

# THE COMEBACK KID

BY CHRISTOPHER L TREMBLAY

## 1. The Big Move

The alarm sounded with a loud *brrrinnngggg!!!* Rowland's eyes quickly opened as he rolled over in his bed, shutting the alarm off with a slam. Then, without hesitating, he pulled the covers over his head and let out a loud groan.

Although Rowland had just awakened from a sound sleep, it was only hours earlier that he had actually been able to nod off into slumberland. He had been up most of the night tossing and turning, thinking about this day. He had secretly hoped the sun would never rise again, but nonetheless, the dawn finally broke on the day he dreaded most, going to not only a new school without any friends, but also one in an entirely different state.

Rowland had been forced to leave his hometown of Woonsocket, Rhode Island, where he had grown up for the past ten years, and all his friends. It was all he ever knew and now he was miles away from the comfort of his familiar surroundings – not to mention everyone and anyone he ever knew.

For years, Rowland hung out with the same kids at school, in Cub Scouts and on the sports fields, but now those memories seemed distant and Rowland was facing his toughest challenge ever. When his father's company decided to transfer him to Arizona, it felt like the beginning of the end for Rowland.

As he lay in bed thinking of the torture he was about to endure today, and in the weeks and probably months ahead, Rowland wished he was back home in Woonsocket with his friends, especially Midget – his best friend, Andrew.

What would the kids of this Western state think of him, a boy from the East Coast? Would they think he was cool because he was smart or would he be branded a geek? Would the clothes he wore in Woonsocket be in style in Flagstaff or would he be a fashion misfit? These were some of the things that kept Rowland tossing and turning most of the night.

“Rowland, let’s go! You’ve got to get up and get ready for school,” yelled his mom from downstairs. “We don’t want to make a bad impression on your first day in your new school, do we?”

In his mind, Rowland thought how much easier it would be if he were back home in Rhode Island, but he wasn’t, and at this point, what could he do about it? Slowly he dragged himself out of bed and got dressed for his first day of school in sunny Flagstaff. Just as he pulled his Carolina Panthers jersey over his head, his mom called up to him to hurry up so that he could have some breakfast.

Rowland made his way into the kitchen, poured himself a glass of grape juice and then reached into the cabinet for the Fruit Loops, his favorite cereal. However, upon opening the cabinet, there was no box anywhere to be found. He spun around to question his mother and saw his older sister slurping down the last of the cereal.

“Mom, Crystal ate all the Fruit Loops!”

“Hey, you snooze, you lose,” remarked his sister. “Besides, they’re not just yours and I wanted to see what they tasted like.”

“Whatever,” sighed a disgruntled Rowland as he slammed the cabinet door shut, gulped down his juice and stormed out of the kitchen without eating any breakfast.

After the junior high school bus had picked up his sister, Rowland and his mom got in the family car and headed toward Rowland’s new school. The ride to the school was eerie; the radio was the only thing making any noise. And it was the noise of his mother’s music.

Finally, Mrs. Smart broke the silence. “Rowland, today I’m driving you into school, but once we get to the school and find out everything we need to know, you’ll be taking the bus like everyone else.”

“Yeah, whatever,” Rowland said. “Why did Dad have to take the job here in stupid Arizona? I hate it here.”

“Your father took the transfer because the money will be good for the family,” she said. “Besides, we’re a lot closer to Grandma now and we thought the area was a peaceful one for you to grow up in.”

“Grow up in? Midget’s not here and I don’t know a single person. Yeah, this is going to be so much fun.”

“Eventually, you’ll meet some friends here in Arizona just like Andrew, but it’s going to take time,” his mother explained patiently. “You didn’t meet Andrew right away, so don’t worry about it. Right now, it’s time for school. We’re here.”

“Whoopie,” muttered Rowland under his breath so his mother couldn’t hear him as he grabbed his backpack and got out of the car.