



One

‘Something’s definitely going on!’ said Hannah.

Charlotte looked puzzled, and blinked hard beneath a quizzical frown.

‘What is? What’s definitely going on?’ She tried to sound interested but was actually more concerned with getting Mandrake’s bridle on before he started playing up. If Charlotte didn’t slip the bit behind Mandrake’s teeth at exactly the right moment he would go on strike and clamp his jaws tight. And when Mandrake did that, you needed a crowbar to get the snaffle in. Or at least a peppermint!



‘YES!’ Charlotte exclaimed in triumph as Mandrake took the bit. She turned her attention back to Hannah, who had long since finished tacking up Flash and was now busy with other thoughts.

‘So what’s definitely going on?’ asked Charlotte again.

‘It’s Miles,’ said Hannah. She reached forward to smooth out Flash’s creamy mane and give him a good rub behind his ears. Flash was a golden palomino whose coat shone like shot silk in the early morning sunlight. ‘Miles is definitely up to something!’

Miles was Hannah’s stepbrother. He was sixteen and dead keen to be a newspaper journalist when he left school. He now had a Saturday job, helping out at the offices of

the local paper. And he'd already managed to get two small news reports printed. Both pieces had been about Hannah. The first was an account of her heroic rescue ride down a Welsh mountain after an accident on an adventure holiday. And the second was about Hannah and her friends saving the old mill on the downs from burning to the ground.

Miles was always on the lookout for a good scoop. He was always in the background somewhere, snooping about like a shadow.

Hannah explained. 'I've noticed that Miles has been leaving the house really early for the last four days. Much earlier than usual. He always leaves before seven anyway for his newspaper round. But since Monday he's been slipping out before six.'

'How do you know?' said Charlotte. 'And why are you awake at that time, anyway?'

'It's the gravel,' said Hannah. 'Those fat tyres on his new mountain bike make a real noise on the drive. And it's right below my bedroom window, so I hear him crunching past as he leaves. Yes! Miles is definitely up to something!'

'I bet it's that ghost pony,' said Charlotte, matter-of-factly. Then she checked Mandrake's girth.

'Ghost pony! *What* ghost pony?' Hannah couldn't believe her ears. She knew nothing

about any ghost pony and was surprised that Charlotte did and hadn't told her.

Charlotte pushed her dark hair back off her forehead and crammed her riding hat down on to her head.

'You know,' she said casually. '*The* ghost pony. I'm sure I told you. Or someone else must have.'

'You didn't tell me about any ghost pony,' complained Hannah. 'No one did. I can't believe *you* didn't tell me either. I'm probably the last person in the whole universe to know about it! How could you not tell me?'

'Keep your hair on,' teased Charlotte. 'It's no big deal.' She suddenly felt really embarrassed that she had forgotten to tell her best friend about it. 'It's only a story that's going round, Han.'

'And who told you?'

'I overheard my mum on the phone telling her friend about a strange white pony which has been spotted up on the moors. Only a few people have seen it,' continued Charlotte, 'but they all report the same thing. A thin, ghostly pale pony which suddenly appears from nowhere, then disappears back into the mist again before anyone can get a really close look.'

'Wow!' breathed Hannah. 'That's fantastic! And I bet that's exactly what big

bruvver Milo is up to. He's out on that moor looking for this phantom pony so that he can write about it for the paper. I can see it now: GHOST PONY HAUNTS MOOR!

'You'd make a great detective, Han,' laughed Charlotte. 'Sharp as a razor, you are.'

Hannah pulled a face. 'If you're so clever, then tell me why Miles hasn't said anything? Why is he being so secretive? I would have thought that I was the first person he would have confided in.'

'I can't believe you've said that, Han. It's quite obvious. Miles knows exactly what you're like. You'd be begging to tag along. You know you would. You'd cramp his style and spoil it for him.'

'No, I wouldn't!' complained Hannah bitterly. Then, 'Yes, I would,' she admitted honestly. 'But wait till I catch up with him anyway. I shan't beg to go along with him. But I *shall* pester him until he tells me everything he knows about it!'

Charlotte swung herself up into the saddle and laughed. 'Something tells me I'm going to be up on that moor really early tomorrow morning.'

'Earlier than you think!' grinned Hannah.



Two

At the very first opportunity, Hannah gave Miles a good grilling. She caught him just at the right moment, the second he arrived home from school.

Poor Miles hadn't even reached the house when Hannah leaped out of the shrubbery and grabbed his handlebars. Miles's bike ground to a crunching halt. Hannah stood there with his front wheel clamped between her knees.

'Gotcha!' she grinned menacingly.

'Oh no!' groaned Miles. 'The Spanish Inquisition. I knew it was only a matter of time!'

Miles was so desperate to get away that he told Hannah everything right there and then.

‘OK, Hannah. Sorry if I shut you out. But it was something I had to do on my own. I wanted a story for the *Echo* and I didn’t want anyone else around spoiling it.’

‘Spoil it! How could I spoil it?’ complained Hannah. She looked hurt and dejected.

‘Be real, Hannah. You would have got overexcited at the first sighting,’ said Miles. ‘You *know* you would. *If* I saw this ghost pony – which I haven’t – I didn’t want to scare it off in two seconds flat.’

‘I could have helped,’ insisted Hannah, but really she knew that Miles was right. He usually was. If she had seen the ghost pony, Hannah would probably have screamed. She would have become so excited that she wouldn’t have been able to stop herself.

‘Anyway,’ continued Miles. ‘I’ve been scouting the moor for days now and I haven’t seen a thing. No ghost. No pony. Nothing!’

Hannah jumped in with her own theory.

‘Maybe you’ve not been looking in the right places. Perhaps you should have asked me, after all. I know all about ponies. Even ghost ones,’ she added. ‘I bet I could have found it. And don’t tell me you were out looking on this mountain bike!’ Hannah’s eyes rolled up to her brows. ‘No wonder you

haven't seen anything. You need a pony. A real pony to attract a ghost one.'

Hannah had already made up her mind. It was going to be easy. *She* would be the one to solve this mystery of the haunted moor. With a little help, of course, from Charlotte and Jade.

The next day was Friday, so Hannah decided that they should be up on the moor really early to fit in a good hour's search before school.

Hannah telephoned Charlotte and told her to be ready in the paddock at six.

'Six! Are you crazy?'

'We could make it earlier, if you like!' said Hannah.

'Very funny. Like five-fifty-five, you mean?'

'Oh, be a sport, Charlie. It's got to be that early. Miles said there have only been three real sightings, and they were all in the early hours of the morning; between six and seven-thirty.'

'I thought ghosts only came out at night!' queried Charlotte.

'So did I,' said Hannah. 'But apparently this one doesn't. It's an early bird.'

'I thought it was a pony!' joked Charlotte.

'Ha ha ha. Does that mean you'll come, then?' said Hannah. 'I'll even promise to laugh at *all* your crummy jokes if you do!'

‘You’d better, Hannah Robinson. Or I’ll torture you and force you to listen to them twice.’

‘I’m not *that* desperate, Charlotte Partridge.’

‘Yes, you are. See you in the paddock at six.’ Then Charlotte hung up and Hannah found herself laughing down the vacant mouthpiece.

She knew she could rely on Charlotte. Now she just had to telephone Jade. Hannah couldn’t wait to tell her her plan.

The following morning was crisp and frosty. The sun had barely woken up and, as yet, hadn’t gathered enough strength to burn away the misty veil which hung over the Willows.

Charlotte looked half-asleep beneath her riding hat as she sat astride Mandrake with her eyes closed. Hannah mounted alongside, swinging herself lightly on to Flash’s back. The air was still. The only sounds were those of jangling bits and the creak of saddle leather.

A small patch of sunlight eked its way through the band of trees which lined the far side of the paddock. Hannah drew in a long, deep breath. The morning smelled good. It was always great riding with the early sun.

‘Are you ready?’



Charlotte opened one lazy green eye.

‘As ready as I’ll ever be,’ she muttered. ‘This had better be good!’

The two ponies were already alert and wide awake. Ready for anything. Ears pricked, eyes bright, they snorted and sniffed the fresh, dewy air.

Hannah clapped Flash’s arched neck and ruffled his creamy mane. ‘What ghost pony is going to be able to resist making friends with this beauty!’

Flash really was a stunning pony. A golden palomino with fine features, a long ivory-coloured tail, and a creamy-white mane. He was a direct contrast to the dark majesty and power of Mandrake. Side by side, the ponies made a magnificent pair.

‘Walk on,’ Charlotte urged Mandrake forward. ‘If we don’t leave soon, I’m off back to bed!’

She leaned forward wearily and unhooked the latch on the paddock gate. Hannah followed, and soon the two friends were trotting their ponies down the deserted lane, on their way to the moor.