

## Chapter 1

“Thomas. Thom–mas. Thomm–maas! Where are you, Thomas? It’s lunchtime!”

Claire stood on the back porch calling for her brother. She knew he wasn’t far away because she’d seen him outside the kitchen window just a moment before. She went back in the house, put down her book, slipped on her shoes, then came outside and looked for Thomas in the most likely place—the garage.

He was there, all right, making something out of a small block of wood, two eggbeaters, and an assortment of radio parts. Today he was building a “Transporter.” His creation was almost as big as a loaf of bread.

Thomas had spent a dollar at a garage sale for the eggbeaters and attached them to one end of the wooden block. On the other end he glued a magnet from a car speaker and then fastened a sparkplug between the eggbeaters. His dad had thrown the car speaker and sparkplug in the trash that morning and Thomas was pleased he’d found them before the garbage truck came by. He carved out a space in the block of wood for two batteries and connected them with a piece of wire to a radio button.

Thomas often created machines and gizmos and pretended they could do special things, like shoot down alien spaceships. The Transporter was almost finished when Claire walked into the garage.

“Thomas, it’s lunchtime,” she said. “Didn’t you hear me calling you?”

Thomas kept working. Claire stared at him for a minute, then frowned.

“By the way, do you know where my bicycle is?” she asked.

Thomas didn't say anything. He didn't even look up. He scratched his armpit, then picked up a screwdriver.

"Thomas..." demanded Claire. "Thomas!"

She waited a moment, a scowl growing across her face.

"Yeah?" he answered slowly, not sounding too interested.

Claire looked at what he was making. She sneered and brushed her long blonde ponytail off her shoulders.

"There's two things I don't understand about eleven-year-old boys: why they play so much hockey and why they have to waste their time making things that never actually do anything."

There was a pause, then Thomas spoke. "And why do thirteen-year-old girls spend hours sitting around reading dumb books... and never remember where they leave their stuff?"

"I left my bike right here in the garage yesterday, and it's not here now."

"No, it's beside the garage because it was in my way and I moved it out."

"Oh you!" snapped Claire. "Why are you so... so irritating?"

This, of course, was a rhetorical question which Thomas ignored. He tightened a screw on his Transporter, then held it in the air, nodding slowly.

"There." He smiled with satisfaction, pushing his tussled hair from his eyes. He examined the Transporter closely. "Say, Claire," he said without lifting his eyes, "how would you like to travel someplace far away?"

Claire's bottom lip jutted out. She crossed her arms, took two steps forward, grabbed the Transporter from Thomas' hands, and ran out onto the driveway.

“And how would you like to see this stupid thing travel someplace far away?” she exclaimed.

Thomas was close behind. Claire brought her arm back to throw the Transporter over the fence into the neighbours’ yard when Thomas caught up and clutched her arm.

“Give that back right now!” he yelled. “You’ll wreck it. Give it back! I’m telling! Give it!”

Claire took the Transporter in her other hand and held it above her head. She was sometimes embarrassed at being tall for her age, but not now. She had no problem keeping the Transporter away from Thomas. She spun around, amused by her shorter brother’s frenzied efforts to get it back, like a frantic dog jumping at a doggie biscuit just out of reach.

“What do you call this wonderful contraption?” she asked, her voice raised in mock interest.

“It’s my Transporter. Now give it!”

“A Transporter. Amazing! And what, exactly, does a Transporter do?”

“It’s for traveling places. Now give it to me before you break it!”

Claire recognized the radio button on the side of the Transporter. With a teasing tone, she said, “Oh! And don’t tell me you can listen to your favourite radio station while you travel? Unbelievable! How convenient!”

“That’s the Activator. Don’t touch it!”

“The Activator? Of course! I should have known. All Transporters come with an Activator, don’t they?”

The sparkplug and speaker magnet suddenly shook loose, fell to the ground, and bounced along the driveway.

“Oh!” exclaimed Claire. “That’s not an *Activator* button, but a *Self-Destruct* button, which seems to be working quite well without even pushing it!”

Thomas glared at Claire. “Just give it to me before you wreck something else!” he snarled.

Claire hadn’t noticed her hand slowly lowering while Thomas scrambled around her, but he did and with a desperate lunge he jumped up and latched onto his machine. One of the eggbeaters broke off in his hand. Claire still held the Transporter.

“Give it to me! Now!” he shouted.

Claire was enjoying the whole skirmish. “What are you going to do? Shoot me with a laser beam from that eggbeater you’re holding?”

“It’s not an eggbeater. It’s an FRM!”

“An FRM?”

“A Frequency Reception Modulator! And now it probably won’t work because you busted it!”

“Wow! A Transporter with a Frequency Receptor Modu-thingy. I didn’t know they came with that feature. What will they think of next?”

“It’s called a Frequency *Reception Modulator*. Now give me back my Transporter!”

Claire yawned. She was about to give the Transporter back when Thomas yelled, “I’m glad I let the air out of your bike tires! You’re awful!”

Claire’s eyes grew large and her jaw dropped. “You did what?!” she gasped.

She gritted her teeth and brought her arm back to throw the Transporter as far as she could. Thomas dropped the eggbeater and quick as a flash jumped up to hold Claire’s wrist with both hands. Then he grabbed the Transporter, and as he did his hand hit the Activator.

Instantly, everything around them faded like the lights in a movie theatre just before the movie starts. They heard the faint, high-pitched sound of a distant siren. They started a kind of head-over-heels, slow-motion somersault as air quietly rushed past them.

This seemed to go on for a long time. Both Thomas and Claire felt dizzy. They began to feel warm. Then hot. The air became smoky. They could hear the roar of an engine. An enormous engine.

Then, with unexpected suddenness, they landed with a thud, face down on something hard.

Thomas yelped. He lay on his stomach, gripping a piece of dirty pipe. Claire was also on her stomach, behind Thomas, holding onto his ankles with all her might, and screaming constantly.

They were on very hot metal which shook and jerked from side to side. They wanted to cover their ears because of the deafening roar in front of them, like the sound of an engine without a muffler, but they didn't want to let go of whatever it was they hung on to.

Black smoke blew in their faces and stung their eyes. The air smelled like burning tires.

Claire felt her long hair blowing around and whipping against her face. "What's happening?" she screamed above the noise. "Where... are we?!"

Thomas didn't answer. He gripped the piece of pipe harder. "I don't know!"

### Discussion Questions

1. If you saw the Transporter, what would you think it was and why?
2. In what ways are Thomas and Claire typical kids?

3. Do you think siblings treat each other differently than they do other people? Why or why not?
4. Where do you think Thomas and Claire are now?