

THE Shape Shifters

CHAPTER 1

Colin's New House



It was like two big eyes staring right at him from outside his window that night. The paper plant was still working hard and shining through the fog that hung low under the heavy clouds that threatened rain, or possibly even snow. Colin wished it would snow, because that would mean no school tomorrow, which was always a good thing. He looked out his window another moment, then turned back to his book. Reading was quiet, relaxing, and a way to escape his thoughts from how life really was. Tonight Colin was reading about a boy who was much like him – alone and unsure. But the ending, he'd heard from the librarian, was hopeful.

He'd been living in Kingsport for about three weeks now. It wasn't so bad now that his mom had officially left him alone with his grandparents. Well, they weren't technically his grandparents, but his adopted family. His mother was adopted at a young age, had Colin when she was 16, then moved out with him only to go from place to place for much of his life. Colin had been everywhere, it seemed. He lived with his mother's friends, his aunt, his other grandparents, his other aunt, and then back again with his mother's friends, all since he was born. In all his 13 years, Colin had never had his own room, toys or even clothes. He always shared, and always got the last pick of everything.

It was better now, a little bit anyways. G'ma's house was nice. It was a small white house with plenty of windows to let the light in. The front porch had two rockers and some potted plants that greeted visitors. There was plenty of space for G'ma, G'pa and Colin. A large kitchen sat towards the back of the house, which led to a spacious backyard – all the things a young boy needed: food and land to run around on. After his mom dropped him off and told him she'd see him in a few weeks, he found out that a room was waiting for him upstairs. He got his own dresser, nightstand, and even a double bed. A big bay window greeted him every time he entered the room, and the natural colors of beige and cream covered the walls and floors. It was all his!

But the best thing he'd gained from moving in with G'ma and G'pa was the dog. Her name was Essie. She followed Colin everywhere in the house, like she was trying to figure him out. She was really cute and seemed to understand that Colin wanted a quiet companion. Her little black and white body would wiggle with excitement whenever Colin would come home from school or even re-enter a room. This made him feel like he mattered. Essie even started sleeping with Colin to keep him company and would wake him in the morning so he wouldn't be late for school.

Essie had become more than just a pal, she was Colin's first real friend. He could tell her everything and she would listen, touch her wet nose to his cheek and make Colin feel like everything he said mattered..

G'ma was nice. She cooked really good meals and always asked Colin how his day was when he got home from school. It was nice to have someone waiting for him. His mom never was. When he lived with her, she was always either at work, out with a friend or boyfriend, or asleep. He

always let himself in after school or from being outside. G'pa was sweet, and often tried to get Colin to play ball or go for a ride in his truck. Colin could also tell that he enjoyed his family. At dinner time, G'pa would just sit, eat, and listen to G'ma, which Colin liked. He liked that G'pa let her talk and just enjoyed being around her. His 56 year old face would just smile at her from across the table. His salt and pepper hair and sturdy, yet playful, appearance was always neat for mealtimes, something G'ma appreciated in her man. They did things for each other. They loved each other, Colin could see. Sometimes, even in just the short time Colin had been there, he would hear G'pa sneak little kisses and hugs from G'ma in the kitchen, right before dinner time. Colin didn't think adults could be so sweet and affectionate. But, apparently, they could!

G'pa seemed to like having Colin around, too.

"You want to go play some one-on-one?" G'pa asked with a basketball in hand. G'pa was fit and liked being outside.

Colin smiled. "Sure, I'll go easy on you," he joked as he got up from the couch.

"Ooohh, son, I think it'll be the other way around!" They played until G'ma had to pull them both inside for supper. Colin didn't like to admit that he lost to an "old man," and G'pa certainly liked to brag! With G'ma he was sweet and let her shine, but with Colin, he let on a little manly competition. Colin had never known this before. Ever.

It was so different from what Colin had had all his life.

But life was far from perfect. Colin never knew when living conditions would change, or if his mom would come and take him away. He didn't want to leave, now that he'd been here a little while. He didn't have the life he'd always wanted, but he had something, and that was worth holding on to.

Colin vaulted as he felt something jump onto the bed. "Whoa, girl, you scared me to death!" He reached over and tousled Essie's ears as she walked toward him for a cuddle.

"Hey, Colin," G'ma said as she entered the cream-colored doorway. "It's time for bed." Essie's little 20 pound body plopped down, ready for a snooze.

"Ok, G'ma," Colin placed his bookmark and got up.

G'ma went over to the closet and got some clothes out and set them on the bed. She was a sturdy lady, tall, and the evidence of hard work showed on her arms and calves. Her frame was fit, just like G'pa's, strong and sure of each movement she made. G'ma was only 51 years old; she adopted Colin's mom when she was 22, when his mom was only a newborn. Her face was pretty, with wispy, blonde-gray, shoulder-length waves around her blue eyes, big smile, and barely any wrinkles. She just had a friendly face and Colin liked how it made him feel like he could be completely comfortable around her.

"Don't forget, you have a dentist appointment tomorrow. I'll be picking you up from school around two," G'ma said, as she put dresses

and denim pants on the floor outside of Colin's room. She went over next to Colin's dresser to straighten it up. "I packed you a toothbrush so you can brush right before you leave from school."

"Okay, I forgot about that," Colin said as he put on a pajama top. Colin was excited to see the dentist. He'd only been once or twice before, but he remembered getting some free things the other times he'd gone. Maybe there would be some cool stuff to keep in case he needed them in the future.

"I know this is a new kind of life for you, Colin. But, everything is going to be okay," G'ma said this every so often since Colin had arrived. G'ma sat down on the bed while Colin finished packing up his things for the next day. "You know, G'pa and I are tickled to have you. I know you have it tough, what with your mom bouncing around and all. But we really love having you here, you know that right?"

Colin didn't like to talk about his mother. It was just too painful. He loved her with all his heart, but knew she would never be the mom he needed and wanted. Colin knew that G'ma just wanted to help heal his heart, and didn't have the heart to tell her not to talk about his mom. G'ma knew she and G'pa were the only stable people in his life; they had no other children, and Colin's two aunts and other grandparents lived in less safe neighborhoods. G'ma had no other children, as she couldn't ever have her own. When they adopted Colin's mom, they were tickled to be with a new little girl, one they could call their own. Little did they know that she would struggle so much as a young girl. Why she rebelled, well, G'ma didn't really know. She knew her daughter got mixed up in the wrong crowd, but there was not one reason or event that G'ma could pinpoint as to why she rebelled so badly. Colin's mom was much of a mystery.

Colin stopped what he was doing and looked over at G'ma staring back with sincere concern. "Yeah, I know that." He went to sit on the bed. "It's just been a big deal to finally have someplace I can call home. For now, anyways." He knew she just couldn't imagine someone having to deal with such an unpredictable life. He also could see that in her daughter she found disappointment, but in Colin, she found hope.

"This will always be your home, kiddo," G'ma gave Colin a squeeze. She stood, ruffled his hair and started for the door. "Get some rest. I guess Essie is your dog, now." She laughed a little and bent over to pet the dog's head. Colin smiled, feeling a bit guilty. "Don't worry, you can love on her. I don't mind. Goodnight," and she walked out.

Colin finished getting ready for bed. He knew that everything would be ok. Somehow, he just had a feeling that things were going to turn out right. Colin lay down with Essie and pet her smooth back while he wondered about what might happen next to him. He spoke aloud so Essie could hear, as if she really understood. "Maybe I could have a talent for skateboarding or music or something. Maybe I could start a band. But, I'd have to have friends to do that." Colin didn't quite have that yet. Maybe he'd meet someone to be best friends with for life. He'd never had a best friend before.

As he lay, Colin stared out the window at the fog. A little flurry fell down, and Colin smiled. Snow in early spring, perfect. His eyelids got heavy. Essie's wet nose on his hand comforted him as they both drifted to sleep.

Next Week Chapter 2

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