

The background is a teal-toned illustration of a winter farm scene. It features a barn on the left, a horse running on the right, and a pickaxe in the center. A white picket fence runs across the bottom. The scene is set against a backdrop of stylized trees. The entire illustration is framed by a white house-like shape.

Lena Garza

ACCIDENTAL DETECTIVE

BONE HILLS

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CHAPTER 1

STRANGE POWERS

The sun was shining in downtown Apple Glen. Mrs. Carson parked the car in front of Rothman's Fine Antiques. A banner hung in the window. It read, "25th Anniversary Sale! Apple Glen's Favorite Antique Store Since 1945."

Donna jumped out of the car and hurried toward the entrance. Her mom followed. As they went in, a bell on the door rang.

"Welcome!" a woman called. She smiled at them from behind the counter.

"Hello!" Mrs. Carson replied. "We drove

over from Wood Dale. A friend recommended your store. Do you know Jo Ann Hickman?"

"Yes, of course!" the saleswoman said. "How can I help you?"

"My daughter's senior prom is coming up. We're looking for a string of pearls."

"Oh, how special," the saleswoman replied. "So you're in the class of 1970! School dances are such fun. I remember my prom like it was yesterday."

As the two women talked, Donna turned away and rolled her eyes. Her mom loved to chat with anyone. At least this gave Donna a chance to browse.

The shop was filled with an assortment of old things. Carved wooden figurines, books, and old-fashioned oil lamps lined the shelves. One table displayed a collection of jewelry and accessories. Donna noticed a beautiful hairbrush and hand mirror. She wondered who had owned them before.

Behind the mirror sat a small, dusty jewelry box. Donna opened it and smiled. Inside was a brooch in the shape of a horseshoe. The image of a horse's head was in the center.

“Mom!” she called. “Look at this!” The gold brooch seemed made for her. Riding horses was her favorite hobby. She had once owned a horse named Goldie.

Her mother was busy chatting and did not turn around.

Donna removed the brooch from the box to examine it. She noticed that the clasp was bent. It would not fasten properly. “That can be fixed,” she said to herself as she pinned it to her dress. Then she grabbed the hand mirror and held it up to admire the brooch.

Suddenly, she felt light-headed. The room seemed to get brighter. She blinked a few times while staring into the mirror. Then the store began to spin. Her head and body grew

heavy. Donna had to grab the table to steady herself. When she did, the brooch fell off her dress.

Everything stopped. She was no longer dizzy. The store looked just as it had before.

“Donna!” her mom called.

She hurried back to the counter.

“I’m afraid they don’t have any pearls,” Mrs. Carson said. She looked at her daughter. “Are you all right? You look as pale as a ghost.”

Donna forced a smile. “I’m fine,” she said, her voice trembling. She glanced warily back at the brooch. “Can I wait for you in the car?”



CHAPTER 2

CHARMING

Luna Garza slumped over her desk, feeling tired. Her best friend, Amber Robbins, sat next to her. Amber rested her chin in her hand. Their teammate, Cooper Sims, stood in front of their desks. He bounced back and forth like he was warming up for a race.

It was Friday afternoon. The three of them had stayed after school for an extra hour. They had done this three times a week for the past month. This was because Luna, Amber, and Cooper had been chosen to compete in a local school competition called the Brain Strain. If they wanted to win, they needed to practice.

Their coach, Mr. Kemper, smiled at them. “Tomorrow is the big day,” he said. “You have all studied hard. I’m proud of you, and you should feel very proud of yourselves.”

“We do,” Cooper agreed. He had been chosen as team captain. “The Apple Glen Bookworms are ready. Luna is our history expert. Amber is our science whiz. And I’m our math genius.”

“Genius?” Amber snickered.

Luna grinned at Mr. Kemper. “Yes, sir,” she said. “We are ready. I can’t wait to beat those Brainiacs.” She was talking about the team from Bosstown Middle School. That was a newer school in a neighboring town. The Brain Strain would be held at the local television studio.

Mr. Kemper looked at the clock. “We are done here. Get plenty of rest tonight. Make sure to eat a good breakfast in the morning.

I'll see you at the studio tomorrow. Be there at 9:00 a.m. sharp."

Luna, Amber, and Cooper walked together to the bike racks in front of the school. They talked about the competition. There were three possible prizes for the winners. One was a \$500 savings bond. Another was a trip to Ohio's famous Goof-Off Park, an amusement park. The winners could also get a weekend at Stone Hills Ranch. That was a local horse ranch.

"If we win, do we get to choose the prize?" Amber asked.

Luna shook her head. "Remember what Mr. Kemper said? There will be a big wheel on the stage. One of us will spin it. Where it stops will determine the prize."

"I hope it's not the ranch," Amber said. "You know how afraid I am of horses. That would be more like a punishment than a prize."

“My dads would never let me go there,” Cooper added. “I have bad allergies to horses.”

“I hope we win the trip to Goof-Off Park,” Luna said. “I’ve never been there.”

Luna and Amber unlocked their bikes. Cooper noticed Amber’s keychain.

“What’s that?” he asked.

Amber held it up. It was a tiny metal horseshoe. “This is my good luck charm. My uncle gave it to me for my birthday. Horses freak me out, but I’m a big fan of luck. I’m bringing it tomorrow.”

“Cool!” Cooper smiled. “I have a lucky charm too. Check it out.” He pulled up his pant leg. Amber and Luna looked down at his ankle.

“Socks?” Luna said. “You have lucky socks?”

Amber tried not to laugh.

“Yes!” Cooper blushed. “These socks *are*

lucky. Look at them. Can't you see the little horses?"

Luna made a face. "That's what makes them lucky?"

"Yes." Cooper looked annoyed. "Our school mascot is a horse, Luna."

"Hey!" Amber squealed. "My lucky charm is a horseshoe! I see the connection." Then she turned to Luna. "Do you have a lucky charm?"

Luna shook her head.

"Could you find one by tomorrow?" Cooper asked. "Then we'll have three times the luck for the competition."

"Find something with a horse on it," Amber added.

A horn honked. One of Cooper's dads waved from a nearby car. "I've got to go," Cooper said. "See you tomorrow!"

Amber hopped on her bike. "I have to go

too. My mom wants me home early for dinner. Bye!”

Luna watched Amber ride off toward her house. She stood alone for a few moments, thinking. *I need a lucky charm with a horse on it by tomorrow. Where can I find that?*