

Flipped
by Wendelin Van Draanen

All I've ever wanted is for Juli Baker to leave me alone. For her to back off-you know, just give me some peace.

It all started the summer before second grade when our moving van pulled into her neighborhood. And since we're now about done with the eighth grade, that, my friend makes more than half a decade of strategic avoidance and social discomfort.

She didn't just barge into my life. She barged and shoved and wedged her way into my life. Did we invite her to get into our moving van and start climbing all over boxes? No! But that's exactly what she did, taking over and showing off like only Juli Baker can.

My dad tried to stop her. "Hey" he says as she's catapulting herself on board. "What are you doing? You're getting mud everywhere!" So true, too. Her shoes were, like, caked with the stuff.

She didn't hop out, though. Instead, she planted her rear end on the floor and started pushing a big box with her feet. "Don't you want some help?" She glanced my way. "It sure looks like you need it."

I didn't like the implication. And even though my dad had been tossing me the same sort of look all week, I could tell- he didn't like this girl either. "Hey! Don't do that," he warned her. "There are some really valuable things in that box."

"Oh. Well, how about this one?" She scoots over to a box labeled LENOX and looks my way again. "We should push it together!"

"No, no, no!" my dad says, then pulls her up by the arm. "Why don't you run along home? Your mother's probably wondering where you are."

This was the beginning of my soon-to-become-acute awareness that the girl cannot take a hint. Of any kind. Does she zip home like a kid should when they've been invited to leave? No. She says, "Oh, my mom knows where I am. She said it was fine." Then she points across the street and says, "We just live right over there."

My father looks at where she's pointing and mutters, "Oh boy." Then he looks at me and winks as he says, "Bryce isn't it time for you to go inside and help your mother?"

I knew right off that this was a ditch play. And I didn't think about it until later, but ditch wasn't a play I'd run with my dad before. Face it, pulling a ditch is not something discussed with dads. It's like against parental law to tell your kid it's okay to ditch someone, no matter how annoying or muddy they might be.