

A New Town, A New Chance

Casey stared out the window of the car at the street beyond, hoping to get a glimpse of the town she was going to live in. As the car turned onto the wide main road, she suddenly saw her new home. In spite of herself, hope fluttered in her chest like a trapped bird. She tried to force it back down. She had no reason to think that things would be different here in North Carolina than in Georgia. No reason to think that the people here might be different, not treat her like a delicate figurine instead of a normal person because of her disability. She had hoped before. She was always disappointed. This was her third new house in the last year. Her mother said that this would be the last time, but Casey didn't mind moving. Moving gave her a chance to start over. Her mother stopped the car in front of a three story white house with green shutters and a green roof. Her mom turned around and tapped her on the shoulder. When Casey turned to look at her, she signed, "We're here!" with her hands.

Casey sighed, not in the mood to be reminded of her disability. "You realize that just because I can't hear doesn't mean I can't tell what you're saying when you just talk. I can read lips!"

"I know, honey." Her mother signed, "I just don't want to make things hard for you. Now, let's go see our new home."

Casey hopped out of the car, mumbling under her breath, "Stop treating me like a baby!" She knew her mother knew she could talk and lip-read; she just insisted on treating Casey like she couldn't do anything for herself. Casey had lost her hearing from meningitis at the age of three, after she learned how to talk. She walked toward her new house, her good mood fouled by her overprotective mother.

The next day, Casey awoke in her new room. Its calm blue walls smiled down at her as she quickly got dressed in a dark green t-shirt and white jeans, excited for her first day at Jayson Private School. Looking in the mirror, she brushed her dark red hair. In an hour, her mother was driving her to school. The closer she got to the school the more nervous and excited she became. As they rounded the corner, she saw it for the first time. Her hopes plummeted. The school was two stories tall, with grey paint. Its windows glared at as if to say, "Stay out! You're not wanted here!". Over its wide wooden double doors was the name of the school in golden letters. Children flocked outside, laughing and screaming things she couldn't hear. All of the sudden the

doors opened and the children flowed inside like a large, turbulent river. A bell must have rung, she assumed.

After all the children were gone, her mother escorted her inside, her hand resting protectively on her shoulder. At the end of the hall was a large imposing wooden door with the word "Office" engraved on it. Her mother opened the door and gestured her inside. Casey glanced nervously around the dark blue room. One wall sported a dark blue and gold banner with the school's crest on it, a lion holding a quill in its mouth. The other wall was hidden behind a display case full of trophies and certificates the school had won. The sight of all those awards seemed to calm her mother. The two of them walked toward the desk at the back of the room, next to another door. Behind it, a short, bespectacled woman stood, her head barely clearing the top of the high desk. The sight would have been funny if Casey hadn't been so nervous. "How may I help you?" she asked.

"Hello. We are here for my daughter's first day of school. Her name is Casey. Casey Manilon." her mother said.

"Oh yes. Casey is in Ms. Krona's seventh grade class, in room 137. You're going to like her, she is a very good teacher." The woman said, smiling encouragingly at them.

"Yes, she probably is, but are you sure she will be able to handle my daughter?" Her mother leaned forward.

Casey looked down, slightly embarrassed. She knew her mother was telling the woman about her deafness. The woman looked at Casey with both curiosity and pity in her gaze. Suddenly Casey felt the urge to say something.

"Yes, I'm deaf. But I can still talk and tell what you are saying." She said, struggling to keep the anger at the woman's treatment of her out of her voice. The woman seemed surprised and a little embarrassed at hearing her speak, and quickly busied herself with the papers on the desk.

"Okay, so I will need you to fill out these transfer papers." The woman said, handing her mom some papers. Her mother began filling them out while Casey sunk dejectedly into one of the hard wooden chairs that lined the walls of the office. Judging by the woman's actions, things wouldn't be much better here after all.

Casey was right not to get her hopes up. When she walked into Room 137, everyone looked at her. Casey shifted from foot to foot. Everyone looked curious to see what the tall,

redheaded girl with the green backpack was doing in their classroom. The minute it was announced that she was a new student, the minor curiosity turned into a storm, and then when they found out she was deaf, a hurricane. Casey could feel twenty pairs of eyes fixated on her, watching. "Now class, I want you to make Casey feel welcome!" Ms. Krona, said, then turned to Casey. "Make sure to tell me if you need anything!" She said very slowly. Casey reddened slightly, embarrassed. "Thank you." Casey said, walking forward to take a seat at the front of the room, making sure to sit somewhere she had a clear view.

Casey sat in her backyard, staring moodily into the trees. She had just gotten home from a terrible first day. Ms. Krona had insisted on speaking slowly whenever she was speaking directly to her, which the other children found funny, but often forgot about her during class and turned around so Casey couldn't see what she was saying. At first, all the other children seemed interested in Casey, but no one tried to speak to her, and they quickly lost interest and went back to their normal routine. Casey was, once again, the odd girl out, the one who ate at lunch alone, and didn't join in the games at recess. Casey got up and walked around her large, grassy backyard lined with trees, surrounded by a tall wooden fence. Casey walked into the house and found her mother sitting in the living room with a tall, dark haired woman and a girl. "Hello Casey." The woman said.

"Casey, this is Anita Rowen, and this is her daughter. I know her from work. She lives next door!" Her mother said, for once not sighing. Casey looked at the girl. She had straight, brown hair, longer than her mothers, with big, brown eyes. She looked around Casey's age.

"Hi." Casey said, suddenly a bit shy.

"Hi. My name is Mia." The girl said, not sounding shy at all.

"Casey, why don't you show Mia your room?" her mother said.

"Okay, come on," Casey replied. Just then, she decided she wouldn't mention the fact that she was deaf. Mia would find out on her own soon enough, so why bring it up? Besides, just for once it would be nice to see how people would treat her if she didn't know she was deaf. On the way up, they talked about school, and their families. Casey found out that Mia went to the same school that she did, but was in a different class. She also found out that Mia had a little sister, who was at a birthday party, that she was in Mr. Orin's class, and that Mia had a dog named

Mercury. In turn, she told Mia about Ms. Krona, and how she had always wanted a pet, but was careful to leave out her disability. As they spoke, Casey grew to like Mia more and more. Mia was funny, smart, and a nice person. By then, they had reached Casey's room. All of the sudden, Casey decided to tell Mia.

"Mia?" Casey said quietly.

"Yes?" Mia said, turning.

"I'm deaf." Casey whispered.

"I know." Mia stated, not at all surprised.

"You do? How?" Casey said, surprised.

"Your mother told me."

"Why didn't you tell me you knew?"

"You didn't mention it, so I didn't either."

Casey was so surprised she didn't answer. Mia knew! She knew, but she didn't treat Casey differently than if Casey was... normal. Mia smiled, sensing Casey's surprise.

"Hey, I just don't think you deserve to be treated any differently than anyone else. Plus, you must be able to do all sorts of things I can't. Can you speak sign language?" Mia asked.

"Yes, I can. I've spoken it since I was little." Casey answered, for once feeling special, and happy.

"Cool! Can you teach me? It could be like our special code!" Mia said excitedly.

Casey grinned. "Sure. It would be cool to know someone else who could speak it. It might take a while to learn, though."

"That's okay. I still want to learn." Mia grinned back.

"Alright, than let's start now. " Casey answered. Over the next hour, Casey taught Mia the alphabet in sign language. They practiced until Mia's mother said it was time for them to leave.

Mia promised to keep practicing, and invited Casey to come over to her house the next day.

Casey smiled. She had finally found a friend.