

THE Shape Shifters



CHAPTER 2

Jenna

School was okay, but any kid will say that school is just “okay,” Colin was the new kid, and still felt the need to prove himself. Prove he was cool enough, smart enough, athletic enough. That’s a lot of pressure for one kid. Almost every other student had cell phones or iPods or laptop computers. Colin didn’t have any of that, but he didn’t really care. If someone didn’t like him just because he was without those gadgets, then so what?

Lunch time came, and Colin relaxed. School work wasn’t hard for him, mainly because Colin really enjoyed reading and learning. He found that enjoying learning made taking tests and quizzes much easier. Lunch time meant that it was going to be dentist time soon. Oddly enough, most of the other kids he told about the dentist wondered why Colin wanted to go so badly. What if they found a cavity or scolded him for not brushing well enough? Colin didn’t care.

Colin sat with a group of kids that most would describe as the “no group” group. No one there was particularly special. They all ate together every day, collecting the kids who filtered through all the other groups. This meant most of the new kids over the course of the year ended up together. On rare occasion, new kids would mingle with existing groups and find permanency there. Colin was not the rare exception and ended with the mixed-breed group. But he liked it. He hid well.

Colin was chewing his sandwich G’ma packed for him when he heard a shuffle next to him. He knew the seat was empty, so Colin startled a little. He turned to look and saw...her. A girl with long brown hair, blue eyes, and a delicate face with freckles all over her nose. She was a little knobby-looking and fair-skinned. She was beautiful. More so than any other girl Colin had seen.

Colin couldn’t speak, even though he tried. He swallowed his sandwich bite and hoped words would come with a free mouth. He opened his mouth, but only air exited.

She smiled. “May I sit here?”

Colin just gaped at her. He managed to nod, but knew she probably thought he was dumb.

“I’m Jenna. Jenna Hartsook. This is my first day, and I have no idea which tables to stay away from.” Jenna laughed at herself. “Is it okay that I sit here?” she asked.

“Yes,” Colin squeaked. He turned towards her a little and hoped his voice would let him have a conversation. “I’m...Colin.” he said, still sounding nervous. He cleared his throat and tried again. “I’m pretty new here, myself. Been here almost a month.”

“Oh,” Jenna said. “Where did you live

before?” She asked as she began taking out her lunch.

“Here and there,” Colin said, not wanting to get into details. He didn’t want the lovely girl to leave, thinking he was weird because of his past, so he decided to keep it simple. “Different parts of Tennessee. But now I’m here with my grandparents. What about you?” Colin put down his sandwich and got a drink, hoping to keep his mouth from drying out.

“Oh, I’m from Atlanta. My dad got a new job here at the paper plant, so we all moved,” she answered and took a sip of her milk.

“Atlanta. Wow. I’ve never been. Is it hotter there?” Colin asked, wanting to hear her voice’s melody.

“Not much. A little, but it can still get really cold,” she answered. “What about you? What does your dad do?”

Colin was embarrassed by the question. He never knew his dad. Mom rarely spoke of him, and when she did, it was negative. Colin didn’t like to talk about him either. “Oh, I don’t have a dad,” Colin started back on his sandwich. Colin didn’t want to tell this beautiful creature that his dad was not a part of his life. He didn’t want to be a part of Colin’s birthdays, holidays, or any day for that matter. Colin saw a picture of him once, and thought he favored him. But the picture got lost when Colin was only 7 years old, and his dad’s face was a distant memory now.

Colin knew his dad’s parents, but not very well. He stayed with them off and on as a kid when his mother toted him around. They were not the nicest people. His grandma walked around all day with a cigarette hanging out of her mouth, curls in her hair, a light green muumuu while grandpa complained about politicians from his worn out Lazy-boy rocker morning, noon, and night. They were older, in their 70’s now, and retired. Colin never liked staying in their smoky house, never liked how fishing, ball-playing, treating, and other regular grandparent things were never the norm for them. Colin always thought they must have run off Colin’s dad, and that’s why he never saw his father.

“Oh,” Jenna began to eat her lunch. She must have gotten the hint that Colin didn’t want to talk about that either. “So... moving stinks, huh?” she asked, trying to lighten the mood.

“Yeah, but I’ve done it a lot, so I’m used to it,” Colin realized he was giving too much away, fast. So, he changed the topic. “I have a dog. Her name is Essie. Do you like animals?”

Jenna smiled. “Very much. What kind of dog is she?”

Colin remembered his G’ma telling him. “She’s a rat terrier. Really loyal and stuff.”

“I’ve never had a dog. My mom’s allergic. We have fish, and that’s it.” Jenna giggled.

“Yeah, Essie is my first dog. She is always following me around.

You can come meet her sometime. She loves people.” Colin couldn’t believe he was already extending an invitation. Wasn’t that weird? Colin felt a nudge in the ribs. It was Derek, another boy at the “no group” table.

“Who’s the new girl?” Derek said in a cocky tone to Colin.

“This is Jenna,” Colin replied, his smile fading a little.

“Hi, nice to meet you,” Jenna leaned forward to give Derek a nod. “Sorry, this is my first day here. Colin was just telling me-....”

Jenna was cut off. “I know, I know, this school is kinda lame, but I would be happy to help you around the classes.” He smiled a big smile at Jenna and Colin rolled his eyes. Colin and Derek weren’t really friends, but they talked at lunch each day. Colin wondered why Derek wasn’t at the “uber-confident” table because he seemed so full of himself. But, he was loud and over-eager, and many of the kids in school thought he was too pushy and annoying, so he didn’t have many

friends at all. He was the guy with a big ego, but didn’t really have any reason to be so confident.

“Well, that’s ok. I was just going to ask Colin about that.” She smiled at Colin.

Colin was a little surprised. Derek was much smoother than he, at least he tried to be, and expected Jenna to seek out his help.

“Oh, really?” Derek said. “My pal, Colin? He’s a pretty new guy. It’d be the new guy leadin’ the new gal. C’m on. After school?”

“No, that’s ok. I think I can manage all on my own,” she replied.

Colin knew Jenna didn’t want to sound rude. Derek was a hard one to persuade. Colin knew that Derek saw how pretty she was and wanted to try and get her to notice him. And even though it was really annoying, Colin was afraid that Jenna would think Derek was cute and funny.

“Well, if you change your mind, I’ll be here. Just ask any time.”

The bell rang. “Okay, thanks.” Jenna rose up with her lunch tray.

Colin began gathering his things. When he looked up to say good-bye, Jenna was gone. He wondered if she would come over again the next day. He hoped.

Colin tried to see if Jenna was in his next class, but she wasn’t. He would just have to wait until the next day to get a glimpse of her. Since she was new just like Colin, they might have to rely on each other for friendship. *Maybe she could be a friend. Even though guys like Derek totally get in the way. Maybe, just maybe, she can overlook him the next few weeks so she and I can talk.* At least, Colin certainly hoped so.

Colin’s G’ma picked him up right at 2.

“Hey, Colin!” G’ma called from the car. “How was your day, kiddo?”

Colin got into the car quickly. “Pretty good, I guess. I met a new girl. She’s even newer than me!” Colin realized he sounded too excited.

“Aw, that’s good. What’s her name?”

“Jenna. Hartsook. I think.” Colin smiled when he said his name aloud, but G’ma didn’t seem to let on that she noticed. The afternoon sun was staying longer in the day. It was a pretty light that danced off of G’ma’s smooth face. She smiled a knowing smile. “Hmm, I wonder what fun you two will have.” G’ma smiled.

“Well, all I know is that I’m not the newest kid at school now, and she asked me to help show her around. Things are looking up...” Colin trailed off, again, not wanting to sound desperate over his new friendship. “I mean, I guess they are,” he finished.

G’ma looked over at Colin. “Honey, things just take time. You can’t expect friends to just happen overnight. What is Jenna like?”

Colin wanted to rave over her beauty, but he held back. He didn’t want to sound dippy. “She just moved here from Atlanta. Her dad took a new job at the paper plant. She’s short and small, and seemed really nice.” Colin stopped there. He couldn’t tell his G’ma much, because of what he knew, it would give his new interest away. There was something about her. Something wispy almost.

It seemed, from what Colin could remember, that her voice trailed a cool mist from one word to the next, leaving the listener refreshed. Like a concentrated breath mint was always in her mouth to give life to her words. Colin was obviously taken with how different she was.

“Maybe you can have her over sometime,” G’ma interrupted Colin’s thoughts.

“Yeah, after I get to know her better, maybe I will.” And Colin couldn’t wait to talk with her again.

Next Week Chapter 3

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