

## Clayton Cartwright

Spotting Matt as the only familiar face in the room, Gerallt walked over and sat at the empty desk next to him. It also happened to be the chair directly in front of Clayton Cartwright.

Waiting for the teacher to face the chalkboard and turn his back to the class, Clayton leaned forward, stretched out his arm, and poked a sausage-sized finger into Gerallt's back. "Hey, new kid," Clayton whispered. "Where'd you get the Halloween costume? What're you supposed to be, some kind of Goth druggie?"

Gerallt ignored Clayton. Matt glanced sideways, the memory of his own initial run-in with Clayton still fresh in his mind from the first day of school.

"What's the matter with you?" Clayton continued, leaning forward to poke Gerallt again. "I'm talking to you. You deaf? Or stoned!"

Gerallt glanced over his shoulder, gave Clayton a look of utter contempt, and then turned back to read what the teacher was writing on the chalkboard.

"Oh, I get it," Clayton whispered, giving Gerallt a third poke in the back. "You're one of these Amish kids who don't believe in fighting. Believe in turning the other cheek, do you? Or maybe you're just a coward." He gave Gerallt a shove to the back of the head. "Just wait 'til after school, Bible boy, and I'll give you a little something on each cheek."

This time it was Gerallt who made sure the teacher was still busy at the blackboard with his back to the class. Then he turned and whispered in the same unusual accent as his sister, "My great ahnt warned me about you, Clayton Cartwright. It will take more than the likes of you tah frighten me. And I promise you this. Poke me one more time in the back, and you won't be poking anyone for a very long time." Then Gerallt turned his back on Clayton, swiftly slipped his fingertips between the wooden buttons of his shirt and began to whisper something too softly for Matt to hear.

"Is that so, Bible boy?" Clayton replied angrily, just loudly enough for the teacher to hear. Mr. Thompson turned around just in time to see Clayton lean his considerable weight forward to poke Gerallt once more in the back.

Clayton's finger had barely touched Gerallt's back when there was a loud crack as the front legs of Clayton's chair snapped. Suspended motionless for an instant, his entire body pivoted forward on the chair's remaining legs, and his nose smashed into the back of Gerallt's chair with a sickening, yet strangely satisfying, crunch. Next, his outstretched index finger, driven by the whole weight of his body and desk, hit the floor with such force that the resulting snap was heard clearly by everyone in the room. This was followed instantly by the crash of Clayton's desktop, body, and books onto the floor followed by an unexpectedly high-pitched scream of pain. After a second of shocked silence, the class erupted as everybody started talking and yelling at once.