



# FLIP

If you could be  
a legendary hero,  
who would  
you be?

David Lubar





## ***Halfway into the Woods***

***Taylor shut off*** her alarm clock and blinked the bedroom into focus. As the morning light filled her eyes, the memory of a flash flittered through her mind. *There must have been some lightning last night*, she thought.

The slight chill of the hardwood floor felt nice against her bare feet when she shuffled down the hall to the bathroom. On the way, she paused by her brother's door long enough to knock and say, "Seven o'clock. Time for school, Ryan."

No answer. No surprise. They were twins, but far from identical. He was blond with blue eyes. Her hair and eyes were light brown. But the real differences lay beneath the surface. Ryan did everything at the last minute, if he did it at all. She finished every assignment as soon as possible. He dangled near the bottom of their class. She hovered at the top. He acted out every thought. She thought out every action.

Taylor knocked again on the way back from the bathroom. "Get up. You can sleep as late as you want tomorrow." Still no answer. *I tried.*

She dressed in the clothes she'd laid out the night before, checked her backpack to make sure she had everything ready, then sat at her desk and wrote in her journal until seven-thirty.

*Yogurt*, she decided as she capped her pen and closed her journal. That's what she usually had on Fridays. Blueberry. With one tablespoon of wheat germ. A good source of vitamin B.

After breakfast, Taylor left for school—allowing herself enough time to arrive fifteen minutes early, as always. She enjoyed the walk, especially now that spring was so close.



The school was only eight blocks from her home, including the long stretch that bordered the park.

When she got there, she spotted a familiar figure wandering along the edge of the woods by the football field. Even from behind, Taylor recognized the black sweatshirt with the bright green alien face, the electric-blue sneakers with the dangling orange laces, and the blond hair in that ridiculous ponytail.

*What's he doing?* Taylor jogged around the side of the school and across the field. By the time she reached the woods, Ryan had disappeared among the trees, but she had no trouble following the snap of branches that marked his passage.

"Hey," she called when she caught sight of him.

"Hi," Ryan said. "What are you doing here?"

"What are *you* doing here?" Taylor asked. She glanced nervously over her shoulder in the direction of the school.

"Looking for the alien ship," Ryan said.

This wasn't even close to any of the thousand excuses she'd expected from him. "What alien ship?"

"The one that exploded over the woods. I saw it last night. Couldn't sleep after that. So I got out of bed early."

"Don't be absurd," Taylor said. "You saw lightning—probably a distant flash which you misinterpreted due to your overactive imagination. That's all."

"I'm not stupid," Ryan said. "I know what I saw. It wouldn't hurt for you to believe me once in a while. I saw a spaceship."

"Then you were dreaming." Taylor checked her watch. There was still plenty of time before school started.

"No way. I was awake. I had a killer thirst. Remember what happened at dinner?"

"Every detail, unfortunately." The scene was fresh in her mind, the newest entry in a collection she thought of as "Explosions at the McKenzie Dinner Table." Of course, if Ryan



had listened to her, there wouldn't have been any trouble. All he had to do was tap the stupid shaker. But he never listened. It was like his brain was clogged.

"I got up for a drink of water. That's when I saw it. Had to be an alien ship. As long as you're here, you can help me look." Ryan waved his arm at the woods around them. "I'll bet we find pieces all over."

"You're wasting your time," Taylor said. It drove her crazy. He wouldn't spend five minutes on things that really mattered like homework or studying, but he'd squander hours chasing after some fantasy. "There aren't any alien spaceships."

"There's one less than there used to be," Ryan said. "That's for sure. Come on, help me look for stuff. If they're smart enough for space travel, they've got to have all kinds of equipment. You know—alien artifacts. And weapons. They'd definitely need protection against hostile earthlings. Wouldn't it be great if we found a disrupter beam?" Ryan squatted and fired at a nearby tree.

Taylor wondered which hostile earthling was Ryan's real target. A list of possibilities scrolled through her mind: Dad, Ms. Gelman, Coach Ballast, Mr. Zorn, Principal Guthrie, Billy Snooks. Maybe even her. The list, like the universe, was endlessly expanding.

While space was growing larger, time was growing shorter. She glanced at her watch again. "We'd better head back, or we'll be late."

Ryan shrugged. "So?"

"So we'll get in trouble." Taylor wasn't about to blow a hole in her perfect attendance record.

"I don't care." Ryan spun away from her and charged deeper into the woods.

"Travel between the stars is virtually impossible," Taylor called after him. "I learned all about that when I did my report for the science club last month." No answer. But she



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