

Alan R.

14 years old

Fox Creek High School

9th grade



### The Girl

As he walked in the door, he already knew he was dead. Charles had gotten another ticket and neither he or his father had the money to pay for it. He stepped in the living room and saw his dad in his usual position: blackout drunk on the couch in the dark living room, beer cans all over the floor. It looked like his dad had had a better day than Charles; that day was the worst he'd had. Nothing went right. He went past his dad and into the kitchen where he made a sandwich with the last of the bread. He knew he had homework, but he never did it. He had some grades lower than his age of eighteen, but he didn't mind. He knew he didn't have a future. He'd known that for as long as he could remember. His family had a reputation for being one thing: drunkards. And there was nothing to say he would be anything other than that.

He was going to drop out of school sooner or later. Up until recently, he'd chosen not to because he wanted to stay in school with his girlfriend. Jenna Micheals was a year younger than him, blonde hair, blue eyes, from the east side (so she was richer than he was) but their relationship ended earlier today. After he'd eaten, his mind returned to his problem: what he should do after high school? Should he even go back to school? However, his thought process was interrupted by a noise similar to footsteps in the living room. Charles, assuming it was his dad, started towards his room, when he heard it again but louder. This time it sounded like a thud and he went to see if his dad was alright. He walked past the kitchen into the dark living room

where he saw his dad, still asleep on the couch, exactly where he saw him last. Thinking little of it, Charles headed back to his room, where he laid down on his bed in effort to end the day early. Just as he closed his eyes he heard the noise once more; however, this time it was much louder and seemed to have a source just outside of his closed door. He quickly stood up, and, still thinking it was just his mind playing tricks on him, quickly opened the door just to find an empty doorway. He turned around to head back to bed when he saw a girl he'd never seen before. She was about four and half feet tall, she had two blonde pigtails and blue eyes. She was wearing a light pink dress and little black shoes with long white socks.

Charles' heart skipped a beat until he realized that this girl was no threat to him. She just looked at him as if she hadn't just appeared out of nowhere. As for him, he had an expression on his face that clearly must have been interpreted by this girl as surprise and disgust because she said, in a rather cocky attitude for a child, "What are *you* looking at?"

Charles, still breathing heavily from the instant appearance of this child in his room, replied with, "Who are you?"

"Why I'm your best friend, silly!"

She talked with an accent that he couldn't place but he knew was familiar.

"But I-I've never seen you before," he said.

She smiled. "Oh I see what you're doing! Well, hello my name is Jenna Micheals. Nice to meet you!"

She stuck out her hand as if they were greeting, but Charles, at the sound of her name, had a feeling similar to someone poking an open wound in his chest. He remembered earlier that day. She had broken up with him for another guy, Joseph. Charles couldn't find out why though. He responded after a moment.

“I guess I do know you. You look different though.”

“I’m hungry,” she said, as she returned her hand to her side since Charles wasn’t going to shake it.

He was fairly surprised at how casual this comment came from the child, but rather than debate it, he figured the best thing to do was to accept her request. He walked her to the kitchen where he remembered that there was little to no food. He decided to get something at the diner, so, sneaking past his dad, he took the last of his money to the car and carefully pulled out of the driveway and down the road into town.

On the way to the diner, Jenna started talking to Charles.

“What’s this?” she said pointing to the ticket he still had on his dashboard.

Charles, who was beginning to warm up to the girl, started telling her about the ticket in the way he usually began talking to her about his day, “Oh that’s a great story. So I was driving home today, right? And I pulled up to this four-way, (it’s the one in my neighborhood, about half way between my house and the high school) and I pass through this four-way at the same time everyday and there is never any traffic, right? Well, I usually can get away with breezing through the stop sign, but today there was a cop. Now this cop must’ve been camouflaged because I’m telling you I didn’t see him until it was way too late. He pulls me over and says something about how he has to uphold the law for the great state of California and all that. Well I tell him that it can’t be that great or else he’d let me go. Well that made him mad and he comes at me with everything he’s got. So now I got that ticket for \$36.50.”

“\$36.50! I don’t even think I’ve seen that kinda money my whole life.”

“Well I know I definitely don’t have enough and my dad probably doesn’t either.”

She laughed. “I only got about \$1.25 and I thought I was doing alright.”

“When you get a job you’ll be doing better.”

“I’m only 7 ½,” she said. “I can’t get a job for awhile”

“Yeah I know,” he said, remembering that she wasn’t the real Jenna.

But then how could they look so much alike. He smiled as he looked down at her face. She was definitely the same Jenna. She had the same face, just younger; preserved just the way he remembered it back in elementary school.

“Do you work?”

She brought him out of his trance. Before he could answer, he parked beside the drug store, and they went in. They each took a seat and asked the waiter to get them both an ice cream.

“And a pop,” she added.

“Do you want to eat it here or to-go?” the waiter offered.

“What do you think, Jenna?” Charles felt weird staying her name.

“Let’s take it to-go so we can go on a walk,” she decided.

They walked along the road, talking just like they used to, until they came to a bridge. He knew the bridge, it was the Scott River Road bridge. He only knew it because his great uncle died there in 1940, nine years before he was born. Nevertheless, he’d heard the story many times. Jenna chose to walk down a trail that led to the river. He, less eagerly, followed her down the trail and to the bank of the river, where he saw her already sitting.

“You know,” Charles began, “My family’s got kind of a history with this bridge.”

“What do you mean?”

“My uh dad’s father’s brother” he said, pausing as he said each word, trying to remember what his relation was to him, “his name was John, back in 1940, he came down here with his

daughter and her friend. His daughter and he both knew how to swim, and the friend didn't know how, but she lied and told him that she did know how. At some point during their picnic down here, the little girls went out in the river. His daughter did just fine with the current, and stayed afloat easily, 'cause she was an experienced swimmer, like I said. But as for her friend, she couldn't keep her head above water and started drowning. Once John realized she couldn't swim, he ran down and jumped in the water right in here. And he saved that little girl's life. Unfortunately, he got swept up in the current and he drowned right in this river."

Once he finished, he had no idea what to expect in response to that from a seven and a half year old. He realized that the topic of death is too complex for a child to be able to comprehend it. He thought she might say something, but she didn't. She just sat there, staring at the water, a look of contemplation on her face. For a moment, he saw her as the seventeen year old Jenna that he'd grown up with for all these years. But he knew it couldn't be her. It didn't make sense.

Jenna stood up and said, "Are you ready to go now?"

"Sure, if you are."

She walked back up the path until she reached the top, where she walked to the middle of the bridge. She sat down so her feet were hanging off the fifteen foot drop. Charles joined her.

He decided to ask her the question he'd been wanting to ask her since he first saw this young Jenna.

"Are you really Jenna?"

"Yeah. Why wouldn't I be?"

"Well I know you're not seven; you're seventeen, so who are you? Are you some kind of practical joke or-or am I just going insane?" he said, a little too forcefully.

She responded calmly, “If I’m not Jenna then how would I know your mom’s name is Carol?”

They were silent. She was the only person he’d ever told about his mom. She died when he was nine years old. His dad was never the same and neither was Charles if he was honest with himself.

“So then why are you here like this?”

“I’m not sure about why I’m a kid now but I just wanted to come hang out with you for a while.”

Still not entirely convinced he wasn’t dreaming, Charles and Jenna finished their ice cream on the bridge. They went back to their usual laughter and joking around until the sun started to set.

A few minutes later, when Jenna noticed it was a lot harder to see, she looked at Charles and said, “It’s getting late. I should probably get back.”

“Yeah, me too. I’m in enough trouble with the ticket already. But I got time to drop you off at your place.”

“No, silly, I’m not going to my house!”

She stood up and turned to go towards the wrong side of the bridge.

“Where are you going? We came from that way.”

“But I didn’t,” she said.

And with one last goodbye, she walked off the bridge.

The walk home was very quiet for Charles as he wondered what just happened. He knew that some of it had to have been his mind, but some of it his mind couldn’t have faked.

More confused than when he left, he drove down the road leading to his house, where he saw Jenna's parents talking to his dad on the lawn. When he got out of the car, he saw that Jenna's mom was crying. He walked up and asked what the matter was.

Jenna's father responded, "Jenna died in a car wreck on the way home from school."