

THE Shape Shifters



CHAPTER 6

Shape Shifters

Colin sat with Essie on the bed. He was finishing up some homework before bed. He looked out the window. It was a clear night, so it was easy to see the smoke puffing to the air from the paper plant close by. It was a cloud maker, so it seemed. Essie's wet nose touched Colin's knee. She was ready for bed, and was trying to tell Colin so.

"Alright, girl. I'm getting up. Snuggle down for bed."

As Colin got ready, he kept the thoughts from the day in this head. His G'ma welcomed him home, glad that he had finally found someone who could be his friend. She raved about how cute Jenna was after she and Lucas had dropped him off at home.

"She is a doll! Colin, did you two have fun together today?" She asked.

"Yeah, it was good. She is really fun." "What did you two do?" G'ma asked as she walked back toward the kitchen, expecting Colin to follow as she waved him on.

"Oh, we just talked and went outside. Walked around and hung out. You know." Colin didn't lie, she just didn't tell her any details. What would G'ma think if she knew what really happened?

Colin lay down next to Essie and turned the light off. The window revealed how light it was outside, from the factory lights, and the smoke puffed on. He wondered where his mother was right now. He wondered if she was thinking about him, too. She most likely wasn't, though. A tear fell from Colin's cheek and onto his pillow. He pulled Essie closer.

On Monday at lunch, Colin met Jenna at the lunch table. Derek was already there, listening to her tell him something. He looked a little too hopeful for Colin's tastes. Colin was glad that he knew Jenna preferred his attention over Derek's; he was glad that he could actually call her his friend.

"Hey," she greeted him. The yellow was left in little traces within her eyes, he could see. He wondered if she got the chance to talk with her parents about the day he came over. He didn't get to meet them because Lucas had to bring him home before their parents got in for the evening. Colin was glad about that.

"Hi, Jenna," he sat down, and she faced him, turning away from Derek. Derek obviously was not going down without a fight for this girl.

"Dude, she's telling me a story," Derek wasn't going to accept Colin just taking over the conversation.

"It's ok, Derek. I'll finish it later," Jenna replied. "I have to talk with Colin for a second."

Colin was eager to find out what Jenna's parents said. "What did you par -" Colin started

before Jenna put her hand over his mouth.

"Not here," she said. "Can you come over after school tomorrow? It's Tuesday, and my dad actually has off of work, so he'll be there. He wants to talk with you. So does Mom. I told them everything."

Colin would accept that, even if it meant waiting a little while longer to learn about the terrifying noise his new friend could make. "Yes," he smiled.

"kay. Good. Now, can you help me with this math homework?"

Colin knew Jenna was trying to distract him from thinking about the next day, and trying not to let him slip up in front of others. The last thing he wanted to talk about was math. But he obliged.

"Sure, math is my thing." Colin played along.

Jenna smiled a crooked smile and started twirling her hair. Colin worked with her until lunch was over and they walked out together. The next day couldn't come fast enough.

Mr. Hartsook opened the door for Colin right after he knocked.

"Hello, son!" he greeted. He seemed happy, but Colin thought it was odd. This man was about to tell him something that he was banned from knowing - why was he excited? "Come on in. Jenna is here. She'll get you something to drink."

In the living room right off the foyer, the whole family sat in various spots. Intricate lamps sat on cherry wood tables next to the light brown couches, and a mounted TV sat above a fire place. A large dark brown coffee table with black wrought iron legs sat in the center of the room. A copy of "Gone With the Wind" sat next to a candle; Colin didn't know if it was for show or if Mrs. Hartsook was a big time reader. The crisp, beige walls and dark hard-wooded lent a formal look to the room, but it was still inviting to guests to come sit and relax. But, it was hard to relax, knowing that an explanation was coming.

"Sit, sit," Mr. Hartsook said.

"Yes, sir," Colin obeyed, sitting next to Jenna on the first couch, opposite of her parents. Colin didn't speak. He didn't know what to say, and was a little embarrassed, now that the whole family was involved.

Mr. Hartsook smile down turned and his face grew stern. Colin realized then that Mr. Hartsook didn't want to show an ounce of worry on his face should G'ma have come to the door. Now, he was free to be serious. "Jennie, go get us some tea to drink. I think your mother got the glasses out. Please."

Jenna obeyed without flaw. She locked eyes with Colin and was gone for a moment before returning with some sweet honey tea.

Mr. Hartsook spoke. "I understand you saw something strange a few days ago, Colin. Jenna told me all about it. I want to tell you it was nothing." Jenna passed Colin a glass of tea. He took the glass all while staring at her father.

"We have some strange neighbors. They like to play pranks, it seems. They can get pretty rowdy when they think we're not looking. Noisy, too. I'm sure that's all it was."

Colin put down his glass on the coffee table in front of him.

Mr. Hartsook went on, "Yes, just a day after we moved here we found out that our neighbors love a good joke. We're sorry that you got the brunt of the joke."

Colin's mouth opened, surprised. Why would the whole family gather to tell him just that? Would there be no mention of the white mist, the horrible noise from his own daughter? The mist that was scared away by so tiny a girl? Jenna sure was small, but she could scare off even a creepy thing like that mist. That ghost. Whatever it was. It was all too unreal to be a prank.

"What?" Colin remarked, shifting in his seat. "Are you joking with me?"

"No, that's all. I just want you to know that we understand you got frightened, but we are going to watch out for our neighbors. You don't have to be scared to come here." Colin felt Mr. Hartsook search his face to see if he bought it.

"I'm sorry, Sir, but with respect, that is stupid," Colin couldn't believe those words came out. He was never rude to an adult. Mainly because when he tried as a little boy, he got smacked over the mouth. He rarely back-talked anyone. But this issue deserved a little passion. Jenna looked hopeful. Hopeful that Colin wouldn't give up.

"I know, Colin," Mr. Hartsook said. "But, it's the truth."

Lucas supported his father with a firm look, Jude looked down, not wanting to confront his father. Mrs. Hartsook quietly sipped her tea. She wasn't going to talk. Jenna fixed her gaze on Colin and didn't waiver. Her look almost said "keep telling my dad that you think it's stupid. Maybe he will tell you what I am..."

Colin stood up. "No. You cannot tell me anything about a prank. Your daughter did something so scary, made such a noise that it made my legs buckle. Something is different about her. I heard it. You know that. You all know that, now. I can't not know what's going on. I have to know!" Colin felt like a man, charging a real explanation.

The family looked at each other. Mr. Hartsook looked up and sighed. He stood. He moved away from Colin, toward the back of the massive room, near the large stone-laid fire place.

From his chest a light started to shine, like someone was shining a flashlight through the center of his body. The light was bright and got bigger with each second. The torso of his body was fading away, and soon his arms and legs were being swallowed whole by this light. Within an instant, Mr. Hartsook was gone and a beautiful white mist, even whiter than what Colin had seen just days ago, burst forth and shined and lit up the whole room. The light ripped radiantly and floated about two inches from the ground. There were no legs or arms, just a lovely apparition-like figure. And where the eyes once were stood two yellow crystal-like balls. They comforted, not frightened. Mr. Hartsook spoke, but Colin could only hear the words in his mind.

"Colin. This is who we are. We are unknown to the rest of the world because we protect them. We have been chosen to love other people and protect them. We are shape-shifters. Or mist-shifters, as we are sometimes called."

Colin was frozen. He listened, terrified, but calm at the same time. He was paralyzed. He couldn't move, but was very aware of everything going on around him. He'd never heard of mist-shifters before.

"We are those who can transform into other beings in order to keep this world protected. That's what a shape-shifter does. We guard and serve as caretakers for things both seen and unseen. We mist-shifters transform into mist-like creatures and have the power to prevent evil from happening before it starts."

"But," Colin said right away, "I don't think I understand."

"We are a breed of people who live and die to protect others," Colin heard in his mind. "We are everywhere in human form, but can mist, shape-shift, to protect all people. We can always form ourselves into a mist to protect and help others. Jenna kept evil from you the other day. She was not scared, and used her gifts in human form to keep you safe... She, like the rest of us, is a shape-shifter."

Colin watched Mr. Hartsook change back quickly and quietly. Regular sounds re-entered Colin's mind. He sat down, unprepared for what happened next.

NEXT WEEK ... CHAPTER 7

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