



Impossible Things

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One

I probably wouldn't have paid much attention to the new kid if Amber and Madeline hadn't decided to make her their next victim. I stood in the hallway and watched as they stared at her from about two feet away, snickering and pointing. Short brown hair, glasses and blue jeans. She couldn't have looked more ordinary if she'd tried. I balled my hands into tight fists and took a deep breath. Maybe the new kid and I had nothing in common but our enemies, but I might as well show her that the environment at school wasn't totally hostile.

I walked over and nodded at her, ignoring the other girls completely. "Hey, welcome to Parkside. It's kind of like a reality show, you know?"

She looked blank.

"Um, like *Survivor*? Once these two establish their place at the top of the food chain and vote you off the island, things may improve." I glanced toward Amber and Madeline. "Or not. In my experience, not."

The new girl stared at me, eyes wide behind the dark frames of her glasses, her mouth slightly open.

“Oh, social advice from Thrift Store Cassidy,” Amber sneered, deliberately lisping my name. *Cathidy*. She planted her hands on her hips and gave the new girl a long hard look. “You ought to watch who you get friendly with. Hanging out with the school freak...”

Madeline nodded. “Social suicide.”

The new girl didn’t say anything. I grinned at her; then I turned to the other two and made a gurgling noise in my throat. Unlike the rest of my family, I don’t have any amazing talents, but I am pretty good at noises. I gurgled a bit more and then I laughed at the disgusted expressions on their faces. “How many times do I have to flush before you go away?” I asked.

There was a muffled snort from beside me: the new girl choking back a laugh.

Amber narrowed her eyes. “Well, I guess you’ve made your choice then,” she told the new girl coldly. “Come on, Maddy. Let’s go.” She linked her arm through her friend’s and they sauntered off down the hallway.

I watched them go, my relief mixed with guilt. I hadn’t meant to, but I’d probably just made everything harder for the new girl. “Look, I’m sorry,” I told her. “I’ll go. If you just ignore me or better yet, shout a few insults at lunchtime, they’ll forget that you laughed. They’re always eager for more followers.”

She held out her hand. No one shakes hands in the seventh grade. It was like something my brother would do—in other words, not entirely normal. I grinned and took her hand. “Cassidy Silver.”

“Victoria Morris.” She watched me for a moment, gray-blue eyes thoughtful behind the glasses, her lips curved in a hint of a smile. “How come they called you that?”

“Thrift Store Cassidy?” I looked down at my outfit: a green T-shirt that read *Humpty Dumpty Was Pushed*, a multicolored silk scarf and a pair of faded jeans with patched knees. “Isn’t it obvious?”

Her cheeks flushed. “Not your clothes. I meant, why did they call you Cathidy?”

Because they know I hate it. That would’ve been the honest answer, but I didn’t like to admit that it bothered me. “I used to lisp,” I said carefully, making sure I didn’t. Years of speech therapy and still, if I was stressed or not concentrating, the lisp would sneak back.

“Oh. That’s...that’s so mean.”

“Um, yeah. Mean is what they do best.” I looked at her curiously. “Wasn’t it like this at your old school? Where’d you go before this anyway? Did you just move here or something?”

She nodded. “Yes, we moved.” Her eyes slid away from mine for a moment; then she looked right at me and smiled again. A full-on smile this time—two rows of small white teeth and lots of pink gums. “You’re in grade seven too? What’s our teacher like?”

“Ah. Well, I’m afraid he’s not quite human.” I sucked my bottom lip between my teeth, making a long, drawn-out, squeaking noise. “No description will do him justice. You’ll see.” I glanced at my watch and picked up the battered briefcase I lug my school stuff around in. “Come on. If we’re late, he’ll eat us alive.”

The seventh grade classroom was kind of like a large jail cell, minus the bunk and toilet. Mr. McMaran had taken down all the artwork on the first day. He said he didn’t want us staring at pictures when we were supposed to be working. The fluorescent ceiling lights hummed overhead. It was sunny outside, a bright January day, but the blinds were tightly closed. I sighed, made a face at Victoria and took my seat in the back row. I liked to sit near the door. It gave me the illusion that I could escape if necessary.

“Welcome to the jungle,” I whispered, patting the desk beside mine. “Sit here. It’s a good spot for those of us low on the food chain.”

Victoria gave that muffled snort of a laugh again and sat down at the empty desk.

“Seriously. From back here you can watch Amber and Madeline tossing their ponytails, giggling and passing notes.” I gestured to the front of the room, waving my hand like I was a tour guide. “And to our left? The outsiders.” With a sweep of my arm, I took in quiet nervous Nathan

Cressman with his smooth black skin and too-big glasses and too-small pants, half asleep with his head on his folded arms; dark-eyed Joe Cicarelli, always in trouble; and chubby Felicia Morgan. I nodded my head toward her. “See the dark-haired girl there? Definitely voted off the island.”

The door banged open. Mr. McMaran stomped in and slammed it behind him. “Get out your history texts,” he said. “Start reading where we left off.”

Apparently he wasn't much in the mood for teaching. He grunted a few instructions; then he sat at his desk and read a glossy magazine about cigars. I snuck another sideways peek at Victoria. I wondered how long it would be before she realized that hanging around with me really was social suicide. I wondered how much longer it would be before she decided to cut her losses and move on. And I wondered how much longer I could go on pretending I didn't care that I had no friends.