

FLIPPED



目录 • *Flipped*

Chapter 01: Diving Under.....	2
Chapter 03: Buddy, Beware!.....	20
Chapter 04: The Sycamore Tree.....	31
Chapter 05: Brawk-Brawk-Brawk!.....	43
Chapter 06: The Eggs.....	62
Chapter 07: Get a Grip, Man.....	81
Chapter 08: The Yard.....	99
Chapter 09: Looming Large and Smelly.....	116
Chapter 10: The Visit.....	128
Chapter 11: The Serious Willies.....	146
Chapter 12: The Dinner.....	160
Chapter 13: Flipped.....	171
Chapter 14: The Basket Boys.....	189

Chapter 01: Diving Under



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

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 on 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 to 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.

But there he was, putting the play in motion, and man, he didn't have to wink twice. I smiled and said, “Sure thing!” then jumped off the liftgate and headed for my new front door.

I heard her coming after me but I couldn't believe it. Maybe it just sounded like she was chasing me; maybe she was really going the other way. But before I got up the nerve to look, she blasted right past me, grabbing my arm and yanking me along.

This was too much. I planted myself and was about to tell her to get lost when the weirdest thing happened. I was making this big windmill motion to break away from her, but somehow on the downswing my hand wound up tangling into hers. I couldn't believe it. There I was, holding the mud monkey's hand! I tried to shake her off, but she just clamped on tight and yanked me along, saying, "C'mon!"

My mom came out of the house and immediately got the world's sappiest look on her face.

"Well, hello," she says to Juli.

"Hi!"

I'm still trying to pull free, but the girl's got me in a death grip. My mom's grinning, looking at our hands and my fiery red face.

"And what's your name, honey?"

"Julianna Baker. I live right over there," she says, pointing with her unoccupied hand.

"Well, I see you've met my son," she says, still grinning away.

"Uh-huh!"

Finally I break free and do the only manly thing available when you're seven years old — I dive behind my mother. Mom puts her arm around me and says, "Bryce, honey, why don't you show Julianna around the house?"

I flash her help and warning signals with every part of my body, but she's not receiving. Then *she* shakes *me* off and says, "Go on."

Juli would've tramped right in if my mother hadn't noticed her shoes and told her to take them off. And after those were off, my mom told her that her dirty socks had to go, too. Juli wasn't embarrassed. Not a bit. She just peeled them off and left them in a crusty heap on our porch.

I didn't exactly give her a tour. I locked myself in the bathroom instead. And after about ten minutes of yelling back at her that no, I wasn't coming out anytime soon, things got quiet out in the hall. Another ten minutes went by before I got the nerve to peek out the door.

No Juli.

I snuck out and looked around, and yes! She was gone. Not a very sophisticated ditch, but hey, I was only seven. My troubles were far from over, though.

Every day she came back, over and over again. "Can Bryce play?"

I could hear her asking from my hiding place behind the couch.

"Is he ready yet?"

One time she even cut across the yard and looked through my window. I spotted her in the nick of time and dove under my bed, but man, that right there tells you something about Juli Baker. She's got no concept of personal space. No respect for privacy. The world is her playground, and watch out below — Juli's on the slide!

Lucky for me, my dad was willing to run block. And he did it over and over again. He told her I was busy or sleeping or just plain gone. He was a lifesaver. My sister, on the other hand, tried to sabotage me any chance she got. Lynetta's like that. She's four years older than me, and buddy, I've learned from watching her how not to run your life. She's got ANTAGONIZE written all over her. Just look at her — not cross-eyed or with your tongue sticking out or anything — just *look* at her and you've started an argument.

I used to knock-down-drag-out with her, but it's just not worth it. Girls don't fight fair. They pull your hair and gouge you and pinch you; then they run off gasping to mommy when you try and defend yourself with a fist. Then you get locked into time-out, and for what? No, my friend, the secret is, don't snap at the bait. Let it dangle. Swim around it. Laugh it off.

After a while they'll give up and try to lure someone else. At least that's the way it is with Lynetta. And the bonus of having her as a pain-in-the-rear sister was figuring out that this method works on everyone. Teachers, jerks at school, even Mom and Dad. Seriously. There's no winning arguments with your parents, so why get all pumped up over them? It is way better to dive down and get out of the way than it is to get clobbered by some parental tidal wave.

The funny thing is, Lynetta's still clueless when it comes to dealing with Mom and Dad. She goes straight into thrash mode and is too busy drowning in the argument to take a deep breath and dive for calmer water. And she thinks *I'm* stupid.

Anyway, true to form, Lynetta tried to bait me with Juli those first few days. She even snuck her past Dad once and marched her all around the house, hunting me down. I wedged myself up on the top shelf of my closet, and lucky for me,

neither of them looked up. A few minutes later I heard Dad yell at Juli to get off the antique furniture, and once again, she got booted.

I don't think I went outside that whole first week. I helped unpack stuff and watched TV and just kind of hung around while my mom and dad arranged and rearranged the furniture, debating whether Empire settees and French Rococo tables should even be put in the same room. So believe me, I was dying to go outside.

But every time I checked through the window, I could see Juli showing off in her yard. She'd be heading a soccer ball or doing high kicks with it or dribbling it up and down their driveway. And when she wasn't busy showing off, she'd just sit on the curb with the ball between her feet, staring at our house.

My mom didn't understand why it was so awful that "that cute little girl" had held my hand. She thought I should make *friends* with her.

"I thought you liked soccer, honey. Why don't you go out there and kick the ball around?"

Because / didn't want to be kicked around, that's why. And although I couldn't say it like that at the time, I still had enough sense at age seven and a half to know that Juli Baker was dangerous. Unavoidably dangerous, as it turns out. The minute I walked into Mrs. Yelson's second-grade classroom, I was dead meat.

"Bryce!" Juli squeals.

"You're *here*." Then she charges across the room and tackles me.

Mrs. Yelson tried to explain this attack away as a “welcome hug,” but man, that was no hug. That was a front-line, take-'em-down tackle. And even though I shook her off, it was too late. I was branded for life.

Everyone jeered, “Where's your *girl* friend, Bryce?”

“Are you *married* yet, Bryce?”

And then when she chased me around at recess and tried to lay *kisses* on me, the whole school started singing, “Bryce and Juli sitting in a tree, K-I-S-S-I-N-G...”

My first year in town was a disaster. Third grade wasn't much better. She was still hot on my trail every time I turned around. Same with fourth. But then in fifth grade I took action.

It started out slow — one of those Nah-that's-not-right ideas you get and forget. But the more I played with the idea, the more I thought, What better way to ward Juli off? What better way to say to her, “Juli, you are *not* my type”?

And so, my friend, I hatched the plan.

I asked Shelly Stalls out. To fully appreciate the brilliance of this, you have to understand that Juli *hates* Shelly Stalls. She always has, though it beats me why.

Shelly's nice and she's friendly and she's got a lot of hair. What's not to like? But Juli hated her, and I was going to make this little gem of knowledge the solution to my problem.

What I was thinking was that Shelly would eat lunch at our table and maybe walk around a little with me. That way, anytime Juli was around, all I'd have to

do was hang a little closer to Shelly and things would just naturally take care of themselves. What *happened*, though, is that Shelly took things way too seriously. She went around telling everybody — including Juli — that we were in love.

In no time Juli and Shelly got into some kind of catfight, and while Shelly was recovering from that, my supposed friend Garrett — who had been totally behind this plan — told her what I was up to. He's always denied it, but I've since learned that his code of honor is easily corrupted by weepy females.

That afternoon the principal tried cross-examining me, but I wouldn't cop to anything. I just kept telling her that I was sorry and that I really didn't understand what had happened. Finally she let me go.

Shelly cried for days and followed me around school sniffing and making me feel like a real jerk, which was even worse than having Juli as a shadow. Everything blew over at the one-week mark, though, when Shelly officially dumped me and started going out with Kyle Larsen. Then Juli started up with the goo-goo eyes again, and I was back to square one.

Now, in sixth grade things changed, though whether they improved is hard to say. I don't remember Juli actually chasing me in the sixth grade. But I do remember her sniffing me.

Yes, my friend, I said sniffing. And you can blame that on our teacher, Mr. Mertins. He stuck Juli to me like glue. Mr. Mertins has got some kind of doctorate in seating arrangements or something, because he analyzed and scrutinized and practically baptized the seats we had to sit in. And of course he decided to seat Juli right next to me.

Juli Baker is the kind of annoying person who makes a point of letting you know she's smart. Her hand is the first one up; her answers are usually complete dissertations; her projects are always turned in early and used as weapons against the rest of the class.

Teachers always have to hold her project up and say, “*This* is what I'm looking for, class. This is an example of A-plus work.” Add all the extra credit she does to an already perfect score, and I swear she's never gotten less than 120 percent in any subject.

But after Mr. Mertins stuck Juli right next to me, her annoying knowledge of all subjects far and wide came in handy. See, suddenly Juli's perfect answers, written in perfect cursive, were right across the aisle, just an eye-shot away. You wouldn't believe the number of answers I snagged from her. I started getting A's and B's on everything! It was great!

But then Mr. Mertins pulled the shift. He had some new idea for “optimizing positional latitude and longitude,” and when the dust finally settled, I was sitting right in front of Juli Baker.

This is where the sniffing comes in. That maniac started leaning forward and *sniffing* my hair. She'd edge her nose practically up to my scalp and *sniff-sniff-sniff*.

I tried elbowing and back-kicking. I tried scooting my chair way forward or putting my backpack between me and the seat. Nothing helped. She'd just scoot up, too, or lean over a little farther and *sniff-sniff-sniff*.

I finally asked Mr. Mertins to move me, but he wouldn't do it. Something about not wanting to disturb the delicate balance of educational energies.

Whatever. I was stuck with her sniffing. And since I couldn't see her perfectly panned answers anymore, my grades took a dive. Especially in spelling.

Then one time, during a test, Juli's in the middle of sniffing my hair when she notices that I've blown a spelling word. A lot of words. Suddenly the sniffing stops and the whispering starts. At first I couldn't believe it. Juli Baker cheating? But sure enough, she was spelling words for me, right in my ear.

Juli'd always been sly about sniffing, which really bugged me because no one ever noticed her doing it, but she was just as sly about giving me answers, which was okay by me. The bad thing about it was that I started counting on her spelling in my ear. I mean, why study when you don't have to, right?

But after a while, taking all those answers made me feel sort of indebted to her. How can you tell someone to bug off or quit sniffing you when you owe them? It's, you know, wrong.

So I spent the sixth grade somewhere between uncomfortable and unhappy, but I kept thinking that *next* year, next year, things would be different. We'd be in junior high — a big school — in different classes. It would be a world with too many people to worry about ever seeing Juli Baker again.

It was finally, *finally* going to be over.

Chapter 02: Flipped



The first day I met Bryce Loski, I flipped.

Honestly, one look at him and I became a lunatic. It's his eyes. Something in his eyes. They're blue, and framed in the blackness of his lashes, they're dazzling. Absolutely breathtaking. It's been over six years now, and I learned long ago to hide my feelings, but oh, those first days. Those first years! I thought I would die for wanting to be with him.

Two days before the second grade is when it started, although the anticipation began weeks before—ever since my mother had told me that there was a family with a boy my age moving into the new house right across the street. Soccer camp had ended, and I'd been so bored because there was nobody, absolutely nobody, in the neighborhood to play with. Oh, there were kids, but every one of them was older. That was dandy for my brothers, but what it left *me* was home alone.

My mother was there, but she had better things to do than kick a soccer ball around. So she said, anyway. At the time I didn't think there was anything better than kicking a soccer ball around, especially not the likes of laundry or dishes or vacuuming, but my mother didn't agree. And the danger of being home alone with her was that she'd recruit me to help her wash or dust or vacuum, and she wouldn't tolerate the dribbling of a soccer ball around the house as I moved from chore to chore.

To play it safe, I waited outside for *weeks*, just in case the new neighbors moved in early. Literally, it was weeks. I entertained myself by playing soccer

with our dog, Champ. Mostly he'd just block because a dog can't exactly kick and score, but once in a while he'd dribble with his nose. The scent of a ball must overwhelm a dog, though, because Champ would eventually try to chomp it, then lose the ball to me.

When the Loskis' moving van finally arrived, everyone in my family was happy. "Little Julianna" was finally going to have a playmate. My mother, being the truly sensible adult that she is, made me wait more than an *hour* before going over to meet him.

"Give them a chance to stretch their legs, Julianna," she said.

"They'll want some time to adjust."

She wouldn't even let me watch from the yard.

"I know you, sweetheart. Somehow that ball will wind up in their yard and you'll just *have* to go retrieve it."

So I watched from the window, and every few minutes I'd ask, "Now?" and she'd say, "Give them a little while longer, would you?"

Then the phone rang. And the minute I was sure she was good and preoccupied, I tugged on her sleeve and asked, "Now?" She nodded and whispered, "Okay, but take it easy! I'll be over there in a minute."

I was too excited not to charge across the street, but I did try very hard to be civilized once I got to the moving van. I stood outside looking in for a record-breaking length of time, which was hard because there he was! About halfway back! My new sure-to-be best friend, Bryce Loski.

Bryce wasn't really doing much of anything. He was more hanging back, watching his father move boxes onto the lift-gate. I remember feeling sorry for

Mr. Loski because he looked worn out, moving boxes all by himself. I also remember that he and Bryce were wearing matching turquoise polo shirts, which I thought was really cute. Really *nice*.

When I couldn't stand it any longer, I called, "Hi!" into the van, which made Bryce jump, and then quick as a cricket, he started pushing a box like he'd been working all along.

I could tell from the way Bryce was acting so guilty that he was supposed to be moving boxes, but he was sick of it. He'd probably been moving things for days! It was easy to see that he needed a rest. He needed some juice! Something. It was also easy to see that Mr. Loski wasn't about to let him quit. He was going to keep on moving boxes around until he collapsed, and by then Bryce might be dead. Dead before he'd had the chance to move in!

The tragedy of it catapulted me into the moving van. I had to help! I had to save him! When I got to his side to help him shove a box forward, the poor boy was so exhausted that he just moved aside and let me take over. Mr. Loski didn't want me to help, but at least I saved Bryce. I'd been in the moving van all of three minutes when his dad sent him off to help his mother unpack things inside the house.

I chased Bryce up the walkway, and that's when everything changed. You see, I caught up to him and grabbed his arm, trying to stop him so maybe we could play a little before he got trapped inside, and the next thing I know he's holding my hand, looking right into my eyes.

My heart stopped. It just stopped beating. And for the first time in my life, I had that feeling. You know, like the world is moving all around you, all beneath you, all *inside* you, and you're floating. Floating in midair. And the only thing

keeping you from drifting away is the other person's eyes. They're connected to yours by some invisible physical force, and they hold you fast while the rest of the world swirls and twirls and falls completely away.

I almost got my first kiss that day. I'm sure of it. But then his mother came out the front door and he was so embarrassed that his cheeks turned completely red, and the next thing you know he's hiding in the bathroom.

I was waiting for him to come out when his sister, Lynetta, saw me in the hallway. She seemed big and mature to me, and since she wanted to know what was going on, I told her a little bit about it. I shouldn't have, though, because she wiggled the bathroom doorknob and started teasing Bryce something fierce.

"Hey, baby brother!" she called through the door.

"There's a hot chick out here waiting for you! Whatsa matter? Afraid she's got cooties?"

It was so embarrassing! I yanked on her arm and told her to stop it, but she wouldn't, so finally I just left.

I found my mother outside talking to Mrs. Loski. Mom had given her the beautiful lemon Bundt cake that was supposed to be our dessert that night. The powdered sugar looked soft and white, and the cake was still warm, sending sweet lemon smells into the air. My mouth was watering just looking at it! But it was in Mrs. Loski's hands, and I knew there was no getting it back.

All I could do was try to eat up the smells while I listened to the two of them discuss grocery stores and the weather forecast. After that Mom and I went home. It was very strange. I hadn't gotten to play with Bryce at all. All I knew

was that his eyes were a dizzying blue, that he had a sister who was not to be trusted, and that he'd almost kissed me.

I fell asleep that night thinking about the kiss that might have been. What did a kiss feel like, anyway? Somehow I knew it wouldn't be like the one I got from Mom or Dad at bedtime. The same species, maybe, but a radically different beast, to be sure. Like a wolf and a whippet—only science would put them on the same tree.

Looking back on the second grade, I like to think it was at least partly scientific curiosity that made me chase after that kiss, but to be honest, it was probably more those blue eyes. All through the second and third grades I couldn't seem to stop myself from following him, from sitting by him, from just wanting to be near him.

By the fourth grade I'd learned to control myself. The sight of him—the thought of him—still sent my heart humming, but my legs didn't actually chase after him anymore. I just watched and thought and dreamed.

Then in the fifth grade Shelly Stalls came into the picture. Shelly Stalls is a ninny. A whiny, gossipy, backstabbing ninny who says one thing to one person and the opposite to another. Now that we're in junior high, she's the undisputed diva of drama, but even back in elementary school she knew how to put on a performance. Especially when it came to P.E. I never once saw her run laps or do calisthenics. Instead, she would go into her “delicate” act, claiming her body would absolutely collapse from the strain if she ran or jumped or stretched.

It worked. Every year. She'd bring in some note and be sure to swoon a little for the teacher the first few days of the year, after which she'd be excused from anything that required muscles. She never even put up her own chair at the

end of the day. The only muscles she exercised regularly were the ones around her mouth, and those she worked out nonstop.

If there was an Olympic contest for talking, Shelly Stalls would sweep the event. Well, she'd at least win the gold and silver— one medal for each side of her mouth. What bugged me about it was not the fact that she got out of P.E.—who'd want her on their team, anyway? What bugged me about it was that anyone who bothered to look would know that it wasn't asthma or weak ankles or her being “delicate” that was stopping her. It was her hair. She had mountains of it, twisted this way or that, clipped or beaded, braided or swirled. Her ponytails rivaled the ones on carousel horses. And on the days she let it all hang down, she'd sort of shimmy and cuddle inside it like it was a blanket, so that practically all you saw of her face was her nose.

Good luck playing four-square with a blanket over your head.

My solution to Shelly Stalls was to ignore her, which worked just dandy until about halfway through the fifth grade when I saw her holding hands with Bryce. *My Bryce*. The one who was still embarrassed over holding my hand two days before the second grade. The one who was still too shy to say much more than hello to me. The one who was still walking around with my first kiss.

How could Shelly have wormed her hand into his? That pushy little princess had no business hanging on to him like that! Bryce looked over his shoulder from time to time as they walked along, and he was looking at *me*. My first thought was that he was telling me he was sorry. Then it dawned on me— he needed my help. Absolutely, that's what it had to be! Shelly Stalls was too delicate to shake off, too swirly to be pushed away. She'd unravel and start sniffing and oh, how embarrassing that would be for him! No, this wasn't a job a boy could do gracefully.

This was a job for a girl.

I didn't even bother checking around for other candidates—I had her off of him in two seconds flat. Bryce ran away the minute he was free, but not Shelly.

Oh, no-no-no! She came at me, scratching and pulling and twisting anything she could get her hands on, telling me that Bryce was *hers* and there was no way she was letting him go. How delicate.

I was hoping for herds of teachers to appear so they could see the real Shelly Stalls in action, but it was too late by the time anyone arrived on the scene. I had Fluffy in a headlock and her arm twisted back in a hammerlock, and no amount of her squawking or scratching was going to get me to *unlock* her until a teacher arrived.

In the end, Shelly went home early with a bad case of mussed-up hair, while I told my side of things to the principal. Mrs. Shultz is a sturdy lady who probably secretly appreciates the value of a swift kick well placed, and although she told me that it would be better if I let other people work out their own dilemmas, she definitely understood about Shelly Stalls and her hair and told me she was glad I'd had the self-control to do nothing more than restrain her.

Shelly was back the next day with a head full of braids. And of course she got everybody whispering about me, but I just ignored them. The facts spoke for themselves. Bryce didn't go anywhere near her for the rest of the year.

That's not to say that Bryce held *my* hand after that, but he did start being a little friendlier to me. Especially in the sixth grade, after Mr. Mertins sat us right next to each other in the third row back. Sitting next to Bryce was nice. *He* was nice. He'd say Hi, Juli to me every morning, and once in a while I'd catch him

looking my way. He'd always blush and go back to his own work, and I couldn't help but smile. He was so shy. And so cute! We talked to each other more, too. Especially after Mr. Mertins moved me behind him.

Mr. Mertins had a detention policy about spelling, where if you missed more than seven out of twenty-five words, you had to spend lunch inside with him, writing your words over and over and over again.

The pressure of detention made Bryce panic. And even though it bothered my conscience, I'd lean in and whisper answers to him, hoping that maybe I could spend lunch with him instead. His hair smelled like watermelon, and his ear-lobes had fuzz. Soft, blond fuzz. And I wondered about that. How does a boy with such black hair wind up with blond ear fuzz? What's it doing there, anyway? I checked my own ear-lobes in the mirror but couldn't find much of anything on them, and I didn't spot any on other people's either.

I thought about asking Mr. Mertins about earlobe fuzz when we were discussing evolution in science, but I didn't. Instead, I spent the year whispering spelling words, sniffing watermelon, and wondering if I was ever going to get my kiss.