

THE Shape Shifters



CHAPTER 9

Danger is Never Far

Colin was stunned at what he saw. He sat on the floor for what felt like an hour, but really got up after about five minutes. Streamer and picture in hand, he climbed down from the attic. Should he ask his G'ma about this? *This is so weird. I'm sure G'ma knows about this girl, but what if she doesn't like that I found it? She probably won't care, but still,* Colin thought to himself.

Colin pushed the image out of his head and decided to focus on the party. He would tell Jenna about it later, but only after her party, her cake, her present. Colin focused, shook off the shocked feeling, and started back again at getting the front family room completely ready for the event. He didn't even remember how scared he'd felt up in the attic when he remembered the evil mist. He picked up the hot pink streamer G'ma got from the store and started making up the room.

Around 7 o'clock, people starting arriving. Everything was hung, completed, and frosted. Lucas and Jude were bringing Jenna over under the guise that they were picking Colin up to go to the movies. It was perfectly planned. *Good thing these shifters can't see the future like other superheroes can, at least like the ones in comic books,* Colin thought to himself.

At almost 7:30, the car rolled up. Colin was prepared with just the front light on to make it look like little was happening at his house. There was a knock at the door.

"Hey Jenna! Come in!" Colin said, a little too nervous sounding. "I need to get my sweater. It's a bit chilly out. Hold on," Colin went to the kitchen so he could get the lights.

"SURPRISE!!" Everyone jumped out, all twelve of them.

Jenna couldn't have looked more surprised. She jumped back as a smile quickly came to her face. "What? Really?" was all she could say.

Everyone started singing "Happy Birthday" and Jenna just grinned from ear to ear.

Colin ran to her side and hugged her. "Happy Birthday, Jenna. You are such a great friend, and this is all for you!"

A single tear trickled down her cheek. "No one has ever..." and she hugged Colin again. "Thank you," she said quietly to Colin. "And thank you everyone for coming!" she told the crowd.

Someone put some music on and the party began. Lucas and Jude sat down on the sofa in the living room while everyone mingled around.

Everyone had a great time. Even G'pa got in on the fun as he sat and talked with some of the kids. The food was good, the cake was better, and Essie enjoyed having people to pet her constantly. Fun dance music let the kids really

break loose and everyone laughed at some silly moves Jude made. Everyone joined in, even G'pa.

"G'pa, you've got some moves!" Colin pointed at his "grocery cart" maneuver. Everyone roared with laughter. After a little while, Colin wanted some alone time with Jenna, just a little, to give her his gift. He pulled her outside, on the back deck. The night was perfect, the stars were coming out, and sunlight just a small sliver on the west end horizon.

"I have something for you. It's not big, but a little something you can hold on to forever." He pulled out the little pink wrapped present. Jenna took it, smiling her pretty smile and seemed pleased with the presentation.

"Oh, I love it," she said, clearly thrilled he had chosen well. Jenna threw her arms around Colin and squeezed him tight. "It's the best birthday gift ever, and I'm not just saying that. It is so pretty." Jenna let go and looked back at the necklace.

"Here, let me," Colin started to take out the necklace to adorn her neck. Jenna swooped her hair to the side to make it easier.

BANG! BANG!

They both stopped short. Quickly and without warning, Jenna became a mist, leaving the necklace in Colin's hand, as Lucas and Jude ran out before everyone else even knew what happened. The transformation felt cool on Colin's face as she didn't put distance between him and her in time. Her mist was gone in a moment and Lucas and Jude transformed quickly after.

After about a minute, everyone rushed out to investigate. The noise came from the house that backed into G'ma's house. It was so close they about shared a yard. The noise was loud, like a gunshot, but no one really knew what it was. No one questioned the birthday girl's disappearance, at least not within a few minutes after the guests had exited the house.

The small crowd of kids was filled with "What was that?" and "Gunshots! I gotta call my dad!" and "I can't believe it! Call the cops!"

"Alright, kids, that's enough. Get back inside. We can call your parents, but at least get inside!" G'ma was busy rounding up the curious kids. Thankfully, she didn't notice that the three Hartsook kids were gone. Colin hoped she wouldn't ever notice. Colin didn't know how he'd ever explain it.

After ten minutes, Lucas and Jude came around the corner to the back deck. They looked casual, because they didn't want anyone to know the danger they'd seen. Colin had actually heard gunshots before a couple of times, and had seen a gun in his mother's nightstand at a friend's house. He was sort of used to it. But, he never expected to hear a gun report this near G'ma's house.

Jenna came soon after her brothers, looking a little more ragged than them both, and out of breath.

Colin grabbed her and hugged her. Thankfully, everyone was either back in the house or on their way home with their parents. Colin heard the cop sirens in the distance and breathed.

"What was that?" he asked.

"She's alive. We managed that," Jenna said. She looked tired.

"Who?!!" Colin begged.

"Mrs. Herman, the woman who lives behind your G'ma. It was an accident."

The necklace was forgotten at that moment as they both grouped up with Lucas and Jude to talk.

"It's not safe for him," Jenna told Lucas. She looked at Colin. "More people will suffer because he knows about us, I really think so." Jenna hunched over and put her hands on her knees, as if to take a breath.

Lucas looked concerned. "I think you are right. It can't be good that he knows about us and now, those other shifters want to get back at us. Lousy..."

Jude nodded in agreement.

"Right," Jenna said, still breathing heavy.

"So what happened?" Colin found his voice. He didn't want Mrs. Herman's unfortunate situation to be because of him, but he knew that it probably was.

Jenna stood. "Colin, she was cleaning out the gun and forgot to unload it. She shot herself right in the shoulder. It was careless. When I got there, I saw him. The red eyes. He was standing over her when I got there and I had to fight him off. She shot herself right after I pushed him away. That mist fought hard, too."

Colin didn't realize how upset he looked. Can these evil beings just stalk anyone? Is it their purpose to try and kill others or do they just like to mess around for fun? Colin looked up, revealing just how scared he was.

"This was a fluke, it could happen to anyone," Jude spoke up, trying to calm Colin. "Let's just tell Mom and Dad. They can help us make sure this won't keep on happening."

"I thought you said stuff like this happens all the time."

"Yes, it does," said Lucas. "But usually, it doesn't happen when we are near. You see? If we are close, an evil shifter doesn't usually cause problems. 'Cause they know we are close enough to stop them."

"Yeah," Jude confirmed. "We have such great hearing and can sense things from far away. Because things don't usually happen close, we have to know when they happen far away. There has to be a reason this shifter did this..." Jude stopped short.

Colin went back to the original statement Jenna made. "Do you think more people will suffer because of me? Am I in trouble?" Colin worried he would have to stop hanging with his new friends. Then he worried about G'ma and G'pa. "What about my family?"

"They said something to me," Jenna looked away, as if she was trying to recall everything. "The evil mist told me... something..." Jenna bent over, leaning on her knees again. "...it was a warning almost: 'Leave, and never come back!' he said. He said it a few times." Jenna visibly shivered.

G'ma came back on the deck.

"What are you kids doing? Get inside now. Lucas, I think you better call your parents before you leave here. I don't want anything to happen to you. The guy who shot might be out there this very moment! Get in here!" G'ma's mind was racing a mile a minute. Colin knew that, for now, they'd be safe, but G'ma didn't know that. And Colin couldn't tell her.

All of the kids obeyed in silence and sat down inside. Lucas got his cell phone and starting dialing his dad's number.

"Doesn't any one want to lie down?" G'ma offered. "I know this is scary, so if you need to take a break, you can lay on the guest bed." G'ma, always thinking of other's needs and comforts.

"We're ok," Jude said. Jenna was quiet as she sat.

Colin realized he was gripping his left hand hard. He slowly opened it and saw the necklace that he'd given Jenna. He looked over at her and closed his hand again. The shifter was now getting in between him and her. Colin suddenly raged. Fire ripped through his torso and sweat began to bead in his forehead. Colin was stunned as how fast he'd become angry and worked quickly to calm back down.

He slipped the necklace into this pant pocket and relaxed. He had to. He knew it was only going to get worse. Angry or not, necklace or not, it was going to get worse.

Next Week Chapter 10

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