely through her sobs.

“What?” asked Chloe.

“I’m sorry for what happened to you. Crystal sounds mean. Did she even listen to your story?”

“No,” Chloe said. Her voice sounded choked, and when Shelby looked up, she saw Chloe’s eyes were misty.

Shelby really did feel bad for Chloe. “I’d like to hear your side of the story and if you really didn’t steal—”

“I really didn’t!” Chloe interrupted in a hurt voice. She started to move towards Shelby.

“I’d like to help you if I can, but first will you tell me your story?” Sunshine raised her head and Shelby stroked her neck.

“No one ever listened to me....” Chloe said. She walked to the other side of the bridge with Moonlight to sit near Obsidian. Both horses looked calmer. Chloe sat down and started telling her the story.

“One time on a date with John, I was admiring the necklace in a store. When we went to dinner later, he handed me the necklace. I refused it at first, because I thought he had stolen it. He was hurt and insisted that he hadn’t—that he’d snuck in and bought it when I was trying on shoes and he’d said he had to go to the restroom. I, well... I believed him.

“Crystal had known about John’s past, and when I wanted to become an Angel rider, she was very intent on making sure I wasn’t a thief. I convinced her that I wasn’t, I guess, and like I said before, things went well. Then one day I happened to be wearing the necklace when Crystal was around... When she saw it, she recognized it from some stolen goods report... Nothing I could say made her believe that I wasn’t responsible for it being stolen... And well...you know the rest.”

Shelby was quiet for a long time. Finally, she spoke. “What aren’t you telling me—There’s more to this, isn’t there?”

Chloe’s eyes narrowed, but then she let out a defeated sounding sigh; pictures and words started to form inside of Shelby’s head.

*Chloe took a sharp surprised breath as John slid a beautiful silver necklace with sparkling diamonds set into a crescent shaped pendant into her palm. “Oh, John! It’s beautiful—where’d you ever get it?” A little trickle of worry dampened Chloe’s happiness. “You didn’t steal it, did you?”*

*“No, never—I would never give you a stolen present, I promise!” John’s dark eyes looked pained. “I told you, I’ve changed.”*

*Chloe felt ashamed. “I know... and I believe you. It’s just... Well, it’s so beautiful, I can’t quite understand that it’s for me.”*

*John smiled. “You deserve beautiful things.” He moved from his seat and gently put the necklace around Shelby’s neck and did up the clasp. At first the diamond pendant felt cold against her skin, but it quickly warmed up with her body’s heat.*

*“Thank you so much,” she said. “But I hope you know you never have to buy me expensive presents... I just really like you.”*

*John didn’t say anything, just took her hand and held it for a moment, then kissed it. Then their food arrived and as they ate and talked and laughed, Chloe put the awkward moment behind her.*

*Chloe waited outside on a bench, enjoying the evening air, while John ran to do some quick errand. She couldn’t believe how lucky she was. If only her dad could see how great John was, things would be perfect!*

*Once the date was over, John mounted Obsidian and held his hand out for Chloe. As Chloe climbed up, John snatched the necklace off her neck.*

*“John! How dare you grab a lady’s jewelry—even if you bought it!” Chloe said jokingly, slapping at his hand.*

*“Sorry! My hand slipped. Here you go.” John handed the necklace back... but wait... It looked the same, but it wasn’t. The moon pendant was slightly rounder and not as heavy. The stones decorating it didn’t shine as brightly....*

Shelby was brought back to her the present; the images had stopped, and Chloe was talking again.

“He had bought a necklace that looked like the one he’d originally given me, and switched them. The next day he was caught and sent to jail and eventually hung. I was sad, so very sad. I thought he really had changed for me.” Chloe started to weep.

Bits of the story Shelby had been shown and told swirled around in her mind. Why steal a necklace, give it as a present, then try to switch it? If he’d wanted to sell it, would he have bothered to give to Chloe in the first place? Something clicked:

John wasn’t a real thief, at least not that time. He stole the necklace for Chloe, but then felt guilty—maybe because of her assurance that she loved him without fancy presents? He must’ve bought a look-a-like to swap it for, so that he could return the stolen one without having to admit he lied in the first place...

Slowly, still thinking about the details, but then speaking more quickly and louder as she realized she was right, Shelby explained her thoughts about what had happened.

Chloe’s long blonde hair flew in the wind and her blue eyes began to water. Tears ran in a river down her tan skin.

“That finally makes sense... Oh, I’m such a jerk! They’re all jerks! And the liars hung John for no reason! Baby, I’m sorry! Please forgive me!” Chloe stood up and held her arms toward the sky. A young man appeared in a cloud of dust; Shelby could only assume this was Chloe’s beloved John. The sound of hoof beats pounded through the sky.

“It’s okay; it’s not your fault. I should never have stolen or lied in the first place!” John vanished again, and the sky turned black. The hoof beats turned into thunder and lightning, and the sky began to pour.

The rain plastered Shelby’s hair to her skull, but she wasn’t going to leave Chloe. Even if she was a ghost. She inched toward her.

“Chloe, come back to the stable with me.” she said gently, reaching out to wipe the girl’s tear streaked cheek, but the ghost was untouchable.

“Okay,” Chloe’s voice was choked. They walked into the stable together. Shelby put Sunshine in the spare stall. “I’ll get my dad to repair her door tomorrow,” Shelby said. Then Shelby and Chloe walked outside together. Shelby’s eyes dropped to the ground. She would have to say good-bye.

“I’ll miss you, Chloe,” Shelby managed to say.

“I’ll miss too,” Chloe answered. “Thank you so much for helping me, especially when I was all set to hurt you. I think John and I will be able to find each other now—on nights with a full moon, you’ll see me and him riding through the sky. Watch for us.” A silver tear fell from Chloe’s eye as she said good-bye. Then she stretched out her hands and silver stardust wrapped around her, Moonlight and Obsidian. They all started to fade away.

“Good-bye, Chloe!” Shelby shouted to the sky. Then she slowly walked back to the stable. “Wow, Sunshine,” she said to her mare. “I was right when I said there were mysteries at this place, but I had no idea. We are going to have a blast here!”