

THE Shape Shifters



CHAPTER 4

The Invite

"Heyya, Jenna," Colin said, trying to be cool, glad that he could now focus on her lovely face. She looked up and smiled at once. Her lunch was spread out in front of her, but she pushed it aside a bit to make more room.

"Hi!" Jenna said as she shifted in her seat to face Colin. "How was the dentist?" She asked with a wary eye, but still a hint of smile. "Derek told me you went yesterday. I have math class with him after lunch. So glad about that," she said sarcastically.

Derek sat down a minute after Colin, on the other side of Jenna, trying to get her attention immediately. Colin was prepared for Derek to make a grand entrance after he ran into him this morning. In fact, Colin expected that Derek might even put up a fight for her attention.

"They found two cavities," Colin confessed. "I guess I'll have to lay off the junk food." He laughed lightly.

"Oh, that does stink. But don't worry, it's not bad getting them filled. Are you getting them filled today?" Jenna asked.

"Uh, no. I think not until next week," Colin said. Why would she ask? What did it matter? Colin's foot started to fidget as he waited for her to chew a bite of sandwich.

"Oh good. Well, I was wondering if you wanted to come over to my house after school today. I have this really neat backyard, trees everywhere. It's begging to be discovered. I thought the two new kids could check it out. You want to?" Jenna asked.

Again, Colin couldn't speak. The lovely girl asked him over!

"I don't think my grandparents would mind. Are you a car rider?" he asked.

"Yes, my brother always comes to get me after school. He's over at the high school. He's really safe. You can call your grandparents on his cell when he gets here, if you want."

Derek didn't look happy. He obviously had plans to hang out with Jenna today, and was waiting his turn to ask her about it. But, here was Jenna was inviting Colin over! Colin knew Derek was mad.

"Yeah, that sounds good," Colin shifted in his seat next to Jenna.

"Good," Jenna said. "There's supposedly an abandoned old house about a mile into the woods from where I live. They say it's all mysterious and historical. I heard this from the guys who moved us in last week. Want to go find it?"

Colin wondered aloud, "Won't your mom and dad care if you check out some crazy old place?"

"Well, my dad works all day and mom has been out all day trying to find a job of her own. She's also been hanging out with the new church ladies and other people, so they won't be home until

later. We'll be fine for a couple of hours." Jenna smiled a sneaky smile and Colin fell into it.

"Alright, I'm in." Colin settled into his lunch. They talked about different things. He found out she was twelve years old, almost thirteen. Early May, and they'd be the same age. "What your favorite subject?" Colin asked. "I really like science. All the neat experiments and learning how things can change and transform with the right agents. What about you?"

"Well, I like reading the best, I think. I like getting lost in a good story, you know? There's something about a really good mystery..." The bell rang. "I'll meet you at the front door as buses are getting here after school. You get your grandma on the phone to have her talk to the teacher, and we'll go. Ok?"

Colin smiled, but not too big, so he could hide his excitement. "Yeah, great. See you after class!"

Colin was nervous after his G'ma said that yes, he could go to Jenna's after school. He couldn't even remember the last time he'd gone over to a friend's house. While his teacher was on the phone with his grandmother, Colin waited for the signal that all was ok, the G'ma was ok with him going to a friend's house. This was such all new territory for him!

Colin's teacher said that yes, he is all clear to go to Jenna's house and gave the phone back. He walked down to the car, which was waiting in line at the pick-up area for students.

"I'm good!" he said. Jenna smiled from the backseat, opened the door on his side and Colin slipped right in.

"Dude, I'm Jude," Jenna's brother said, sitting in the front passenger seat. He laughed at his rhyme. Colin figured he did that a lot. Jude seemed cocky right away. He was short, like Jenna, but stocky, and probably played sports at school. "And this is Lucas, or as Jenna calls him, Lukie." He snickered.

"Hey, what's up?" Colin nodded and handed it over the cell phone. Lucas was also stocky, but taller.

"What grade are you guys in?" Colin asked while they waited for the line to move, so they could get home.

"I'm in 10th grade, I'm 15. Luke is a senior, 17 years old, almost legal." Jude pretended to cry at the thought of his brother growing up.

Jenna laughed and smacked her brother from the backseat. "Jude is nuts, and Lukie just takes it." Jenna seemed to like her older brothers. Colin wondered about the dynamic of having siblings, and thought it wouldn't be long before he really found out as he watched these three together.

"We're good to go!" Luke said, as the line started to move.

On the car ride to Jenna's home, Colin thought it was going to be quiet. But, Jude was so loud, talking all about the big prank the guys on the baseball team were going to pull over the coach. Lucas warned his brother to be careful and Jenna laughed as Jude explained the whole thing in details.

"Whipped Cream. In his duffel. Coach is gonna hate us!" Jude laughed.

"That's gross. Mom and dad are going to be so mad at you," Jenna giggled.

"Nah, they won't know who did it. Once no one confesses to it, and the whole team has to run a few laps, Coach will be over it. It's the perfect plan!" Jude said.

"Be careful. Remember when I was your age and pulled a stunt like that? Mom and dad found out, and I was in huge trouble. Just keep it sly." Lucas said calmly.

"Right. Sly." Jude jumped with excitement and started texting on his phone.

Jenna's house was big. Bigger than five people needed. Her parents and two brother's all used up a seven bedroom, four bathroom, huge living area, three-car garage house. They also had a bonus room and a guest apartment in the back. The entry-way with vaulted ceilings led right into the family area with a big TV and couches that looked so soft, they could be used as regular beds.

Jude slung his backpack on the kitchen counter and grabbed an apple.

Lucas went to the cupboard to pull out a snack. "Just make yourself at home, man," he said to Colin.

"Thanks," Colin said. Lucas sat down on the bed-like couch with his laptop in hand.

Jenna looked at Colin and offered a snack. She had a sneaky look to her eye. It was saying "Let's go!" They both got some cookies and juice and went outside, ready for their adventure. By now, the news of the morning was nothing more than a small disappointment.

Even though it was bright and sunny outside, inside the forest walls it seemed like it was early evening at twilight time. Colin wasn't used to so much freedom. He never lived in a place that condoned much exploration outside without having someone older tell him to get his rear-end back to a house because it wasn't safe. This was nice.

Jenna pulled out a compass. "If we keep going due west, we are supposed to hit the old creepy house right away."

Colin trusted her, even though she'd only lived in the house for a week.

"Ok," Colin said and followed her lead. A breeze came by and made him feel like he could take off flying any minute. He closed his eyes and took in the surreal feeling. He was thankful that this new girl in town, who could share in the lonely feeling a little bit, brought him here. The trees made a musical rustling sound that got louder with each gust of wind. Colin hadn't realized Jenna stopped when he bumped into her.

"Sorry!" Colin was startled. He backed up after he steadied her, but she was fine on her own feet after the bump.

"It's ok. Look!" She pointed at something about a hundred feet away. "It's amazing! Just like I've heard!"

This "shack" was nothing short of an old mansion that had been heavily grown over. There was even a picket fence that marked it once a year. Weeds had overtaken the lawn and the bushes and landscaping was in need of a heavy trim. Tall trees were all around which made the inside of the mansion even more dark.

The fence gateway was open and invited strangers in an eerie way. It was almost saying, "don't you want to come and see what is hiding in my upstairs closet?" Colin shivered at that thought.

"You want to go inside this thing?" Colin asked. "Are you sure it's safe?" He didn't want to let on that he was freaked out and that he'd rather stay out because of how scary it might be.

"You mean you don't?" Jenna seemed brave. Intrigued. She walked toward the opening in the fence, holding her hand out to Colin. He reached for her, ashamed he was such a scaredy-cat. He took her hand, reluctantly.

"I mean, I do, but this place totally creeps me out." Colin said. "You can't tell me you aren't freaked by this place."

"Well, I know others have come here to explore, because that's what the movers said. I know other have had fun here, not ghosts or freaky people." Jenna laughed.

The wind picked up and Colin found himself shielding Jenna from the strong gusts. He looked up at the windows at the sound of a dark green shutter responding to the wind. *BANG!* *BANG-bang-BANG!*

"It'll be fun!" Jenna said, trying to convince once more. She put out her hand and Colin accepted. At that moment, he felt enough courage to have his very first, friend-on-friend adventure.

NEXT WEEK ... CHAPTER 5

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