

# THE Shape Shifters



CHAPTER 3

## Sad and Bad News

The dentist was a little less fun than Colin had expected. They did find a cavity...two actually. He'd have to go back and get them filled. G'ma told him he was lucky they didn't find more. If you never see the dentist, you'll never know about the holes in your head, she'd said.

As Colin came home and retreated to his room, all he could think about was Jenna from that day at lunch. He remembered her long, flowing, brown hair, her pretty little face, her delicate self. She seemed small for a middle-schooler, but a 7<sup>th</sup> grader can come in all shapes and sizes. Colin wasn't big by any means, but he was getting bigger. Taller, really. His short dark brown hair and brown eyes were a little dull, and his smile was ok. His winter-pale skin would get darker as the warm weather kept up, he knew. That might make a difference if it ever came between him and Derek. Being thirteen is no easy thing. He didn't even know how old Jenna was. He would ask her more tomorrow. Hopefully he would find his voice more easily.

The next morning, bright and early, Essie woke Colin with a wet tongue to his face. "Ok, girl, I'm awake." He tried to push her away, but she kept up with persistent licking until Colin rolled out of bed, laughing at the pushy pup. Then he remembered that he would get to see Jenna again today and leapt to his feet. He dressed quickly and packed up his bags for school.

As he got ready, Essie sat on the bed and seemed to approve of his every move. Colin stopped and looked in the mirror for a moment.

"Yeah," he said to himself, "I'm just like any regular guy. So what if I don't have a normal mom and dad, I'm just like anyone else. I'm not weird or have strange habits. I'm just a regular guy."

He smiled at himself. "Derek doesn't have anything on me." He smirked into the mirror one more time. He hoped he could maintain this small level of confidence through the day, at least through lunch time.

"Colin, can you come down now? I need to talk with you!" G'ma called from the bottom of the stairs. Her voice sounded funny, sounded rushed.

"Sure!" Colin yelled and grabbed his things quickly. Essie on his heel, they both plodded downstairs.

Breakfast was waiting for him at the dining room table. G'ma was sitting with her coffee, as if she was waiting for Colin to come and talk with her. "Mornin'!", he said cheerfully.

"Sit and eat, Colin," G'ma said.

Colin obeyed, a little put off at the command. He always obeyed, and loved doing so, especially for such a sweet person, but didn't understand the urgency. Colin slid into his seat,

Essie by his side.

"I got an e-mail from your mother this morning. I called her."

Colin looked up at G'ma, who was mid-sip with her coffee. She must have needed an extra boost to tell Colin what she wanted, without wavering.

G'ma looked at Colin square in the face.

"She won't be coming back, Colin. She didn't want to tell you when she dropped you off that she was leaving you here. She knew you needed a more stable life, away from the people she surrounded herself with. So she won't be coming back to get you again." G'ma touched Colin's arm. "I'm sorry honey."

Colin looked down at his cooling eggs and bacon.

"I'm very sorry. I knew she would do that. I was prepared for it. G'pa and I were ready to take you in. We love you. We want you to stay with us all the time."

Tears filled Colin's eyes. The image of his food turned blurry as the uncontrolled tears released down his cheek. Mom wasn't coming back. Would he ever see her again? Colin loved her so much, even though she had never given him a stable, loving life. And now she was, what, gone? Forever? He kept looking down as G'ma spoke on.

"You know, when you were a little baby, your mom brought you to see us. You were only three months or so. When we saw you, we just fell in love with you, almost like you were our own son. Not our grandbaby, but our firstborn boy. It was something I can barely describe. We have always loved you like that. We've been quiet through your young years, and haven't seen you much, but we knew from that moment on that you are our boy. You're still our boy. That will never change. Never."

Her words were sweet music to Colin's ears.

Tears still fell. Colin never felt so weak. He looked up at G'ma. It was no use hiding from G'ma. She knew he was shattered.

Colin smiled faintly. "I know," he whispered.

"I know," G'ma held tight to his arm for several minutes before G'pa walked into the dining room. He got his coffee from the kitchen and came back to sit and listen. Colin figured he knew everything already.

"Colin, you can stay home from school today. Process all of this," G'pa offered. He sat up tall and strong, but was tender-hearted through it all.

Colin remembered Jenna. Her sweet face, innocent looking and kind. Picking him from a crowd of people, almost like she was there for him at that moment the day before.

"No, I'll go to school. I want to," Colin began to eat, though he didn't feel like it. He figured he'd better act like he was up to going to school.

"You sure?" G'ma asked. "I know this is a lot."

"I'll be fine," Colin looked at G'ma. "Don't worry about me. I figured Mom would say that. I just had a feeling about it." Then he felt the need to open up a little. "Mom never did make me feel like everything was ok. Cuz it wasn't most of the time. I need you both, cuz you'll never leave me." Another tear came down. "I don't know how I would cope without you both."

G'ma got up and hugged Colin. G'pa looked into his coffee and shifted in his seat. He looked up at Colin.

"How about we have a special time this weekend, just us three. We can go out to eat and drive around and just relax," G'pa said.

Colin looked up, wiped his tears away, and nodded.

"That's a good idea, Honey." G'ma said as she hugged Colin. He hugged back, thankful for the warmth.

"Maybe we can go to Roan Mountain. Some kid said they had good hiking," Colin said.

He could feel G'ma's and G'pa's hope. It made Colin realize just how luck he really was.

Even though breakfast was full of sadness, Colin felt more hopeful than ever.

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As Colin rode to school with G'ma, he sat quietly, but his mind was buzzing. He probably should have known that his mom wasn't going to come back, but he didn't want to think that way. He would always love her.

Perhaps something amazing would happen today. Maybe something great would take place in class. Maybe he would discover a cure for cancer in science class, write a core-shaking story in English, or solve the world's hardest problem in math. G'ma's smile leant some extra confidence that Colin wouldn't have been able to have on his own. For that he was grateful.

Colin walked into school, and all thoughts shifted to Jenna. He thought he saw her walking through the halls on his way to science, but her image vanished in a sea of middle-school heads.

"Hey, man," Colin heard behind him. He turned to see Derek.

"Hey," Colin said.

"I saw that new girl today. What is her name again? Do you remember?" Derek asked.

"Jenna. Her name is Jenna." Colin was annoyed that Derek was pressing so hard to know this girl. He seemed like a decent guy, but was really persistent. Derek was so sure of himself, something that made Colin leery. He didn't want to tell Derek to back off because, well, Jenna wasn't up for grabs.

"Oh yeah. She's cute, right? I wonder if she'd go for me." Derek said.

"I dunno," Colin said. "She seems like she just wants friends right now. And that's all" Colin was trying to shift Derek's thinking.

"I guess. We'll see at lunch who she talks to more." Derek said slyly, poking Colin in the chest before he traipsed off.

Hesitantly, Colin said, "Yeah, see you." He was more determined than ever to beat Derek to the lunch table.

Classes went by slowly, mainly because it took time and effort to try and push thoughts away from his mind. Every two minutes or so he would have to tell himself to focus on the teacher or his work. It was exhausting.

Lunch finally came. There she was, already sitting at the table, waiting for Colin to arrive. Or so it seemed.

Derek wasn't there yet, and Colin didn't want to give him any chance of stealing the show.

Jenna was glowing. It was like a light was propped up behind her to outline her whole body with some glorious glow. Colin had never met a girl like this before, and couldn't explain why he was so drawn to her. He'd liked a girl once, when he was six, but that friendship was doomed from the start because her daddy moved her all over, from state to state, all the time. Colin had known her, Abby was her name, for only two weeks before her dad plucked her out of school one day, only to never come back. She was really pretty, blonde hair, green eyes, and had a sweet laugh. Oh, and a pretty smile. But, in this moment, nothing else mattered but Jenna. He didn't want her to slip away like Abby did.

He was older now, and was going to do everything in his power to create a friendship. He just had to. Colin took a deep breath and started walking to the "no group/group's" table with his backpack and bag lunch, ready to hear her lovely voice again.

**NEXT WEEK: CHAPTER 4**

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