

THE Shape Shifters



CHAPTER 13

The Dawn

Mr. Hartsook drove Colin home in silence. They both knew everything was fine again, and now it was time for Colin to figure out his part of the puzzle.

Colin walked inside alone and saw G'ma sitting in the quiet, waiting for him.

"Mrs. Hartsook called me and told me you took a fall while hiking. But how on earth did you get so beat up?" G'ma asked seriously.

"I'm sorry. I fell really hard in the woods, out back from their house. I didn't realize it looked so bad until I saw it." Colin tried hard not to lie.

"Sometimes we just get carried away."

"That's what Jenna's mom said." G'ma said. "I never thought I'd have to worry about you," she looked concerned, but not angry. "I hope any adventure you've been having was worth it." G'ma got up and got an ice pack from the freezer. Essie, who was at G'ma's feet, got up and went over to Colin and begged him for some attention. Colin reached down and picked her up. Her nose was wet and cold and comforting on his face. She licked him until he put her down.

"I'm ok, G'ma. Really. I'm fine." Colin sat down across from his G'ma. "Anyway, I need to talk with you about something. I know it's really late, but there is something I need to ask you about."

"Alright," G'ma's called from the bathroom where she was now getting pain pills and a glass of water. Colin knew she was worried.

"Ok, I don't know where to start," Colin remembered he didn't have the picture.

Just then, someone tapped him on the shoulder. Colin spun around to find no one. He looked all around, and saw something on the floor. It was the picture of Annalynn! He picked it up, saw the sad girl, who now, looked hopeful somehow. G'ma walked back from getting the treatments and put them on the coffee table next to Colin.

"Who is she?" Colin blurted out and held out the picture to G'ma. He felt the thirteen years of his life, not knowing where he would end up next, was uncertain enough. He didn't want to wait anymore for answers.

G'ma looked at the old photo. She was quiet, solemn. "Where did you get that?" she asked, composed. They both sat down, across from each other. Essie lay next to Colin, calm and protective.

"I found it up in your attic. It was by accident, the night of Jenna's surprise party. I couldn't ask you then, but now I have to. It was almost like the picture wanted to be found. Who is she?" Even though Colin knew the answer, he had to hear it from G'ma.

"That person in that picture was your grandmother. My sister. Anna," G'ma said.

Colin gasped for effect, but was still inwardly shocked to hear the words from G'ma. She was his aunt. His real aunt.

G'ma took the picture and held it for a moment. "She died before you were born. Your

mother barely even knew her. Anna gave up your mother to me, and G'pa and I raised her like our own. Your mom was a troubled girl because of it," the confession dripped from G'ma's mouth.

"So, you are my aunt? All this time, I've been your relative? Even though I thought I didn't have anyone blood related who wanted me?"

G'ma seemed disappointed with herself. "Yes," she looked at Colin. "Anna told us never to tell anyone. Your mom doesn't even know. She just thinks she was involved with a closed adoption. That's all."

Colin wanted to know more. "Where did you live? Your family, I mean."

"I grew up here in town, in a house very near to where Jenna lives now. It used to be amazing. Anna and I grew up together in that house with our brother, David. But when Anna was young, about fifteen or so, she got strange. Something wasn't right. We'd hear odd noises coming from difference places in the house at all times during the day. Anna never heard it, never acted scared of it. She was... eerie." G'ma paused and gave the picture back to Colin. That must have been when Anna's shifter entered her life.

"Well, then one day, Anna met a man. A handsome man who swept her off her feet. They fell in love, even though there were times in her relationship when she acted strange. Then, when she was only about nineteen or twenty, she got pregnant.

Daddy was furious, and demanded she and her boyfriend marry right away. Anna was upset and refused to marry so fast and broke it off with the love of her life. Then she had your mom."

Colin drank in every word G'ma was telling him.

"Since I was older and married to G'pa, Father made me take the baby. Anna was so upset, but daddy didn't want anyone to know that Anna was disgracing the family." Colin knew the evil shifter was a big part of this. This was the part G'ma didn't know, and would never know.

"Well, I gladly accepted. I wanted a child so much. Your mom looked identical to Anna. It was hard for her to give up your mother because she loved her so. She was a sweet baby, but when she turned three, something happened. Terrible three's and your mother always had a rebellious nature. She grew, and rebellion grew too," G'ma made everything fall into place.

"And then, she had me. I'm part of that curse," Colin looked down. "What a history." He put his hand on Essie's back and she attempted to lick his hand.

"No, you are a blessing!" G'ma touched Colin's cheek. "You are a wonderful blessing. God gave you to me. I know He did."

Colin thought about Annalynn.

"Anna loved her daughter, which means, she would have loved me, right?"

G'ma smiled, "Oh yes, Anna loved your mom. And honey, I'm sure she loves you, wherever she is."

"What happened to her?"

G'ma sighed. "She died after she lost your mom. She got really sick, but I think she was mostly heartbroken. Anna just was never the same after she got pregnant, really."

Colin saw an image in his mind of the blurry lady who hung over him when he has been saved from the evil shifter. He knew she was there for him, she pulled the mist from him and let him live. She heard his cry, even though he could only think it. She loved him. Colin, for once, felt the warmth of his own family.

Annalynn, I love you, too, Colin thought.

"Colin, you alright?"

Colin refocused on G'ma. "Yeah," Colin smiled. "All this time I thought I didn't belong anywhere. But, I do! I belong with you!"

G'ma smiled. "You do! Sweetheart, I loved your mother like my own, and I love you like my own. You belong always, and I will love you always. G'pa and I, we love you like a son!" She got up and hugged Colin so tight, it was like she was squeezing all the confusion, loneliness, and uncertainty away. Colin was whole. And always would be.

Back at Jenna's house the next day after school, a Friday, Colin was pleased to see the family looking completely put back together. Jenna's parents had scolded her and Jude for going alone, but they got over it fast. It was a dangerous mission, but since everyone was alright, the scolding was short lived. Colin knew this was because Jenna and Jude weren't average kids. Simple dangers in all its magnitude for a regular human being was downsized when you were a shape-shifter.

As for Jenna's dad, he realized how much Jenna and Colin needed each other. He didn't like all of the bad things Colin had been through, but it was not without purpose. He lifted their friendship ban, but they would be closely monitored.

Colin and Jenna walked outside and sat on the front patio together. Colin told Jenna everything. His grandmother, his mom, the curse. It was all open now. Well, not everything. Jenna and her family would be kept a secret.

"You know, part of me wishes I could shift just like you. It would be neat to have your powers, to help people, to transform. I still want to be that dog and run like the wind!" Colin smiled and Jenna giggled.

"I know. Imagine if we could shift together. We'd be unstoppable!" Jenna halfway joked. "But you know what, yeah, we can help others, and you can too, even if you can't transform," Jenna told him. She grabbed his hand and gave a little kiss. "You are just as much of a shifter as I am.

Only, without the powers of extra strength and misty abilities." Jenna held his hand as they sat together and felt the early summer breeze.

"School's almost out. Next year, you'll be in high school. We'll be in different schools. You better not find another shifter as your best friend," Jenna smiled.

Colin laughed. "I won't, I promise."

"Good," Jenna replied. "It'll be a whole new thing, high school stuff. Makes me nervous for you. Think it will be hard for you?"

Colin knew this. "If I can get through what life I've had, it'll be a piece of cake"

The sky was a clear blue. Colin looked up and just enjoyed it.

"Do you think I should try to tell my mother about everything?" Colin couldn't believe he was even asking this aloud. "I don't know that it would even make a difference, but she has a right to know." Colin leaned his head back on the porch swing.

"I don't know. Do you ever know where she is?"

"Well, my aunt has her phone number and email address," Colin said. He had started referring to G'ma as Aunt, now. Actually, she was Aunt Sarah. And Uncle Frank. Colin felt wonderful every time he said their names.

"I guess you could try, but what if she doesn't..." Jenna trailed off.

"I know," Colin offered. "She might not care or want to know. That's ok. It has to be. Because even if she doesn't want hear it, I know who is there for me."

Jenna squeezed his hand. "Yes, you do," she said, smiling.

Colin pushed the swing as they both glided.

Who knew what would happen? Colin had learned that life doesn't have to be sadness all the time. Even when he found himself feeling lost, without anyone to call his own, Colin had discovered what he had wanted his whole life. A family. Friends. He was home, he had family, he was found.

The End

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