

THE Shape Shifters



CHAPTER 8

A New Kind of Friendship

They never did talk again about the day Colin ran into an evil shape-shifter. And it didn't matter. Colin and Jenna just kept their secret. And now that he'd had time to think it over, it made sense. Colin understood. Now that Colin knew about the whole mist-shifter world, he was a threat. His human connection in being friends with a good shifter only made the Hartsook family stronger. He was a threat to this evil mist not only because he knew about the shifting world, but because he was ally for all things good. He knew what was going on and this evil would find a way to try and destroy him. At least, that's what Colin thought. There would most likely be other incidents.

One thing Colin knew, he was not about to verbally challenge the evil mist to come for him. He stayed away from communications like that, and didn't want to hear that dreadful voice in his mind ever again. Colin would respect that and leave it alone.

Now that Colin saw a whole new world around him, his eyes were opened to the bad things that lingered in every cranny, all over school and home. The way students bullied each other – evil. The way kids bragged about how they tortured animals over the weekend – evil. The way his neighbor's mother yelled at the mailman – evil. It was everywhere. No wonder the shape-shifters were needed. When they could, the good shifters would scare away the bad and defend those who knew no different.

Colin wondered why Jenna's family became a mist and not something else. She said that being a mist only made rushing to a problem easier. In the dark of the night, a mist could fly into action faster than a human or an animal, and people didn't easily recognize them as a being. They could transform into other things, but they didn't commonly do it since it was more conspicuous.

"Like, what kinds of things can you be? Other people?" Colin asked.

"No, like, animals. I have been a horse before. Oh, and a spider. That was weird. I didn't like having all the hair on my body. But, I needed to get in somewhere I couldn't be seen." Jenna said.

They both laughed at it. Colin just couldn't believe what he was hearing, but at the same time, loved all the great stories.

"My dad was a bumble bee once. Sometimes we have to shift so fast that we don't have time to think about what we want to be. So, the first animal we might see might be something we're not too happy about. But it works." Jenna laughed louder.

"What about the bad guys? Can they be anything?"

"They can, of course. But, honestly, it is just easier, faster, and simpler to be a mist. No one can see us and we can move around with no sound. We can get through cracks, hide behind curtains. It's better," Jenna explained.

"I get it. It makes sense," Colin offered. "I bet it still is cool to turn into a dog or something. That's what I would want to be."

Jenna smiled. "Well, I wish you could be." She paused and looked down. "But, you are human and need safety. That's what we're here for." Jenna was serious.

"How do you keep things from happening?" Colin wanted to know about more this.

"Well, we can sense danger in our area. Kinda like when a dog can smell an intruder or a cat can sense something strange. We have that, but it's, like, a million times stronger. When we feel it, like when someone is about to hurt someone else or if a car is about to get into an accident, we can rush to try and stop it. Most of the time, we make it right on time."

Colin understood. When someone was driving in road rage, a shifter could transform into a cloud and keep a crash from happening. If there was a disease taking over a body, a shifter could breathe health into that person while they slept. If a young child was hurt, a shifter could speak over that wound. When Colin was being hurt by his own mother, a shifter would defend him. "Doesn't that keep you busy?" he asked.

"Yeah, it does. Many times my dad runs out at night time or mom will be gone in the morning. I usually take some weekend stuff so mom and dad can rest. We all just work together," Jenna explained.

Everyday, Colin looked forward to Jenna sitting and lunching with him. They talked together at their own table, every day, from bell to bell, about Jenna's family. Other kids thought they were "together" or dating, but it wasn't like that. Jenna connected with Colin on a close level, a saving level, and the friendship was closer than siblings. Siblings, something Colin never had. He cherished her.

And every day their love grew for one another. They were prepared to go through school and life together, as long as it was possible. Colin was thrilled to have found love that he never had.

"Do you think you'll ever move again?" Colin asked her one day at lunch.

"Hmm, I don't know. I hope not. Dad said he wanted to stay here a while. A long while. I've begged for it, too," Jenna's now blue eyes sparkled. The yellow traces were almost completely gone.

"Good. I really don't know what I'd do without you. Our talks together mean so much to me. My G'ma is really happy that we are friends. Essie, too. Though, I think she sometimes gets jealous," Colin laughed, and Jenna grinned.

Everyday, they talked about what Jenna had done the day before. Jenna worked hard to help out others. "Sometimes I have to hunt for ways to help others. If I hear someone in my neighborhood with just a complaint, I run out. Sometimes my brother's and I have to cross towns just to put ourselves to work."

"Don't you guys have to sleep?" Colin asked.

"Only a little bit. If we get four hours a day, that's plenty," Jenna informed.

"Wow, I wish I needed just that much. What else can you do?" Colin wanted to know everything.

"Well, we can climb high, jump far, pass through things, mimic sounds, and more," Jenna told him. Colin was impressed.

"So you are guys are superheroes," Colin said.

Jenna laughed. "No, not really. I guess if it were a movie we would be." But, as far as Colin was concerned, they were.

It had been three months now since he'd come to live with his adopted grandparents, and it was going well. The little family of three had a nice groove going each day. G'ma would get Colin out to school in the morning and then come home to work on the house. G'pa, retired man he was, would go fishing, work out in the shed, or go for a drive in the morning to enjoy his time away from home. The evenings were filled with laughter at the dinner table and the 6 o'clock news. Things flowed; Colin never knew a time in his life when everything seemed to fall into place like it had in recent weeks. Colin had never been happier.

Jenna was about to have a birthday. She was almost 13. A big year. Jude and Lucas wanted to throw her a surprise party at Colin's house, and G'ma said yes. Colin was excited, even though the guest list would be small. Neither of them had a lot of acquaintances, much less friends. He invited their whole old lunch table at school and a few neighbors. Cake, streamers, balloons, but that best part was the gift. Colin got her a little locket with an emerald birth stone, for her birth month. He thought she could wear it and be reminded of their friendship often.

With plans in place, and G'ma really running the show, Colin was told to go get some decorations from the attic.

"I think there are balloons and decorations toward the back of the attic, on the left. Be careful, the ceiling is low," G'ma said.

Up in the attic, toward the back, to the left, there they were. Colin began rummaging through the boxes labeled "Party Stuff." He wanted the black streamer, which G'ma said was at the bottom, so he dug deep. He leaned forward to try and get it from the bottom, where he saw it laying, but he leaned too fast and fell over himself. Pretty ungraceful. He looked around him. He'd knocked over some pictures, old pictures, that sat in another box that was now on the floor.

For a moment, Colin forgot what he was doing and looked up. A chill overcame him and he hugged himself. His wild imagination flared up and for a moment, he was scared. The image of the evil mist flashed in his mind's eye for a second, just long enough for him to feel terrified inside. "You are a part of the blood!!" rang in his mind, so loud, Colin thought he heard it coming from...somewhere.

Quickly, Colin shook his head and took a deep breath. The fear left as fast as it came, and Colin felt normal again. He looked down to the mess he'd made. "Great," he mumbled and quickly tried to pick them up. As he gathered, he got interested in some of the pictures. They were really old, yellowed on the edges. He saw a picture of a baby with layers of clothes on in one of those older riding carriages.

"This is a weird looking tree," Colin said to himself as he held a photo with an aluminum-looking Christmas tree and three children around it. The kids had obviously been told to say something to capture smiles. He kept flipping through them. Then he saw something he'd seen before.

It was a picture of a girl. A young girl, about his age. She was pretty, with her hair pulled back and a sad smile on her face. She was in black and white, so he didn't know what her coloring looked like. This young girl...he'd seen her before, but where?

Then he remembered: It was the girl from the picture in the mansion!

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