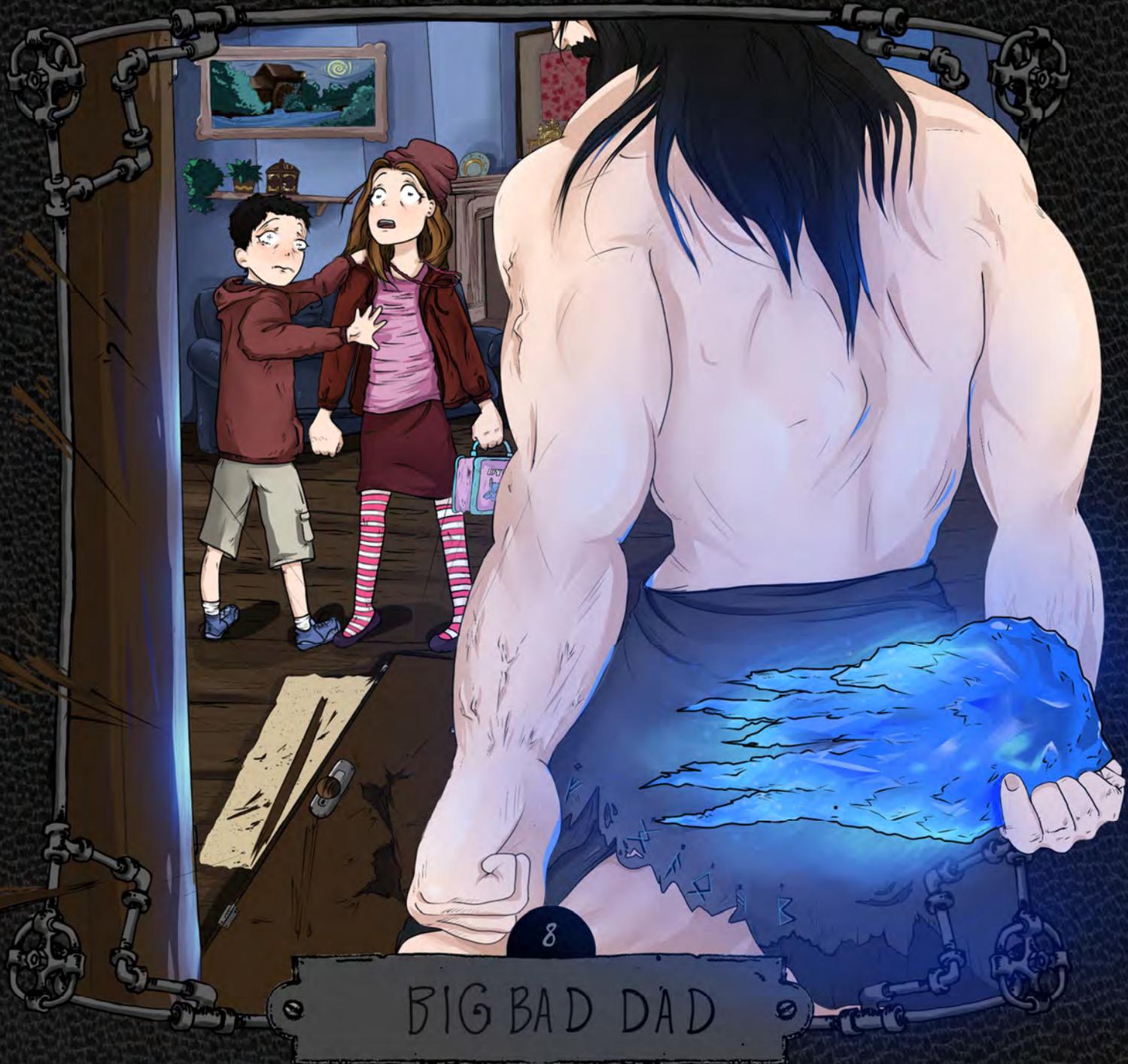
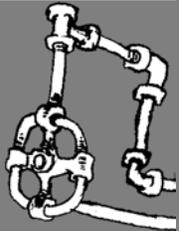
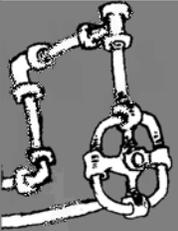


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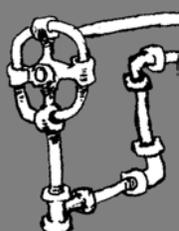
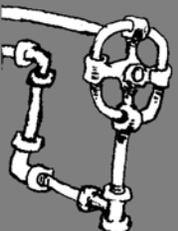


BIG BAD DAD

THOMAS KINGSLEY TROUPE



FURRY & FLO



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BIG BAD DAD

BOOK 8



BY THOMAS KINGSLEY TROUPE
ILLUSTRATED BY HAPPY_SHMEPPIR

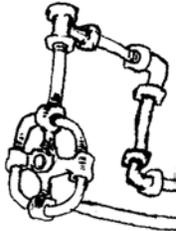
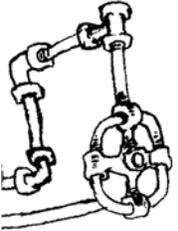
TABLE OF

CHAPTER 1	
GROUNDED.....	7
CHAPTER 2	
SOMETHING IN THE AIR.....	19
CHAPTER 3	
MAKES SCENTS.....	31
CHAPTER 4	
ONLY CHOICE.....	43
CHAPTER 5	
OVER THE RIVER.....	56
CHAPTER 6	
THROUGH THE WOODS.....	70
CHAPTER 7	
GRANDMA'S HOUSE.....	83

CONTENTS

CHAPTER 8	
HIDDEN TREASURES.....	97
CHAPTER 9	
HERE COMES TROUBLE.....	110
CHAPTER 10	
GOING, GOING.....	125
CHAPTER 11	
DENN OF WOLVES.....	137
CHAPTER 12	
WEREWOLF WAR.....	150
CHAPTER 13	
SAYING GOODBYE.....	164
CHAPTER 14	
HOME.....	180

GROUNDING



CHAPTER 1



Flo Gardner sat on the edge of her bed in her small, dingy bedroom in Corman Towers. For the moment, the room was quiet enough to hear the creaks of the neighbors walking around in the apartment above them. She glanced at the crack in the ceiling to avoid her mom's stare.

After a moment, Mom broke the silence.

So you still won't tell me what happened," Maggie Gardner said from the doorway. She leaned against the

door frame, her arms crossed. Flo could feel her eyes on her as if studying her, trying to figure out a way to get through. “Great.”

Flo shrugged.

“You and your friend were missing for two days, Flo,” Mom said. “Two days. And there was no trace of you, no note, nothing. The two of you were just... gone.”

Flo took a deep breath then held it in. She wanted nothing more than to just blurt out exactly what had happened from the beginning, but she couldn't. There was no way. If she flat out told her everything...

...everything would change.

“I've talked to Jorge and Mona and they said Furry is doing the same thing,” Mom began.

Flo glanced at her mom, feeling both horrible and trapped. If Furry's adoptive parents were having the

same struggle, it meant their secret, and more importantly, Furry's secret, was safe. At least for the time being.

“Everything is fine, Mom,” Flo said quietly.

“We're home. Nothing bad happened to us.”

Mom unfolded her arms and waved them around her body. “And yet, I have no way of knowing that for sure, Flo. You show up here after two days without a phone call or anything. You looked like you've been through lord knows what...and I'm supposed to just believe you?”

Flo hated that she had to keep quiet. It wasn't fair to her and it really wasn't fair to her mom.

“Yeah,” Flo said. “I guess.”

Mom closed her eyes and tilted her head back against the door frame, as if trying to calm herself down.

“I don't understand why you won't talk to me,”

Mom said, shaking her head. “You’re all I have left in this world, Flo. I thought we were a team and could tell each other anything. I just...if anything happened to you...”

“But I’m home, Mom,” Flo said. She felt tears starting to sting the inner parts of her eyes. “And everything is okay.”

For now, she thought.

Flo knew it was only a matter of time before some new scary thing came through the crack in the basement laundry room.

“Losing your dad was hard on me. I think about him every day,” Mom said.

“So do I,” Flo admitted and it was true. Even the mention of him made flashes of his face and smile light up in her mind. “I still can’t believe he’s gone.”

Flo studied the battered, Dyno-Katz lunchbox by her side. Besides her memories and his voice in her



head, the little metal box was really all she had left of him. Without realizing she was doing it, she touched the faded, embossed image of Acro-Kat on the front of the lunchbox.

“So you can understand how worried I am that I’m going to lose you too,” Mom said. “If you’re in trouble, I need to know so I can protect you. But I can’t be much of a mom if I don’t know and you won’t tell me.”

I want to Mom, Flo thought. But I just can’t.

How was she supposed to tell her mom she was trapped in another world? Would she believe there was a

place filled with monsters, werewolves, and gigantic golems? Flo knew she couldn't tell her mom that her best friend was a 3rd grade werewolf. It would be impossible to tell her about all of the adventures she and Furry had been on: outsmarting giant spiders, fighting goblins, bashing skeletons, dodging mummies, helping golems and running from big brother werewolves.

Flo didn't even want to think about Vane, the vampire bounty hunter...but it was too late and she shuddered anyway.

Only two people knew Furry's secret: Flo and Curtis, the retired caretaker of Corman Towers who had found Furry behind the basement laundry room dryers when he was just a young pup. Not even Furry's adoptive parents across the hall knew that when the moon was full, their kid turned into a werewolf.

“Well?” Mom said, definitely beyond losing her

patience. “Are you just going to zone out or are you going to tell me?”

Flo took a deep breath and exhaled. She hoped didn’t sound like a sigh.

“There’s nothing to tell,” Flo said slowly, feeling the lie burn inside of her. What she really wanted to say was: There’s nothing I CAN tell, Mom.

“I love you to pieces, Flo,” Mom said. “But I’m beyond worried about you. It scares me to no end that there’s something going on.”

“I love you too, Mom,” Flo said, and meant it. “Just please believe that I’m okay. Okay?”

Mom nodded and wiped a tear from the corner of her eye.

“You won’t tell me, so I guess I have no choice,” she said quickly. “Hurry up or you’ll be late for school.”

“Okay,” Flo said and slid off the bed. Her body

ached from her last crazy adventure. She wanted nothing more than to stay home and sleep for another day.

“And when you get home, you’re to do your homework, eat dinner, then head to your room. Nothing else.”

“I know,” Flo said. “I’m grounded forever.”

“You’re grounded until you can finally be honest with me,” Mom said. “It’s that simple.”

Sure, simple, Flo thought, pulling the lunchbox off of her ruffled bedspread.

“Do you hear me, young lady?” Mom said.

Flo tilted her head to meet her mom’s gaze. Maggie Gardner never said *young lady* unless she was really mad. This time it looked less like anger and more like hurt and to Flo? That was even worse.

“I hear you, Mom,” Flo said. “I’m sorry I worried you.”

She gave her mom a hug and stopped in the kitchen to grab a Toaster-Pop for the bus ride.

A moment later, Flo was out in the hallway, closing her apartment door behind her.

Outside, Furry stood waiting in his usual attire of a hooded sweatshirt and shorts. His oversized backpack was slung over each of his shoulders. He seemed fidgety, even more so than usual.

“Good,” Furry said, almost bursting with energy. “You survived!”

“Barely,” Flo mumbled and couldn’t even manage a smile. She hated feeling like she let anyone down, especially her mom. It was pretty much the worst feeling ever.

The two of them walked in silence to the elevator and took it from floor 17 down to the main level. At their stop, the creaky elevator doors slid open, rattling along the tracks. Through the lobby, they could

see bright yellow outside the window.

“It’s the bus,” Flo cried. “We’ve got to catch it!”

“I’m on it!” Furry shouted and dashed for the front door. Flo ran behind him, her lunchbox banging against her leg and her backpack bouncing up and down along her back.

As they blasted through the front door, the bus started to pull away. Without hesitation, Furry dashed across the sidewalk and grabbed the bus by the back bumper with his bare hands. He grunted as he lifted, holding the bus in place. The back tires squealed lightly against the pavement.

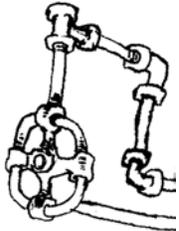
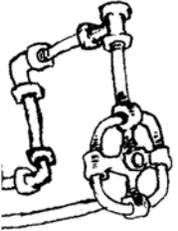
“What are you doing?” Flo shouted. She knew Furry’s werewolf strength was awesome, but she didn’t know he could stop a moving vehicle!

A moment later, the bus’s wheels stopped spinning and Furry gently set it down.

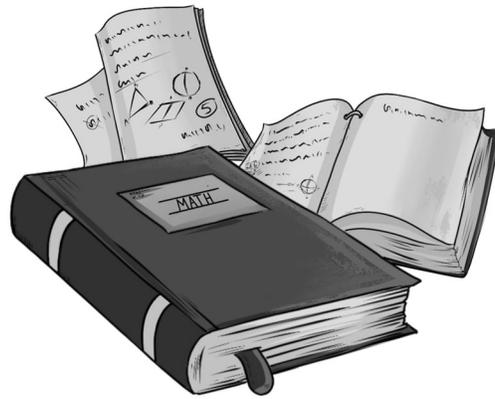
“Catching a bus,” he said with a smile. “C’mon!”



SOMETHING
IN THE
AIR



CHAPTER 2



Furry and Flo found a seat together on the school bus and waited for their bus driver, Carla, to drive off. She scratched her long, blonde hair and looked at the gear shifter in confusion as if wondering why they'd been suddenly stopped.

After a moment she shrugged it off and the busload of students were headed to Raimi Elementary.

“She thought the bus was broken,” Furry whispered.
“That’s hilarious.”

Flo didn't think it was so funny and she let Furry know.

"That was super dumb," she said. "What if someone saw you? You can't do stuff like that if you want to keep your secret."

"I know, I know," Furry said. "But I didn't want to miss the bus. We're already in enough trouble, right?"

"Yeah," Flo said and stared out the window. She didn't even feel like eating her Toaster-Pop "I'm pretty much grounded for the rest of my life."

Furry stopped smiling and clasped his hands together and looked down into his lap. "I'm sorry, Flo. It's all because of me, isn't it?"

Flo knew that because Furry was in her world, the occasional monster was set loose to run around. However, their two-day disappearance was actually her fault. She'd wanted to help Garvel the golem get

back to his world and help the rest of his golem brothers and sisters escape their creator and master, Krigg.

Flo was the reason they'd been stuck in Furry's world for as long as they were.

"Not all because of you," Flo said finally, bouncing in her seat as the bus tired bounded over a pothole in the road. "I got us stuck over there. You kept telling me it wasn't a good idea."

Furry shook his head. "Yeah, but I'm glad we did it," he said. "We helped those big lunks and they kept my brothers off my back. It's a win-win, I think."

Flo raised her eyebrows and nodded. "I guess so," she said quietly. "It's just hard, lying to my mom to keep your secret. She's never going to trust me again."

Furry fiddled with the loose tightening strap on



his backpack and glanced down the bus's main aisle. Flo knew he had just as hard a time, if not harder than she did. She knew Furry didn't feel like he belonged anywhere, but wanted to live in her world more than his own.

She also knew that if the rest of the world discovered he was an actual, real-life werewolf, Furry's life would never be the same. Flo worried that scientists or government guys would come and take him away. He'd be studied, poked and experimented on. Her best friend would disappear faster than she could say "Holy socks!"

"I have to figure out what to do," Furry said so faintly, Flo wasn't sure if she was meant to hear it or if he was just talking to himself.

The two of them were quiet for the rest of the ride to school. Flo looked at her friend, who continued to stare down the aisle and out the front window.

Is he sad? She wondered. Or maybe he's wondering how he can say goodbye to this world forever?

- - -

The first part of the school day was pretty uneventful. Just before lunch Flo spoke with her teacher, Mrs. Shamp, about the two days of school she'd missed. It wasn't easy, hearing that people at school were worried about her too, since her mom told them she didn't know where Flo was.

"What happened?" Mrs. Shamp asked.

"Kind of a long story," Flo said, but didn't offer to say anything more.

Her teacher nodded and gave her a little smile.

"I'm just glad you're back and safe, Flo," she said. "Your mom must have been worried sick."

"Yeah," Flo admitted. "She was."

Flo listened as Mrs. Shamp walked her through

what she'd missed while she was gone. Thankfully, there weren't too many homework assignments and it didn't seem like it would be too tough for her to catch up with the rest of the class.

She couldn't help but feel like a lousy student. She'd skipped school to battle skeletons her first day of 4th grade and missed two days completely only a few weeks later.

"Get all of this stuff done and you'll be in good shape," Mrs. Shamp said, handing her some worksheets with a smile.

"Thanks," Flo said. "I promise I'm not usually like this."

"We all hit rough patches from time to time," Mrs. Shamp said. She adjusted her glasses, which made her eyes look tiny behind her thick lenses. "I still think you're pretty great."

A rush of warmth flooded Flo's heart. As bad as

she'd been feeling ever since getting back home from Furry's world, she needed to hear something like that.

"You're pretty much the best teacher I've ever had," Flo confessed. "I mean, it's not even close and I've had a lot."

"Thanks, I'll take it," Mrs. Shamp said. "Now go eat some lunch!"

Flo grabbed her Dyno-Katz lunchbox and headed to the lunch room. She barely got through the double doors when she saw Furry waving her down. As usual, he'd saved her a spot at the table.

"I knew you were coming," Furry began. "I-"

"You could smell me coming from the other side of the school," Flo said, setting her lunchbox down with a clank. "I know, I know."

"Just so you know, it's not like you smell bad or anything," Furry said. "Really."

The two of them ate their lunch together, and Flo couldn't help but feel the stares of some of her 4th grade classmates from other tables. They probably thought she was weird for being the missing new girl and even more so for sitting with a 3rd grade boy.

It was rude to stare, but Flo realized she didn't care. Not today anyway.

After lunch, the two of them opened the doors leading to the playground, which was nothing more than a concrete slab enclosed by a tall, rusty fence. There wasn't much space on the school property for a proper recess space.

As soon as they were outside, Furry started acting funny. He lifted his nose and Flo saw his nostrils opening and closing as he was sniffing something in the air.

"Hey, stop it," Flo whispered, firing an elbow into his ribs. "You look like a dog sniffing a butt."



Furry took a few steps forward and tilted his head back even further as if to get a better whiff of whatever scent was hitting his nose. Flo saw a cluster of girls whisper and point at him. A few boys huddled near the

broken basketball hoop shook their heads and laughed.

“Furry!” Flo whispered, a little louder. She knew she didn’t need raise her voice with his wild werewolf senses, but it was getting ridiculous.

“I can’t help it,” Furry said. He continued to inhale the air in huge gulps.

Just as Flo was about to say something more, he stopped and scanned the horizon. She knew he could see for miles, but the buildings of the city likely blocked whatever he was looking for.

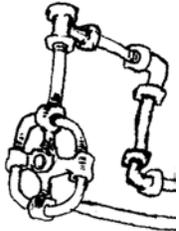
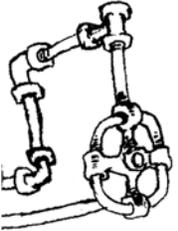
“Something’s coming,” Furry said in a hushed whisper.

Not again, Flo thought.

She walked over to her friend. His eyes were opened wide and his mouth hung open. The kid’s face was the definition of fear. “What is it?”

“Something bad,” Furry replied. “I think it’s...”

MAKES
SCENTS



CHAPTER 3



“...my father,” Furry finished.

Flo felt dizzy all of a sudden, as if someone had pulled the ground out from beneath her tennis shoes.

“Are you serious?” Flo cried.

She only had to look at Furry’s face again to realize the kid wasn’t kidding around. He looked as pale as a piece of paper with nothing printed on it.

So...” Flo began, not quite sure what to say.

Furry had told her his father wanted him back in his own world. He said it wasn't because he truly missed his son, he wanted the portal shard back. Flo had learned in the few months she'd been Furry's friend, the little werewolf had broken a piece off of something called the Veldir stone back in his own world. He used the shard to open a portal between his world and Flo's. It left a glowing blue crack in the floor behind the dryers in the Corman Towers laundry room.

The problem? As long as the shard was in Flo's world, the crack stayed open, leaving the way between worlds wide open for all sorts of monsters to come through.

In the short time she'd lived in Corman Towers, the two of them had to fend off monsters to keep themselves, the city, and the world, really, safe from whatever escaped from Furry's world. Flo found out that once the shard was returned to Furry's world, the

crack would seal up, closing off the way back forever.

Because of Furry's werewolf-y secret, he chose to hold onto the shard as a "just in case." If people knew what he really was, he could escape to his own world where werewolves were as common as pigeons.

Flo secretly wished Furry would get rid of the shard for good and stay in her world forever. It would keep monsters away and they would be able to just be normal friends.

Well, almost normal.

"Say something," Furry said, jolting Flo back to reality. "I'm not sure what to do."

Flo's eyes darted around as she shook her head.

"I don't either," Flo admitted. She'd wondered when Furry's dad would find and catch up with them. She definitely didn't think it would be this soon.

Before either of them could say another word, the

bell rang, alerting the students on the playground to return inside to finish off their day. Flo took a step toward the building on auto-pilot.

“What are you doing?” Furry asked, touching her arm.

“We need to go back inside,” Flo replied to her frightened friend.

“But...he’s coming.”

Flo looked off in the distance where Furry had sensed his dad somewhere off in the horizon. She didn’t understand how her friend could smell him in a city full of stinks, but somehow he knew. Even so, she still didn’t have a clue as to what they could do.

“I can’t leave school again,” Flo said, feeling terrible. “I’m in enough trouble as it is.”

Furry nodded, but said nothing. He fidgeted with his hands as they headed back inside with the rest of the students. Flo felt her heart beat faster in her

chest. She was nervous and scared and felt completely helpless.

Her dad's voice spoke up in her spinning mind.

Always do what you can for the ones you care about, he said. *They're the ones that matter most.*

"I know," Flo whispered.

"What?" Furry said, just before heading up the stairs inside to follow the rest of the 3rd graders.

"Nothing," Flo said. "Just talking to...myself."

"Oh, okay," Furry said, his head hanging lower than usual. The little guy looked beaten, almost doomed.

"How long until he gets here?" Flo asked quickly. "Is he close?"

Furry looked toward the door leading to the playground and shrugged.

"I'm not sure," he admitted. "I think he's a ways



off, but if I can smell him...”

“...he can smell you,” Flo finished.

Furry nodded. “Right.”

“Let’s get through school and get back home,” Flo suggested, drifting away with the rest of the 4th graders. “We’ll figure something out, okay?”

“Okay,” Furry called. “Let’s just hope it’s not too late!”

- - -

The rest of the school day was a mess. Flo couldn’t concentrate on anything and spelled ECLIPSE wrong in front of the whole class. During dedicated reading time, she re-read the same paragraph over and over. It was like her brain wasn’t in the mood for reading and instead wanted to figure out how to help Furry.

Mrs. Shamp even caught her looking out the window three separate times.



“I know it’s really nice out there, Flo,” Mrs. Shamp said. “But it’s not so bad in here, too.”

Flo nodded. She knew her teacher wasn’t making fun of her, but was just trying to get her to pay attention.

After the bell rang, signaling the end of the school day, Mrs. Shamp stopped her.

“Is everything all right, Flo?”

Flo tightened her grip on the handle of her lunchbox. Everything was definitely NOT all right, but she needed to pretend it was. She couldn't just blurt out that Rolvis the werewolf king was on his way to them right now and she had no idea how to stop it from happening.

“Yeah,” Flo said quickly. “It will be. I'm sorry I was a little distracted today.”

Mrs. Shamp nodded. “It's okay,” she said. “Everyone has off days, but I'm here if you need me.”

Flo smiled as best she could. *If you had any idea just how off some of my days were,* she thought.

“Thanks,” Flo said finally.

- - -

On the bus ride home, Flo watched Furry press his nose against the window. He even opened it a crack as if to let some of whatever he was smelling in.

The other kids on the bus kept looking at him like he was being weird, but Flo ignored them. Worrying about what other people thought wouldn't help them at all.

"How far away can he smell you?" Flo whispered.

Furry turned from the window, his eyebrows pushed down over his eyes in a semi-frown.

"Miles and miles," he said. "Werewolves can smell blood even easier."

Flo didn't know that. "So, if you're not bleeding it's harder for him to pin you down?"

Furry nodded. "Yeah, it's weird. Like I can smell that he's somewhere off in the distance but I don't know exactly where. But it works both ways. If he were to cut himself or something, it's like it sends out a signal. Does that make sense?"

"I think so," Flo said. "The scents makes sense."

"This is no time for jokes, Flo," Furry warned, but

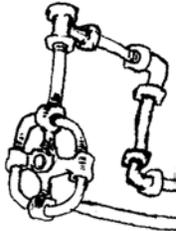
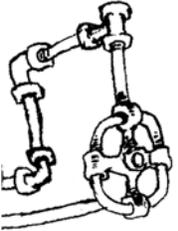
managed a smile anyway. “Even though that was pretty awesome.”

Flo smiled a little, then mashed her lips together in a half-frown. She had an idea, but knew it was either the worst idea ever or might be just what they needed.

“So we just have to get far away from here,” Flo said. “So your big bad dad can’t smell you anymore. Hopefully we can make him lose the scent.”

Furry nodded. “Yeah, I guess. But where can we go? We’re just kids.”

ONLY
CHOICE



CHAPTER 4



Once they were back at Corman Towers, Flo told Furry to come over as soon as he could. She figured they could come up with a plan together. When they got to the 17th floor, Furry went into his apartment across from Flo's as she unlocked her door.

Once inside, she headed to the kitchen for a quick handful of mini pretzels. On the kitchen table was a sticky note from her mom.

Working late today, but should be home before bed.

Eat, do you your homework, and head to your room. Being grounded is the pits, isn't it? Love you! MOM.

Flo popped a pretzel into her mouth and looked around the dingy little apartment kitchen, hoping an idea would strike. Scattered around on the mustard-yellow refrigerator were magnets that held coupons in place, along with a few old photos from easier, happier times.

As she looked at the familiar faces on the photos, an unlikely idea began to form. Before she could dismiss it, there was a knock at the door.

Flo darted to the living room and peered through the front door's peephole. She hesitated a moment, almost afraid she might see Furry's dad standing there. Instead, it was Furry himself, crossing his eyes with a goofy smile on his face.

Oh boy, Flo thought as she opened the door.

“Did you see the dumb face I made?” Furry asked.
“Before you opened the door?”

“Yeah,” Flo said with a quick nod. “Pretty dumb.”

Furry suddenly looked worried. “Oh, shoot. Will your mom be mad that I came over?”

“She’s not home from work yet,” Flo said.

“I know,” Furry said, tapping his nose. “But if she finds out? You’re supposed to be grounded, right?”

Flo shrugged. They definitely had bigger things to worry about. She motioned for him to come in.

Furry walked in and looked around, almost as if he was still afraid Flo’s mom or even his father were waiting inside like it was some sort of trap. After inhaling another nose-full of scents, he seemed to relax.

“So,” Flo began slowly. She shook her head, almost afraid to suggest it. “I sort of have an idea, but it’s either the worst idea ever or a pretty good one.”

“But not great?”

“No,” Flo said. “Nothing about any of this is great. We need to get far away and can’t tell anyone why. And of course, it’s just going to get me in trouble all over again.”

“Yeah,” Furry said. “But if we don’t, I’ll get dragged back to my world. Probably forever.”

Flo sighed. “So we don’t have a choice.”

Furry squished the corners of his mouth together like he wasn’t sure what to say. He looked up at Flo with his worried eyes and blinked as if waiting for her to speak.

“So what do we do?”

Flo led him into the kitchen to the old refrigerator where pictures of her family and her past were on display. Furry’s eyes moved rapidly, as if trying to take in all of the faces and places. He stopped when he saw Flo’s finger pointing at a photo of an older

woman, standing outside with a baby in her arms.

“Hey, who’s that old lady?” Furry asked, his eyebrows shot up in sheer curiosity.

“That old lady is my grandma,” Flo said.

“Grandma Flo, the same lady I was named after.”

“Is she holding...?”

“Yeah,” Flo said. “That’s me. I was like a week old in the picture.”

Furry whispered a quiet *oooooh* under his breath as he seemed to take the details in. A smile slowly crept across his face.

“I think we should go visit her,” Flo said.

“Yeah, we should,” Furry said. “Maybe once the coast is clear and my dad isn’t looking for me.”

“No, no,” Flo said. “I mean now. Like, today. She lives a few hours from here. Maybe that’s far enough so your dad won’t be able to find us.”

Furry blinked three times.

“Yeah, okay, Flo,” he said. “But how? Neither of us can drive and it’s too far to walk. And he’d totally catch up to us, even if we did.”

“I know,” Flo said, still looking at the photo. “I even thought about taking the bus, but I’m pretty sure they wouldn’t let a couple of kids take a bus across the state.”

“I don’t have a bike,” Furry said.

“And I don’t either,” Flo admitted a little sadly. “Not anymore.”

“So...?”

“So, we’d have to have a grown-up take us,” Flo said. “Someone we can trust with your secret.”

Furry shook his head. “We can’t tell your mom,” he said quickly. “She’d completely freak out.”

“She definitely would,” Flo said. “So that just leaves one person and he’s our only choice.”



- - -

“Absolutely not,” the old man said.

Flo felt all of the fight in her drain instantly. Furry scuffed his feet on the ground of the basement hallway.

Curtis Rockwell stood in the doorway of his former caretaker’s apartment, wearing his usual faded, tattered, green robe and a pair of thick, dirty glasses perched on his nose. His white hair was as messy as ever, jetting upward in all different directions.

“We have nowhere else to go,” Flo explained. “And it’s only a few hours away.”

The television noise behind Curtis was loud, so he pulled a remote from his robe’s front pocket and aimed it over his shoulder, knocking the volume down 50%.

“I told you kids to leave that crack in the laundry room alone,” Curtis said, waving the remote at them.

“It’s brought nothing but trouble to you.”

Furry spoke up.

“We didn’t mess with the portal,” he insisted. “My father must’ve come through from somewhere else and caught my scent. He’s coming to get me, so we need to get as far away from here as we can!”

Curtis sighed and Flo could tell Furry was getting to him.

“Both your parents would be worried sick if the two of you just disappeared again,” Curtis said. “And how would that look to have some old codger like me driving you across the state?”

“It would look even worse if a giant werewolf ripped through Corman Towers looking for Furry,” Flo said. “We have no idea what he’ll do once he gets here. It could get ugly.”

“It definitely WILL get ugly,” Furry insisted.

There was some commotion on the TV behind

Curtis and he glanced over his shoulder. Furry and Flo tilted their heads to look past him and into his messy apartment. There, on the news, was a reporter talking to a woman outside of a grocery store.

Curtis turned the volume back up.

“...and he just flipped the car over,” the woman on the TV said. “He kept shouting: *My son. Where is my son? I’ll tear this world apart until I find him!* I’ve never seen anything like it.”



“It’s him,” Furry whispered. “He’s getting close.”

Curtis watched for a moment, then groaned as he shook his head.

“Get your things,” Curtis whispered. “I’ll get dressed and meet you behind the building in five minutes.”

- - -

Flo burst into her apartment and grabbed her backpack. She dumped her school books out on the living room floor and ran into her room. With little time to think, she grabbed a few sets of clothes, pulled her red hooded sweatshirt over her head and tossed in a toothbrush.

Even in times like these, clean teeth are important, she thought.

Flo grabbed a few juice boxes from the fridge and threw them into her lunchbox. She realized she’d have to make some emergency sandwiches at Grandma’s

house.

If we get there, she thought with a shudder.

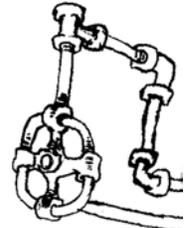
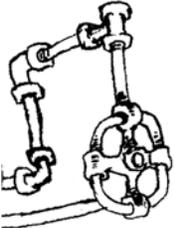
As Flo was about to leave, she stopped. Her mom would come home to find the apartment empty and a mess. She would fear the worst. After tearing a page out of one of her school notebooks and finding a marker, she scrawled out a quick note. It wasn't the best, but it would have to do.

For now, she and Furry needed to get out of town...and fast.

Flo left the piece of paper on the kitchen table, looked at her apartment, and just hoped it wasn't for the last time.

OVER

THE RIVER



CHAPTER 5

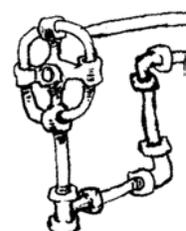
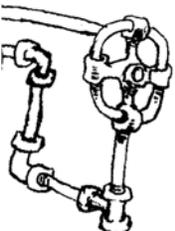


Flo met up with Furry in the hallway and together they ran to the elevator. They pressed the button and could hear the groans and creaks as the car slowly made its way up to the 17th floor.

“This is taking too long,” Furry said, pacing back and forth like a hungry dog waiting for a well-deserved treat.

“I mean, we could always take the...”

“Stairs,” Furry said, grabbing Flo’s hand. “Great idea.”



The two of them raced down what seemed to Flo like thousands of steps in a mad decent to the basement. Flo was thankful she didn't trip and fall on her face as hard as Furry was tugging her along. After all this time, the werewolf in hiding still managed to forget humans weren't nearly as fast as his kind.

At the lowest level, they dashed down the hallway and into the small utility garage that housed a nearly crushed dumpster and Curtis's old yellow pickup truck.

"Get in," Curtis shouted through the open passenger window.

Furry and Flo pulled the truck's door open with a creak and jumped in. Furry sat in the middle, his eyes wide and searching as he buckled his seat belt. Before Flo had a chance to close the door, Curtis put the truck into gear and peeled out of the garage. The rubber tires squealed along the concrete.

“Whoa,” Flo cried as she tugged the passenger door shut. “Take it easy!”

Curtis adjusted his glasses as he swung the truck into the garbage-littered alleyway.

“You didn’t watch the rest of the news,” Curtis mumbled, squinting behind his thick glasses. The front of his truck smashed into a cardboard box someone must’ve decided not to recycle. “This guy, whoever he is, is not messing around. There were reports from places just south of the city.”

“It’s my father,” Furry whispered, pulling his legs up close to his chest. “I just know it is.”

Flo managed to click her seatbelt into place and looked around as Curtis screeched into a right turn and out of the alley. She glanced through the back window to see Corman Towers grow smaller and smaller the further they got away.

“Okay,” Curtis said. “I don’t know how fast this

dad of yours can run, but I think we've got a pretty good jump on him."

"Good," Furry gasped.

"Which way are we going, kid?" Curtis asked Flo, swerving around a taxi cab. He accelerated and crossed 5th Avenue just before the light turned red.

"North," Flo said. "Do you know where Spring Falls is?"

Curtis nodded. "I believe so," he said. He scratched the wild thatch of white hair on his head. "It's probably a couple hours away if I remember right."

"I think so," Flo said. "But I'm not 100% sure. It's been a while since I've been to my grandma's house."

"Now why is th-"

But before Curtis could finish his question, there was a loud bang and the tail-end of the truck swung into the right lane. Tires squealed and metal crunched as his yellow pickup took a massive hit.

Both Furry and Flo whipped around in their seat and peered out the back window. Walking toward them was the biggest, meanest looking man she'd ever seen in movies or otherwise. The brute had long, black hair and a giant beard that reached almost to his bare chest. His arms as wide as military cannons, with muscles that looked like they might burst out of his skin at any moment. The man's hand was clenched into a fist that appeared as destructive as a wrecking ball. There was a faint blue glow emanating from between his huge fingers.

Almost without clothes, a long swatch of cloth with gold ornamental designs covered his waist and tops of his giant, powerful legs. Even though he was in the middle of the city, the man's giant feet were bare on the gritty city street.

His thick eyebrows were lowered over his wild eyes which looked directly at Flo, making her shiver instantly.

“It’s him!” Furry shouted. His hands clawed frantically at the back of the truck’s seat as if he was trying to run without moving.

“Go,” Flo pleaded. “Go, go, go!”

Curtis didn’t need to be told a fifth time. He hammered the gas pedal down and the truck’s tires screeched again, grabbing the concrete and surging them forward.

Furry’s father ran after them as the truck weaved through the steady stream of cars making their daily commute. Horns blared at them as they zipped past. People crossing the street dove out of the way. More than a few people shouted things Flo couldn’t repeat.

Flo watched in fear and amazement as the human form of Rolvis the Mighty bounded after them. Like Furry and his brothers, she knew he’d entered her world in his human form. Unfortunately, it didn’t make him any less creepy. He ran with his hands and

feet, leaping on top of cars and launching himself toward them.

“He’s getting closer,” Flo warned, keeping her eye on the werewolf king. “Can’t you go any faster?”

Curtis grunted and swerved into another lane of traffic. A moment later, Rolvis slammed into the space the truck had occupied. Flo saw the concrete crumble beneath him.

“We have to get out of this traffic,” Curtis shouted. “Then I’ll put some distance between us!”

Flo looked ahead. The bridge out of the city was still quite a ways off and she was worried they weren’t going to make it. The beast was literally on the truck’s bumper and she didn’t know how fast werewolves could run...or for how long.

“I can’t believe he found me,” Furry cried. He turned and covered his eyes as if that alone would make the hairy giant disappear. Flo didn’t know what

to say or what to do, so she put her hand on her friend's shoulder.

“It'll be okay somehow,” Flo said, not sure she actually believed it. “I'm not going to let him get you, got it?”

Furry nodded quickly, his eyes squeezed shut.

She glanced out the back window to see Rolvis knock a smaller car out of the way. The car's metal folded in as if it were made of paper. The strike slowed the monster down a moment, giving them a chance to pull half a block ahead of him.

People shouted and screamed. It made Flo realize again how dangerous it was to have Furry there in her world. Their worst possible fears were coming true: Something monstrous that could hurt others had slipped through a portal.

And it was causing trouble for people besides the two of them.

“We have to lose this guy,” Curtis said.

“Ferdinand, isn’t there something you can say to have him back off?”

“Yeah,” Furry said, removing his hands from his eyes. “Tell him I’ll go home with him.”

Curtis glanced at Flo as if he thought that wasn’t a bad idea.

“No way,” Flo said. “That’s NOT an option. This is Furry’s home now.”

Curtis shook his head, then nodded.

“Well, I guess I can’t blame you,” the old caretaker said, squinting at the road ahead. “But I think he’s going to tear our world up until he finds you.”

“If we get out of the city and lose him,” Flo said hopefully. “Maybe he’ll just give up and go away.”

She cringed as Rolvis leapt up onto a city bus. His eyes never left the yellow truck as he ran along the rooftop after them.

Maybe not, Flo thought.

“Hang on,” Curtis warned. “This might be tricky.”

Flo turned to the windshield and saw another bus coming their way in the opposite lane of traffic. She turned back to Rolvis who looked prepared to leap at them, as if poised to land in the pick-up truck’s rusty, empty bed.

Just as Furry’s dad launched himself at them, Curtis swerved to the left, narrowly missing the oncoming bus. Rolvis, wasn’t so lucky. The bus smashed headfirst into the transformed werewolf, knocking him down and shattering the front windshield.

“Oh no,” Flo shouted, watching the hairy giant tumble across the pavement. The bus hissed to a stop as the pick-up drove off toward the edge of the city.

“Well shoot, I wasn’t expecting that,” Curtis admitted. “Is everyone okay back there?”



Flo scanned the crash scene quickly as they got further and further away. It looked like everyone in the bus survived, but she wasn't so sure about Furry's dad.

"I think everyone is fine," Furry said, focusing on the intersection with his werewolf eyes. "But my father won't be happy. Not even a little bit."

The truck moved through the traffic and Furry and Flo kept watch out the back, half expecting to see Rolvis back on their tail at any moment. When they were out of the city and heading over the Walcott Bridge, Flo wondered if things had finally gone too far.

"Do you think your dad is..."

"Dead?" Furry asked, finishing for her. "Oh, no. No way."

"I'm sorry, Ferdinand," Curtis said, making a noise with his mouth. "I didn't want to hurt the big fella."

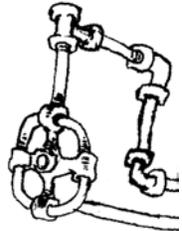
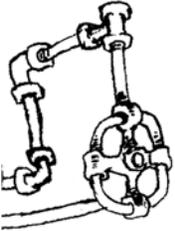
“It’s not your fault,” Furry said. “He’s the one acting like a monster out there. Besides, he needs to know how to watch out for cars...and busses.”

Flo couldn’t help but smile and Furry managed a small smile back.

They both peered out the window at the river below them as they finally caught their breath.



THROUGH
THE WOODS

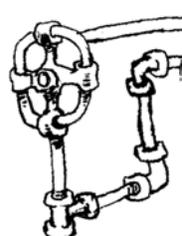
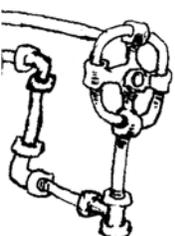


CHAPTER 6

SPRING FALLS 14

The beat up yellow pick-up kept cruising north along the two-lane highway. Flo marveled at how different it was being outside of the city and away from the cluster of buildings, traffic and crowded sidewalks. She watched suburban neighborhoods whiz by. She remembered what life was like back when there were three people in her family and they lived in a little house with a yard and a driveway.

It seemed like a long time ago already.



“How are we looking, Ferdinand?” Curtis said. He glanced up at his crooked rearview mirror. He adjusted it a bit with his hand.

“Okay, I think,” Furry said, turned around in the front seat. “I don’t see or smell him right now.”

Considering how far off in the distance Furry’s eyes could see and his nose could sniff, that’s good, Flo thought. The further away we get, the better.

“Do you think we can get far enough away where he can’t smell you?” Flo asked, almost afraid of the answer.

Furry turned around and plopped back down in his seat, adjusting his seatbelt.

“Yeah, I don’t know,” Furry said with a shrug. “Just depends on how far away your grandma lives, I guess.”

“Maybe we’ll lose him, he’ll get frustrated and quit looking for you,” Flo offered. “That’s possible, right?”

Furry was quiet and scratched his head as if he was deep in thought.

“How far away is Spring Falls again?” Furry asked, glancing over his shoulder and out the back window once more.

Flo tried to remember the last time she’d gone to visit her grandma, and realized it had been a long time ago. She and her mom had gone to visit her from where they lived a few houses back. Now that they’d moved to Corman Towers in the city, it was hard to tell just how far away they were now.

“Not sure,” Flo admitted. “Something like a couple hours, I think? Probably less now.”

Furry nodded. “Okay.”

“We’ll get you there,” Curtis said. “Just sit back and relax, little guy.”

- - -

The rest of the trip was mostly uneventful. They

had to stop once for a bathroom break and to fill up on gas. All the while, Furry paced along the parking lot and urged Curtis to hurry up. Flo wasn't sure how to tell her friend that the gas pumps couldn't pump any faster.

Flo stared across the gas station parking lot and off toward the long stretch of highway back toward the city.

"Is he getting closer?" Flo asked. She put her hands up over her eyes to block the nearly setting sun.

Furry shook his head. "I really can't tell."

That's a good sign, Flo thought. If he can't sense his dad, maybe his dad lost his scent somewhere along the way.

Back on the road and a little more than an hour and a half later, the landscape thickened with trees. Flo remembered all of the tall pine trees along the side



of the road back when they came to visit more often. After a while, a sign for the small town that Grandma lived in popped up.

SPRING FALLS – 14

“Whoa, is that the population?” Furry asked.
“That’s a pretty small town.”

“No,” Curtis said. “We’re fourteen miles away.”

“Oh.”

As they rolled into Spring Falls, Flo watched for familiar streets as the truck slowed down from highway speeds. She told Curtis where to turn and watched Furry. He looked like he was confused by how far away the houses were from each other.

“Are we out in the country or something?” Furry asked.

“Yes, definitely,” Flo replied. “Grandma always liked the quiet, even after Grandpa died. Even more so when my dad...”

Flo paused and caught her breath.

“She’s going to be so happy to see you,” Furry said. “Especially if it’s been a while.”

Flo nodded. She knew Grandma Gardner would flip when she saw her, but couldn’t help feeling bad that it had been so long.

“Do you have any grandkids, Curtis?” Furry asked.

“I sure don’t,” Curtis admitted, slowing to a stop then making a right turn where Flo pointed. “Never got married and never had any kids.”

“I’m sorry,” Furry said. “You must’ve been kind of lonely.”

Curtis laughed and adjusted his big, black glasses.

“It’s what I was used to,” Curtis said. “But I did visit my grandparents as often as I could. Probably because I knew they wouldn’t be around forever. It’s

strange saying this while we're trying to escape from your dad, but family is important."

"Yeah," Furry said. "I just wish my family was different."

"There's an old saying," Curtis said. "You can scratch your butt, but you can't pick your family."

I don't think that's how it goes, Flo thought, but didn't dare correct Curtis. His heart was in the right place, even though he was pretty grumpy sometimes.

"Scratch your butt?" Furry asked. "That doesn't make sense."

"Well, dogs smell butts," Curtis replied. "And I'm guessing werewolves do too and I don't understand that either."

Flo snorted.

"Very funny," Furry said and shook his head. Despite everything he'd been through already, he smiled a little.

All I'm saying is no family is perfect," Curtis said. "Even so, you're stuck with them."

Flo nodded. "Jorge and Mona are Furry's family now," she said.

"And they're pretty much perfect," Furry said. "I just hope I get to see them again."

A dreadful silence fell over the cab of the pick-up truck. Flo thought about what would happen if Rolvis actually caught up with them. What would happen to Furry? Would he get dragged back to his own world, forever and ever?



I won't let that happen, Flo decided. We've been in tough spots before and this is no different. We'll figure it out and everything will be fine.

“Everything will be fine,” Flo whispered to herself.

“What did you say?” Furry asked.

She should've known his wicked werewolf senses would pick up anything she said.

“I'm just trying to stay positive,” Flo said, then to Curtis. “Hey, this is Grandma's street.”

Curtis clicked his tongue against his teeth as he made the left turn on Juniper Lane. As they drove along the wooded, curvy road, Flo was reminded of how much land, forest, and space there was between the houses.

“Wow, your grandma really lives out in the woods,” Furry said. His eyes were wide open as he marveled at the lush green scenery. “I've never seen so many trees before.”

Flo remembered what some of the creepy trees looked like in Furry's world and realized it was probably true. His adoptive parents probably didn't leave the city much and outside of the city park, he didn't have a chance to see much green.

"Are we close, kid?" Curtis asked. "I don't want to miss it."

"Almost there," Flo said. "But you can call me Flo."

"Sure, sure," Curtis said. "And what's your grandma's name?"

"You won't believe it, but it's actually Flo, too."

"Flo 2? Like the number? That seems kind of backwards. If she's older, shouldn't she be Flo 1?"

"No, Flo as in her name is also Flo," Flo explained. "I was named after her, but neither of us likes to be called Florence."

"A name that neither of you likes and it was

passed down to you,” Curtis said. “That’s really... interesting.”

“I know, it’s weird,” Flo said. “I’m not sure why my parents did that.”

“I’m pretty old, but I’ve never known a Flo before,” Curtis began. “Now I’m heading somewhere where there’s two of them. This might be really confusing for me.”

“Yeah,” Flo said. “I guess so.”

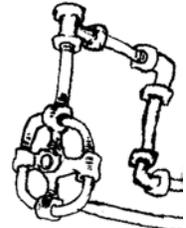
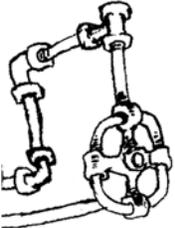
“So, kid it is.”

Flo shrugged. *He got us out of the city and away from Rolvis. I guess he can call me “kid.”*

“Okay,” she said, pointing off to the left. “We’re here.”

Curtis turned the pick-up truck onto the cracked blacktop driveway. It snaked through a canopy of trees for a bit until they finally arrived at...

GRANDMA'S HOUSE



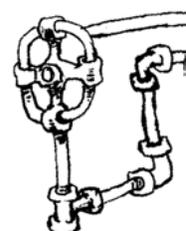
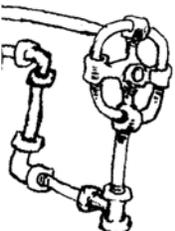
CHAPTER 7



The pick-up slowed to a stop just outside of a garage that had seen better days. Each of the garage door panels were dented and looked a little crooked on the track. Curtis turned off the ignition and the truck's engine sputtered then fell silent.

"We're here," Flo said.

She immediately felt flashbacks of both happiness and sadness. She remembered visiting here often with her parents when she was younger and the few times



they'd come by after her dad died.

Sometimes Grandma would wave to them from the front window, as if excited that they were finally there. Flo peered at the front of the house. The curtains were drawn.

Though she was only in fourth grade, Flo realized things would never be the same. She'd heard grown-ups say it for as long as she could remember: Time changes everything.

"I hope she's home," Curtis said.

"She is," Furry said.

"What? How do you..." Flo began, but stopped once Furry tapped his nose. "Oh, right."

The three climbed out of the truck, one groaning more than the others from the long trip. Curtis put a hand to his back and stretched.

"This is why I don't do long trips anymore," Curtis blurted.

“I can’t thank you enough,” Flo said. “Really, I didn’t know what else to do.”

“Don’t mention it, kid,” Curtis replied. “It’s good for me to get out of that basement every once in a while and get some air.”

Flo inhaled a lungful and couldn’t agree more. It was crazy how much different it was outside of the city. She’d almost forgotten what clean air smelled and tasted like.

Furry, meanwhile, walked to the end of the pickup, aiming his human nose toward the main road. He leaned forward and sniffed, his arms extended back behind him as if that helped his enhanced sense of smell work even better.

“Are you picking up anything?” Flo asked.

“Besides the fresh air?” Furry replied. “Not that I can smell.”

“Good.”

She turned toward the little white house with the faded black shutters. The home was where Grandma and Grandpa had lived most of their lives. It was the same place her dad had grown up in. It made Flo feel nostalgic and sad at the same time.

“Maybe we should knock on the door,” Curtis suggested. “Your grandma might wonder why there’s a weird old yellow truck and an even weirder old guy out here.”

As the trio walked along the cracked and dirty sidewalk, the front door opened, making the screen door shudder a bit. A face familiar to Flo peeked out. A moment later, her grandma’s eyes lit up and she was out on the front steps before any of them took another.

Grandma Flo was dressed in a pair of old, faded jeans and a blue and green flannel shirt Flo guessed belonged to her grandpa at one time. Her long, curly

hair was held up and away from her face with a red bandana.

“Am I dreaming?” Grandma cried, tap-dancing barefoot in excitement on her front steps. “Is that my baby grand-daughter?”

Flo felt herself blush in front of her traveling companions. She didn’t like to be called a “baby” in front of anyone, but her grandma was the only one who could get away with it.

“Hi Grandma,” Flo said and ran up the two steps to greet her. She wrapped her arms around Grandma Flo, feeling her lunchbox clank lightly against Grandma’s back.

“Oh, bless you,” Grandma cried. “You’re still carrying around that little lunchbox.”

“Yeah,” Furry said from the sidewalk, his hands in his pockets. “She brings that thing everywhere.”

Grandma looked up from her hug, still clutching



Flo to her as if her granddaughter might slip away again.

“Who’re your friends, Flo?”

Flo turned a bit and Grandma released her grip slightly so that she could talk.

“That little guy is my best friend, Furry and...”

“Whoa, whoa,” Grandma said, one eyebrow shooting skyward in confusion. “His name is Furry?”

“It’s short for Ferdinand,” Furry said. “Sort of. Long story.”

“Okay then. Well, welcome Furry,” Grandma said and smiled sweetly to show she wouldn’t hold his weird name against him.

“And this...”

“Old guy is Curtis,” Curtis finished for Flo.

“Curtis Rockwell, ma’am. I’m the former caretaker of the Corman Towers apartment building where we all

live.”

“Okay...” Grandma said, as if starting to wonder what was truly happening.

“Why we’re all here is an even longer story,” Curtis admitted. “But it’s nice to meet you.”

“Flo Gardner,” Grandma said with a nod and a smile. “Call me Florence and I’ll knock your block off.”

“Fair enough,” Curtis said, putting his hands up in surrender, but then quickly added. “Any chance we could come in? We’ve got ourselves in a situation.”

Curtis looked back at the road and Grandma tilted her head.

“You didn’t kidnap these kids, did you, Mr. Rockwell?”

Curtis laughed and adjusted his glasses. “Oh lord, no. No, no, no.”

Flo took a deep breath and let it out to try and

calm herself down.

“I’m afraid it’s much crazier than that, Grandma.”

- - -

Close to twenty minutes later, Grandma Flo sat back in her chair in the living room and shook her head. She’d been all smiles and happy to see her granddaughter again and meet her new friends. Now she looked exhausted, like she’d just run around the block five times.

“You have an active imagination, just like your daddy did,” Grandma said finally. She put her thumb and forefinger to her eyebrows like she suddenly had a headache.

“I wish it was just my imagination,” Flo said.
“But, really, Grandma. It’s all true. All of it.”

Grandma turned to Furry, who sat on the couch between Flo and Curtis.

“So you’re telling me this little guy here,” Grandma

said with raised eyebrows. “Is a werewolf?”

Flo nodded and drummed her fingers on the battered lid of her lunchbox. The faded and dented cartoony faces of the Dyno-Katz looked back at her. They’d seen it all too.

“Well, he’s in his human form now,” Flo explained.

“Of course he is. Now, I hate to be rude but I’m going to need some proof,” Grandma said. “I mean, I’ve heard some whoppers in my time and lord knows your dad believed in everything from UFOs to Sasquatch, but werewolves are something else entirely.”

“Okay,” Furry said. “Werewolves have crazy super senses, like sight, hearing and smell. I can smell things, even in my human form, from really far away.”

“Oh, really?”

“Yep,” Furry said. “Like right now I can smell there’s a dead mouse behind the water heater in your

basement. There's an apple tree in your neighbor's yard down the road from you. And I can smell the key lime pie from someplace a bit further away."

"Dudley's Café," Grandma whispered. "Best French silk pie in town. He makes it every Monday. But that's close to three miles away, young man."

"Werewolf nose," Flo said. "See? We weren't kidding."

Grandma Flo shook her head. "The rest of that stuff could be a lucky guess and maybe you drove by—"

"Okay, Furry," Flo said. "Do it."

"Are you sure?"

Flo nodded. It was the only way.

Furry stood up, took a deep breath and stood on the coffee table. He plugged his nose and blew like he was trying to clear ears that needed to be popped. As soon as he did, his whole body changed. Fur burst from his skin. His feet extended, tearing through his



shoes. His nose stretched out and formed a snout. The small teeth in his mouth turned into wolfy fangs.

Within a matter of seconds, Furry was back in his werewolf form.

Grandma Flo stood frozen, her eyes as wide as dinner plates.

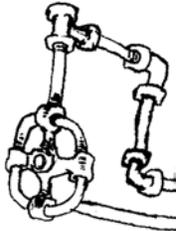
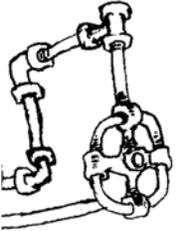
“That’s not...,” she stammered. “I don’t think...”

And just like that, Grandma Flo fainted in her chair.

Furry sighed, but it sounded more like a doggy whine.

“And this is why I don’t tell people my big hairy secret,” he said sadly.

HIDDEN
TREASURES



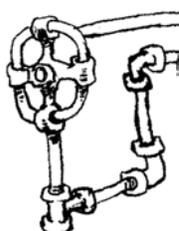
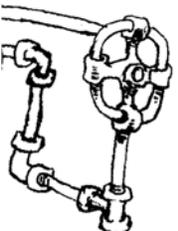
CHAPTER 8



It was scary to see her grandmother pass out, but Flo was relieved when she regained consciousness less than a minute later.

“You okay, Grandma?” Flo asked. She leaned over the chair to look into the elderly woman’s eyes. “We thought we lost you for a second, there.”

Grandma Flo squinted and searched Flo’s face as if trying to convince herself that her granddaughter was truly standing there with her. She blinked a few times



and when she opened her eyes again, she looked around the rest of the cozy and cluttered living room.

“I must’ve dozed off and was dreaming or something,” Grandma said, a bit confused. “That there was a little wolf boy...”

“Yeah, hi,” Furry said off to the side, still in his werewolf state. “I’m still here.”

“Oh my,” Grandma said. “Okay, well, I wasn’t ready for that! And I’m still not sure I’m believing what I’m seeing!”

Flo knew what she meant. She was absolutely stunned the first time she caught Furry changing to his werewolf form. It was on the roof of Corman Towers during a full moon, when she caught the little bandit stealing her box of Popsicles. Seeing someone turn into a hairy beast made her wonder at the time if the stories she’d heard about monsters were true.

Turned out, most of them were.

It took a minute for Grandma to accept the little werewolf in her house was real and had no plans to eat her.

“You okay ma’am?” Curtis said from his spot on the couch. “I know it’s a lot to take in. I nearly jumped out of my skin when Ferdinand here first transformed in front of me.”

Flo put a hand on her grandma’s shoulder. “We’ve been doing our best to keep Furry’s secret a secret. Pretty much everyone would freak out if they knew.”

Grandma nodded and managed a small smile. “Does your mother know your best friend is a werewolf?”

“No,” Flo admitted. “You’re the first person I’ve told. We’re just afraid of what the rest of the world would do if they found out that werewolves and other monsters are real.”

Furry crossed his arm. “Hey, I’m not a monster.”

“I know, I know,” Flo said quickly. “That’s just what we humans call creatures we know nothing about.”

“Yeah, I don’t like it,” Furry said.

“Sorry,” Flo said. “I don’t think you’re a monster. You know that.”

Just then, Flo thought about her mom, coming home from work to find the apartment empty. She felt horrible, especially after she and Furry “mysteriously” disappeared for a few days, lost between her world and Furry’s. She honestly didn’t know how she would talk her way out of this one.

“So the idea is you and your friends hang out with me until Furry’s werewolf dad gives up and goes away?” Grandma asked, sitting up in her chair. She already seemed surprisingly a bit more comfortable having a werewolf in her home.

“I guess so,” Flo admitted. “We didn’t know what

else to do.”

“Well, if this werewolf dad is anything like any other dad, he won’t give up,” Grandma said. “Most parents love their kids and will do anything they can to protect them.”

“Not my dad,” Furry said. “He doesn’t love me. He only wants his stupid piece of stone back.”

Furry pulled the portal shard out from his t-shirt and looked down at it. It looked like a thin piece of blue chalk that he’d secured to a loop of cord. He wore the makeshift necklace to keep it close in case of emergencies.

Flo felt a pang in her heart. She couldn’t imagine for a second thinking her dad didn’t love her. How bad was life in his own world, among the other werewolves that made Furry realize he didn’t belong and that his dad didn’t love him.

Are werewolf families different?” Flo wondered.

“Are you stuck like that?” Grandma asked, nodding to Furry. “I mean, no offense. You’re pretty cute as far as werewolves go.”

“Oh, no. I can change back,” Furry explained and turned to Flo.

On cue, she opened her lunchbox and tossed him a juice box. He caught it, bit the top off and drained the juice in one gulp.

“So, juice makes him turn back, or...?”

“Wait for it,” Flo said, closing the metal Dyno-Katz lunchbox lid.

The little werewolf wiped a paw across his hairy face and gulped. A moment later, he belched loud enough to make the glass on Grandma’s curio cabinet rattle. Flo watched her grandma look on in awestruck fascination as Furry’s fur disappeared and his body morphed back to his human form.

“And there you go,” Furry said. He bowed as if

he'd performed a magic trick.

“Well, that’s certainly something,” Grandma said and awkwardly clapped a few times. “What do you three say to some dinner?”

- - -

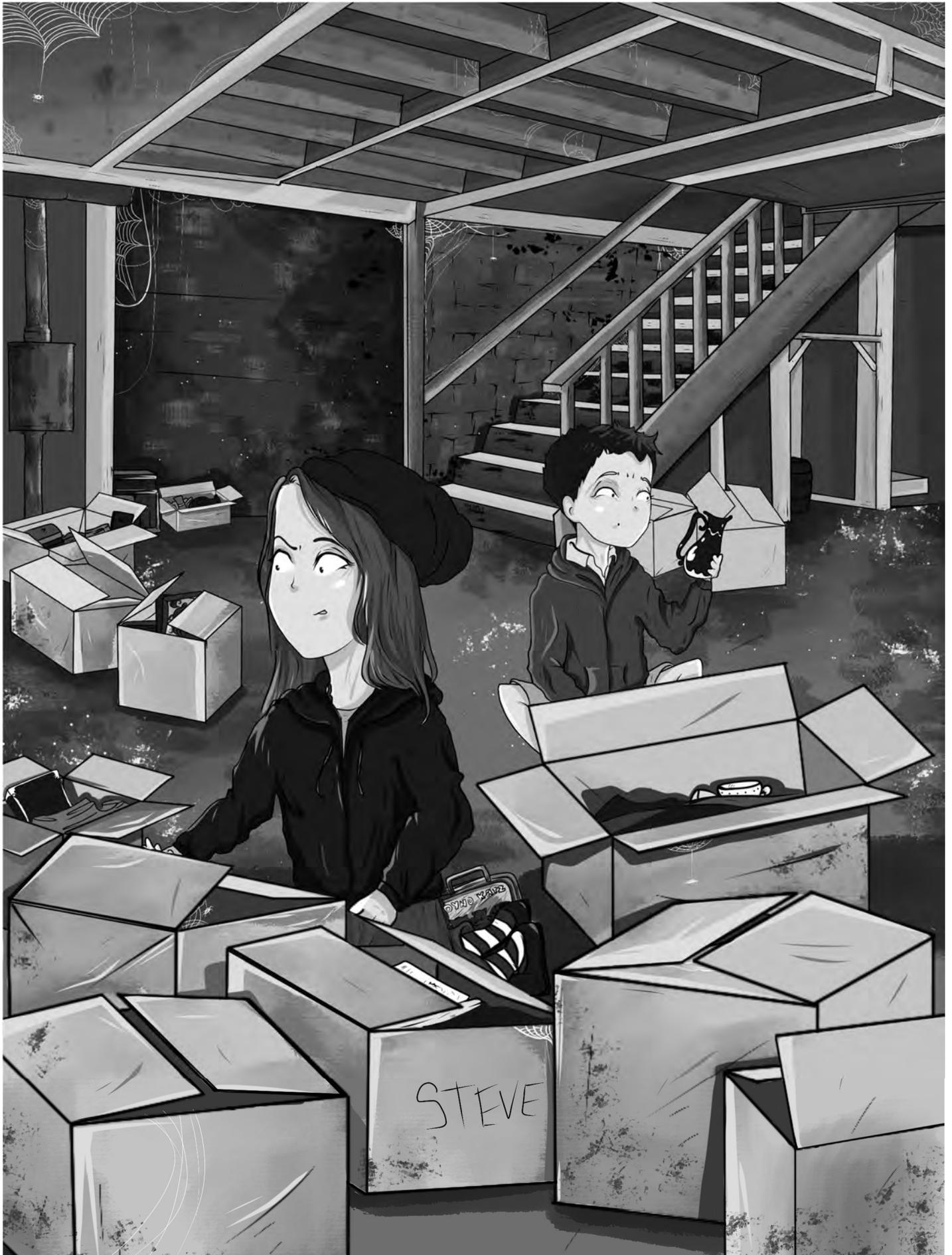
As Curtis and Grandma worked in the kitchen, Flo and Furry explored the rest of the house. She showed him the basement where there was indeed a dead mouse behind the water heater.

“Poor little guy,” Furry said.

“Maybe we can give him a funeral later,” Flo suggested.

They looked through the boxes of old stuff. The two of them found toys from decades ago when Flo’s dad was a kid, old books, and came across a creepy doll with a cracked face.

“Darling Dolls,” Furry said, reading something on



the foot before putting it back. “Not really.”

An old box with a familiar name along the side made Flo pause.

Written in a child’s printing and in black, crayoned letters was the name: STEVE.

“Dad,” Flo whispered.

She pulled the box down from the stack in the corner and set it on the ground. She opened it and her heart nearly exploded. Inside were notebooks and pads filled with old drawings, sketches and scribbles about the characters he created as a kid. Flo picked one up that had three very familiar cats lined up, ready for battle.

“Is that those...?”

“Yeah,” Flo said. “It looks like one of his first Dyno-Katz sketches. He told me he created these guys when he was a kid.”

“That’s pretty cool, Flo,” Furry said, looking closely

at the illustrations. “Your dad was a talented dude. Even when he was little.”

They dug around in the box, marveling at the creations young Steve Gardner had worked on as a boy. There were drawings of superheroes he’d created, including a brother and sister team called The Mighty Murphys.

Furry dug even deeper into the box where a bunch of pens and things had sifted and settled to the bottom. Without warning, he cried out and withdrew his arm from the box.

“Ow,” he cried, clutching his hand to his chest.

“What happened?” Flo asked, her eyebrows twisted in concern. “Did something bite you?”

She wondered if a mouse had somehow gotten into the box and dug deep to find it. There, she found a sharp Razr-Pen, a tool used to cut shapes out of papers.

“Ugh,” Flo said. “Found the culprit.”

She pulled the Razr-Pen out and held it up. The blade still looked sharp enough to poke or cut things. When she turned, she saw tears forming in Furry’s eyes.

“Whoa,” Flo said. “Are you okay? Does it hurt that bad?”

“It’s not that,” Furry said, shaking his head. “Look...”

He held his hand up and Flo saw a single droplet of blood had formed on his finger.



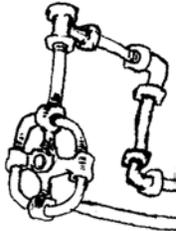
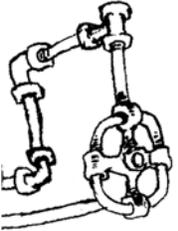
“It’s just a small cut,” Flo said quickly. “I can get you a bandage and it’ll be...”

“You don’t get it,” Furry cried. “Werewolves can smell blood from super far away. It’s like I said, blood sends a signal, especially mine since I’m his kid!”

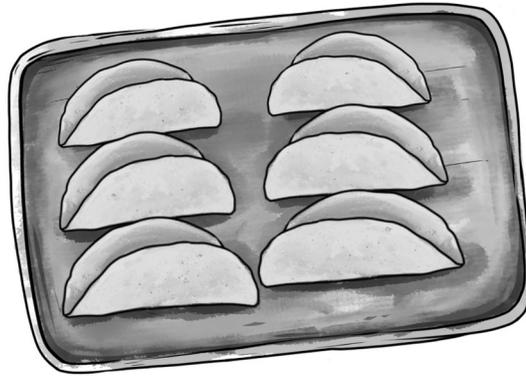
“But it’s a little blood and we’re in a basement far, far out in the country,” Flo protested. “There’s no way...”

“It doesn’t matter,” Furry said. “My dad will find me for sure now.”

HERE
COMES
TROUBLE



CHAPTER 9

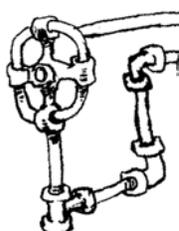
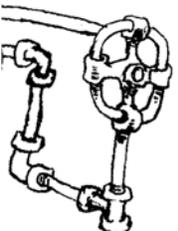


Furry and Flo ran up the creaky basement steps to find Grandma in the kitchen, sliding a baking sheet of warmed up taco shells from the oven. Curtis was in the dining room, setting the table.

“Okay, so we have stuff for regular tacos and grilled vegetables for Furry here, and-”

“I’m sorry Grandma, we have to go!” Flo shouted.

She ran past her and led Furry through the dining room and into the small, tidy bathroom. She quickly



opened the mirrored medicine cabinet above the sink and snatched a box of bandages.

“Wait. Whoa, what’s happened?” Curtis shouted, holding a plate in his hand.

“Furry cut himself downstairs,” Flo said, stripping a bandage free from the wrapper before tearing the strips off the back. “And he said werewolves can smell blood from super far away.”

“Yeah,” Furry cried, wiping the tears from his eyes. “It’s like a beacon, letting him know where I am. He’s going to get me, guys!”

Even though Furry told her it was no use, Flo wrapped his finger anyway in an attempt to hide the little injury he’d sustained. Maybe some way, somehow it would slow Rolvis from finding his long, lost son.

Grandma came into the hallway and surveyed the scene in her bathroom. She put an arm around the

scared little guy to comfort him. Flo took a deep breath and shook her head. It felt like she had a million thoughts rattling around in her brain at once. Panic made it hard for her to think straight.

“I don’t know what to do,” Flo admitted. “I just feel like we need to run.”

Curtis adjusted his glasses and glanced at Flo’s grandma. “I’ll go get the truck ready and-”

“It’s no use,” Furry blurted from Grandma’s side. “He’ll find me, no matter where I go.”

“But isn’t he far away?” Grandma said. “Surely we can get away from him before he gets here.”

“We?” Flo said. “No, Grandma. I don’t want you to get all caught up in this. We’ll leave and he won’t bother you.”

“Sorry, sweet one,” Grandma said. “There’s no way I won’t fight to keep you and your little friend here safe. What kind of grandma would just throw you to

the wolves...literally?”

“We’re two hours away from where we saw your dad last, Ferdinand,” Curtis said. “We already have a heck of a head start.”

Furry shook his head. “I know, but he’s really fast. And we don’t have anywhere to go. How long are we supposed to run?”

“Forever if we have to,” Flo said. “You’re not going back.”

“We outran him once,” Curtis argued. “We’ll can do it again.”

Flo wondered where else they could go and realized Furry might have a point. They couldn’t run really forever, especially not with the scent of his blood in the air.

Just then, Furry wiped his nose with his arm and his ears perked up. His eyes widened in fear.

“It’s too late,” he whispered. “He’s here.”

- - -

The four of them scurried into the living room and held their breath to keep absolutely quiet. Grandma tiptoed over to an old brass lamp on the end table and clicked it off.

“Maybe he’ll think no one is home,” she whispered.

“Werewolf senses, Grandma,” Flo reminded her, crouching near the dining room table.

“Oh shoot,” she replied. “That’s right.”

Besides the tick of the oven cooling, her home was silent. Furry held onto Flo’s hand and she was unsure if was him shaking with fear or if it was her.

And then, the silence was broken.

“I seek my son, Fiercas,” a booming voice said outside, coming from the front of the house. “Release him unto me and there will be no bloodshed.”

Bloodshed? Flo thought. *Is he planning to eat us if we don't give him Furry?*

“Fiercas?” Grandma and Curtis whispered.

“It’s Furry’s real name,” Flo said quietly.

“And I hate it,” Furry whispered back.

“I will not ask again,” Rolvis boomed from outside.

Or you're going to huff and puff and blow our house in? Flo thought. She clutched her lunchbox in one hand and twisted her red hooded sweatshirt’s draw-string in another.

Curtis approached the front door.

“Look, friend we don’t want any-”

And before Curtis could finish, the front door was blown off of it’s hinges, landing with a dull thud on the living room carpet. Curtis stood in awe as a giant of a man filled the doorway, barely illuminated from behind by the porch’s front light. His left hand was

wrapped around something, making the spaces between his fingers glow blue.

“Hey,” Curtis said and took a brave step toward Rolvis.

Without hesitation, the hulk grabbed the old man by the neck and threw him across the room. Curtis smashed against a large painting of a scenic watermill and landed on the couch. Chunks of frame and glass fell on top of the old man. He groaned in pain.

“Curtis!” Furry shouted and bolted to the couch.

“Fiercas!” Rolvis shouted, his eyes were ablaze with anger. “You will come with me. Now.”

His long, black beard twitched as he spoke. The muscles on his bare chest and arms swelled, as if ready to do more damage.

“Leave me alone,” Furry said. “I-”

“SILENCE,” Rolvis boomed.

Flo wanted nothing more than to get up, protect her best friend and see if Curtis was okay. The old guy shifted under the rubble of the shattered picture, but couldn't see how seriously injured he was.

But she crouched, frozen with fear. Her heart thrummed in her chest like she was running for her life, even though she was completely still. Grandma grasped her arm as if to hold her back.

Don't worry Grandma, Flo thought. I don't know what to do.

“With me, Fiercas. Now,” Rolvis commanded. He held out his giant arm and opened his equally enormous hand. “It is time you returned home where you belong to live among your kind.”

Furry stood up and faced his father, his fists clenched in defiance.

“No,” he said. “This world is my home now.”

Flo watched in awe. Her best friend, the 3rd grade

werewolf who lived in the apartment across the hall from her held his ground. Furry looked like he couldn't weigh more than fifty pounds soaking wet compared to his father who was the size of two pro wrestlers and five times scarier.

“You will come with me or I will tear this world apart until there's nothing left,” Fiercas said, his thick neck quaking in anger. “I will break anything and everyone that stands in my way until you do.”

As if to prove his point, Rolvis picked up a potted plant near the window with one hand and squeezed. The hardened clay shattered as if it were made of egg shells, raining dirt and roots to the ground. Pieces of the destroyed pottery dropped from his fingers like grains of sand.

Flo stood up. Despite everything in her body telling her to stay put, she was on her feet.

“Hey,” she shouted, tightening her fingers around

the lunchbox's handle. "Don't you get it? He doesn't want to go with you. Furry belongs-"

"Do not meddle, small one," Rolvis warned and turned his menacing face to Flo. His dark brown eyes felt like they might burn right through her. He pointed at her with a long finger that looked almost as thick as her arm. "I've eaten meals much larger than you."

Flo knew to be scared of him after everything Furry had told her and seeing him tear through the city. Having his werewolf king's focus on her was something else completely. Her heart skipped a beat and she wanted to run and hide her face forever. Despite that, she continued.

"You're rude," Flo said, eyeing his pointing finger. "And I don't care what you say. You're NOT taking my best friend away from me."

Flo stepped forward and Rolvis moved on her with



insane speed. He grabbed her by the hood of her hooded sweatshirt and lifted her up. The neckline pulled against her throat, making her feel as if she was choking. Her hands opened and went to her neck to try and relieve some of the pressure. It didn't help.

Her Dyno-Katz lunchbox fell to the ground and bounced once on the carpet.

“Flo!” she heard Furry shout.

I...I can't breathe, Flo thought, her mind swirled and her vision blurred. The light in the room seemed to dim slowly toward darkness.

“Let go of her, you monster!” Grandma shouted and moved toward Rolvis. Before she could take more than two steps, Furry dashed in front of her.

“No, Grandma. It's no use,” Furry said quickly, before turning to his father. “Let her go! Please!”

The room was silent for a moment as Flo struggled to breathe.

“I give up. Please don’t hurt my friends. “I’ll go.”

With his words, Flo’s sweatshirt collar loosened around her neck and she dropped to the ground in a heap. As she struggled to catch her breath, she watched Furry walk out of the front door with his monstrous father.

“Goodbye, Flo,” he whispered, reaching for her as his father led him away. “I’m sorry for everything.”

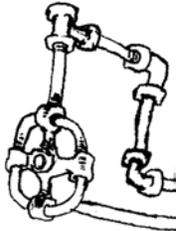
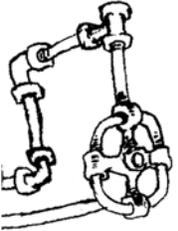


Flo raised her hand weakly to touch Furry's, but he was just out of reach.

And then he was gone.

GOING

GOING...



CHAPTER 10



“Flo, are you okay?” Grandma rushed to her side, wrapping her arms around her granddaughter. “That was brave, but incredibly stupid of you.”

Brave and stupid things, Flo thought, fighting back tears. That’s pretty much all I’ve been doing lately.

There was a rustle of rubble to their right as Curtis shifted around on the couch.

“Curtis,” Flo said. “I’m so sorry, all you all right?”

The old caretaker sat up. Glass and frame remains fell onto the cushions beneath him. His glasses were askew on his face and he set them right.

“I haven’t been hit that hard since I was my high school’s football team’s right tackle,” Curtis mumbled. “Sorry about your front door and picture, ma’am.”

“I don’t care about any of those things,” Grandma said. She stepped over and helped Curtis to his feet. “I’m just glad we’re all safe.”

Not all of us are, Flo thought.

“We have to go after them,” Flo said as she stood up. “He can’t take Furry. He just can’t.”

Grandma and Curtis glanced at Flo as she snatched up her lunchbox.

“It’s over, honey,” Grandma said. “There’s really nothing we can do.”

Curtis nodded. “Your grandma’s right, kid. He’s

got us out-gunned and outmatched.”

Flo ignored this and ran out the wrecked front doorway. Besides the exterior light, only darkness wrapped around the house in the woods like a hug. She ran toward the garage and into the yard behind it. Flo smelled the air to see if she, like Furry, could pick up a scent.

Nothing.

Human senses are garbage, Flo thought angrily.

“Flo!” Grandma shouted from the front stoop.

“I have to find him, Grandma,” Flo shouted. She didn’t want to disobey her grandmother, but she couldn’t let some monstrous maniac run off with her best friend. Even if he was Furry’s father.

She had no idea where they could’ve gone and it occurred to Flo that with their speed, she’d never catch up with them. All she knew was there was no way she’d give up without trying. It didn’t matter how

dangerous the werewolf king was.

“Come back here, Honey,” Grandma called, her voice further off. “Please! I don’t want you to get hurt!”

“I can’t,” Flo cried, just then aware tears were spilling from her eyes. “I have to try.”

As she wiped her face with the sleeve of her sweatshirt, she spotted something off in the distance. Flo wasn’t sure if her eyes were playing tricks on her or if she was just being overly hopeful.

There, about thirty yards in the distance, was a familiar, bright blue glow.

Despite herself, Flo cried out in excitement and sprinted toward the light. She heard footsteps behind her, getting closer by the second. She knew it was Curtis and Grandma trying to stop her, but they couldn’t. She’d found something she hoped would change everything.

A portal stone.

As Flo drew closer, her instincts proved true. There, partially hidden in the pine needles and undergrowth of the woods was a stone with a bright blue circle of light exploding from it. It looked different than the cracks Furry's shard had made.

She didn't know how long the opening would stay open, but knew from experience that it wouldn't be long. Once Furry, his portal shard, and the Veldir Stone were on the other side, the portal would close. The way to Furry's world would be sealed up, likely forever.

"There you are," Curtis cried, slowing to a stop just a few feet from Flo. "Come on, kid. I'm too old and sore to be running like this. We need to—"

"I have to go after him, Curtis," Flo said. "I won't be able to sleep ever again if I don't at least try."

"Those werewolves are dangerous," Curtis warned.

“If he gets his paws on you, you might end up sleeping forever. What I mean by that is-”

“I get what you mean,” Flo said. “But I can’t give up.”

Grandma appeared behind Curtis.

“Come on, Flo,” Grandma said. “It’s time to let him go.”

Flo shook her head. She glanced at the portal stone’s glowing circle and saw the light begin to fade. It began to shrink to a close, right before her eyes.

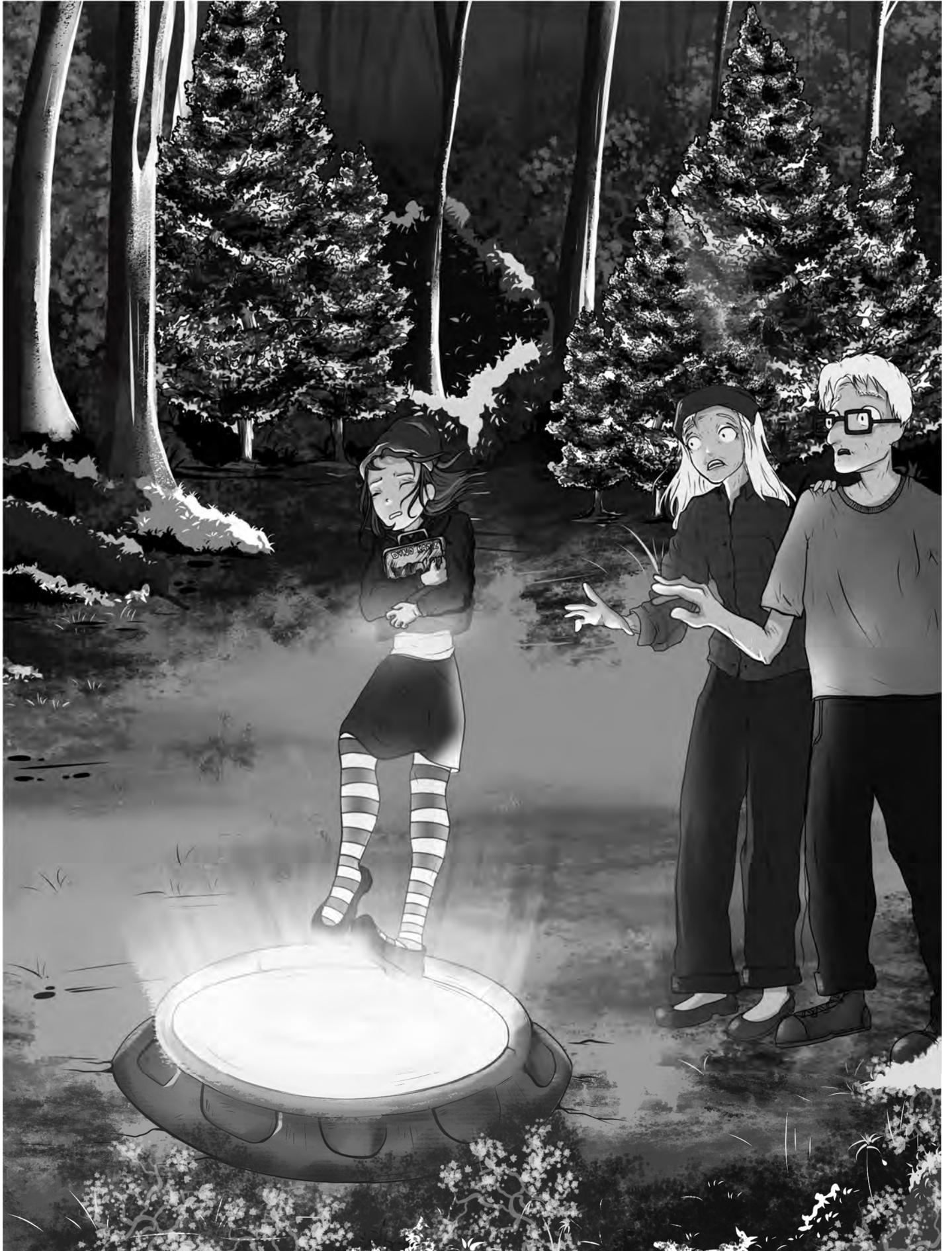
“Furry once said: *If you have a chance to do something good, I think you should do it,*” Flo recalled.

She remembered when Furry chased, caught and saved the dog at the park from getting hit by a car.

“So that’s what I’m going to do,” Flo said quietly.

And before anyone could stop her, Flo Gardner stepped onto the blue, glowing circle.

WHOOSH.



- - -

No matter how many times she'd jumped between her world and Furry's, Flo never got used to the sensation. It was like being on the downward slope of the world's faster rollercoaster for a few moments longer than usual, as if she might never stop. Streaks of light whipped by her in a blur. It felt like her hair might fly right off the back of her head.

And without warning, she landed with a *WHUMP* on a hard surface. Her lunchbox clanked against the ground next to her.

"Okay, ow," Flo muttered. She picked herself up and brushed the front of her skirt off with her hand.

Her nose crinkled like her favorite French fries at Burger Max. It smelled dank and musty, kind of like when they gave her cousin Clara's dog, Biscuits, a bath.

Wet dog, Flo thought. That's the stink.

She peered around and realized there wasn't much to see. It was dark and quiet. A single torch lit the way further ahead. She heard a drip and a tiny splash, making Flo realize she ended up in some sort of cave.

Before she could do anything else, there was a grunt behind her, then another. Instinctively, Flo turned and brandished her lunchbox, ready to smash anything that tried to grab her.

“Help your grandma up, won't you?”

Flo squinted as if she couldn't believe it, but her eyes didn't lie. On the dirty cave floor was her grandmother. A groan nearby told her Curtis came through the portal too.

She set her lunchbox down and helped Grandma up, her heart beating with panic.

“What are you two doing?” Flo hissed. “You weren't supposed to follow me in here!”



Grandma shook her head, a little shaky on her feet from the journey from one world to another.

“Pretty sure you’re not supposed to be here either,” Grandma said.

The two of them yanked Curtis to his unsteady feet, too. He straightened up and twisted his back,

letting it pop audibly.

“Yeah, kid,” Curtis said. “I’m starting to believe you want to get eaten by wolves. Your grandma went in after you and I couldn’t let you two go without me.”

“I appreciate it, Curtis,” Flo said. “But I’m pretty sure I can take care of myself.”

“And I don’t doubt that,” Curtis replied. “But I don’t want to be the one to tell your mom you jumped through some sort of wormhole while I just stood around and watched. Now, let’s get back to where we belong before those werewolves sniff us out.”

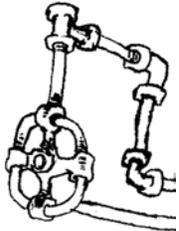
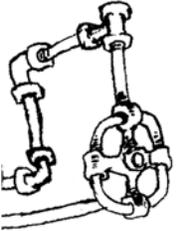
Flo shook her head.

“First of all, I’m not leaving without Furry,” Flo said. She glanced at the ground quickly then bent to pick up her lunchbox. “And second of all...”

The two older folks watched Flo with worry in their eyes.

“The way home is all closed up.”

DENN
OF
WOLVES



CHAPTER 11



The group was silent a moment, broken only by the sound of water dripping somewhere nearby. Flo guessed that both her grandma and Curtis wondered what “the way home is closed up” meant exactly.

“What does that mean exactly?” Curtis said. “You and Ferdinand have been here and back a bunch of times. Why’s it different now?”

Flo peered down the cavern passageway, hoping nothing nasty was headed their way.

“This time, we don’t have the portal shard to draw and open up a way back home,” Flo explained. “Furry took the piece from his dad’s sacred stone, that stone that begins with a V... I always forget the name. That’s how he got to our world in the first place and that’s why his dad wanted to get him back here.”

“His father only wanted Furry home because of some piece of rock?” Grandma whispered. “I find that hard to believe.”

“Well, that’s what Furry said,” Flo said with a shrug. “And if there’s even a little piece of it in our world, the crack stays open. That’s why we had all those spiders, that dumb mummy and everything else come through the basement.”

Curtis nodded. “So, with Furry back here, it’s closed again. Good news for Corman Towers...”

“Bad news for us,” Flo whispered.

“We just need to find your little furry friend, grab

the rock thingy and use it to get home,” Grandma said. “How hard could it be?”

“Considering Furry’s dad has both? Pretty hard,” Flo said. “And I have no idea don’t know how many other werewolves are running around out here.”

“And those werewolves can smell us from miles away,” Curtis said. “I just hope you have a plan, kid. From where I’m standing, this seems like an impossible mission.”

Flo saw how frightened both her grandma and Curtis looked. Both of them scanned the cave as if a door with a nice, bright EXIT sign might appear somewhere to take them back to their world where they’d all live happily ever after.

“I’m going to look for Furry,” Flo decided.

“That’s the plan?” Curtis asked.

“It’s the only one I’ve got,” Flo admitted. “Maybe he’ll know how we can all get out of here.”

There's no way his dad is going to take his eye off of Furry, not after looking for him all those years, Flo realized. Even if we do manage to escape, what's going to stop Rolvis from coming back into my world and snatching Furry up again?

No matter what, Flo couldn't help but think Furry was there to stay and they were in big trouble for even setting foot in Furry's world.

Off in the distance, a wolf howled, followed by what sounded like a chorus of other howls in response. While Flo didn't know much about how wolves, let alone werewolves communicated, she felt in the pit of her stomach that howling wasn't a good sign.

"We need to move," Curtis said quickly, glancing back over his shoulder. "I feel like there are about forty pairs of eyes in the dark watching us standing here like sitting ducks."

Flo felt them too. It was like something big, hairy

and scary was silently watching every single thing they did and said. She knew it was just a matter of time before they jumped out and grabbed them.

The three of them headed toward the light and Flo noticed how different the air was, the closer they got to the burning torch. As they rounded a natural bend in the cavern, she saw the passageway opened to a much larger cave.

What she saw almost made her heart stop beating. As Flo opened her mouth to warn Grandma and Curtis, her world went completely dark.

- - -

Flo realized she'd been captured. She felt herself lifted from her feet and carried over the shoulder of something strong. She felt footsteps pound against the ground and as she shifted, she realized was inside the confines of a thick, rough sack.

Mission over before it started, Flo thought, her

mind racing. She had no idea who had her or what they planned to do with her. *Of all of my stupid ideas, this was the worst*, she thought.

She knew it was dumb to think she could sneak around Furry's home without her scent being picked up by every werewolf within miles. As if on cue, she heard a chorus of howls all around her. It sounded like a concert stadium full of the creatures, cheering on whichever werewolf had snatched her out of the cave.

"Let go of me you hairy brute!" Grandma's unmistakable voice was off to the left. To her right, she heard a male's voice grunt something she shouldn't repeat.

Curtis, Grandma, Flo thought. She was dropped to the ground roughly and her knees vibrated in pain. The howls and commotion continued, leaving her feeling completely scared and helpless to whatever was in store for her.

For comfort, Flo tightened her grip on the handle of her Dyno-Katz lunchbox. She didn't know what good her battered one-of-a-kind lunchbox would do in a cave full of werewolves, but it was all she had. Flo was just grateful she'd held onto it when they'd taken her.

As she attempted to wriggle free from her confining prison, the sack was quickly ripped from her, leaving her squinting and wincing inside the gigantic, torchlit cave.

Large, tattered tapestries with symbols she couldn't recognize hung randomly on the cave walls. There were torches everywhere in stands and in sconces that brightened the cave, allowing her to see most of the furry faces glaring back at her. She was sure there were likely more in the shadows, making her feel even more uneasy than she already did.

Everywhere Flo looked, there were werewolves. All of them were large, menacing monsters that circled

her and watched her with their ferocious, yellow eyes. She spied more than a few licking their chops, as if they didn't see a frightened young girl, but a delicious meal they could tear apart in seconds.

A werewolf with dark brown mottled fur came close to her on all fours, sniffing her like a dog inspecting a tree. Flo felt its hot breath on her face... and it stunk. On instinct, Flo raised her lunchbox and stuck the beast in the nose with a decent *KLONK*.

Immediately, the werewolf snarled and snapped at her. Flo recoiled and the beast's mouthful of teeth missed taking a bite out of her by mere centimeters.

“Grontif!” A loud, commanding voice boomed.
“Heel!”

The mangy werewolf growled but did as he was commanded, he narrowed his eyes at Flo.

Within the crowded throng of wolves surrounding them, Flo saw that her Grandma and Curtis were

now de-sacked as well. They were shoved closer to Flo as if to keep their human feast together.

“Move aside so that I may address these unwelcome outsiders,” the voice ordered.

Flo knew instantly who it belonged to.

The circling werewolves moved aside, forming a ring around the three of them. Flo saw that there was a raised portion of the cave floor where ornamental rugs and tapestries hung. An enormous werewolf, covered in black fur stood taller than the rest. Even through his hair, Flo saw he was packed with muscle. Around his waist he wore the swatch of cloth she'd seen before. His face was pulled into a permanent snarl, as if nothing in his world or anyone else's would bring him joy.

It was Rolvis the Mighty, Furry's big, bad dad in all of his werewolf-y glory.

Standing next to him stood a tinier, familiar



werewolf in a pair of swim trunks that looked completely out of place, even among his own kind.

“What are you doing here, Flo?” Furry cried.

“I’m bringing you-” Flo began.

“SILENCE,” Rolvis shouted.

“No,” Flo shouted back. She suddenly didn’t care if Rolvis commanded his werewolf minions to eat her up. One way or another she would get her best friend back where he belonged and didn’t care what it took to make it happen. “You came to my grandma’s house, kicked in her door, hurt Curtis, almost killed me and stole my best friend.”

There was a collective silence from the pack of wolves. Though her heart beat a bajillion times per second, Flo was pretty sure none of them had ever heard anyone, let alone a shrimpy human girl, speak to their leader like that.

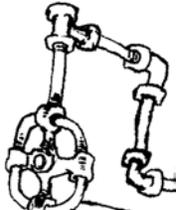
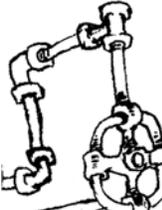
Furry took a deep, frightened breath.

“So, no,” Flo said, standing up. “I won’t be silent.”



WEREWOLF

WAR



CHAPTER 12



The werewolf king was not amused. He watched the small girl with the metal box in her hand as if unsure what to make of her. Every eye in the place looked to him, as if expecting him to explode with rage or command them to do his bidding.

“You stand in Denn, Kingdom of Werewolves,” Rolvis said finally. “Where I am the alpha, the king of my kind. When most who are not welcome here beg for their lives, you’ve set loose your sharp tongue.”

Flo stood her ground.

“Yeah, well,” she said. “You made me mad.”

Rolvis narrowed his eyes at Flo.

“You understand that your anger means nothing to me, don’t you small one? I have to merely give the signal and my pack will be on you within seconds, ending your brief and foolish visit to my domain.”

Flo looked around at all of the werewolves watching her. She could actually see saliva dripping from the muzzles of some of the hungry creatures.

She nodded.

“Sure you could,” Flo said. “I’m not as big or as strong as any of you guys. You can run faster than I do and can smell me from miles away. I’m not much of a challenge for your army of big, bad wolves.”

“Flo,” Grandma whispered from off to her left. “Don’t, sweetheart. Please.”

Flo nodded as if to assure her grandmother that she knew what she was doing. Truth was, she had no idea. She just spoke from the heart.

“I might be small, but I’ll put up a fight,” Flo said.
“I only want Furry-”

“Fiercas,” Rolvis corrected.

“Right, sorry,” Flo said with a quick, nervous laugh. “I only want Fiercas to come back home with me. He doesn’t want to be here. You only wanted that shard of your precious stone and-”

“HOW DARE YOU TELL ME WHAT IT IS I WANT,”
Rolvis boomed.

“Don’t interrupt me!” Flo shouted, her own eyes narrowing. “If you cared even a little bit about your son, you’d realize he doesn’t belong here! He was happiest in my world, living among my people!”

Flo felt a hand on her shoulder and flinched. She turned to see her grandma’s kind face.

“Flo,” she whispered. “You’re only making him angry, dear.”

Rolvis seemed to smile, exposing a wicked mouth full of fangs. They were long, sharp and worn from years and years of destroying his victims.

“Your elder speaks wise, small one,” Rolvis growled. “And my patience with you runs thin while my wolf pack grows hungrier by the moment.”

They’re going to eat us, Flo thought. Her heart continued to thud rapidly in her chest from both fear and adrenaline.

“Father, no,” Furry protested. He tugged at the giant werewolf’s hairy arm. “You can let them go peacefully. Don’t do this! Please!”

Rolvis turned and snarled loudly at Furry, startling the small, werewolf.

“YOU ARE IN ENOUGH TROUBLE AS IT STANDS, FIERCAS,” Rolvis roared. The werewolf king grew

angrier by the second. He didn't appear to tolerate having anyone, let alone the smallest creatures in his den, tell him what to do. Not in front of his ravenous horde.

Before anyone could draw another breath, Rolvis turned his head to the dark cave ceiling and howled into the stalactites.

In an instant, there was fur moving everywhere.

"This is it," Curtis shouted, backing up while rolling up the sleeves of his shirt. "Here they come."

Flo watched as a werewolf dove at her, eager to sink its teeth into her leg. She instinctively swung, cracking the beast in the head with her lunchbox. It howled in surprise as another scrambled in front of it to take a shot at her.

Flo saw a mouthful of fangs close in on her face. A moment later, a small pair of furry hands shoved them out of the way.

Furry stood next to Flo, his eyes wild and angry.

“You really did it this time,” Furry said. His arms were up, ready to fend off anything else that came their way. “You should’ve just let me go. I’m not sure there’s any way out of this one.”

“I couldn’t just-” Flo began, but ducked as another werewolf swiped at her and Furry shoved it away.

“Leave you here!”

Everywhere she looked, there were hairy beasts circling and waiting for their chance to strike. She spied Rolvis standing, above the fray, watching as if studying what she and Furry were doing.

Flo stepped backwards and found herself back-to-back with Curtis and Grandma. They were completely surrounded, fending the snapping jaws and fangs off as best they could. One of them swiped at Grandma’s leg, ripping a slash into her jeans. She shrieked in pain as Curtis stepped forward and grabbed a torch



from the cave wall.

“Grandma!” Flo shouted.

What have I done, what have I done? Flo felt terrible. She’d not only endangered her own life, but her poor grandmother’s as well.

“Bring it, you fanged freaks,” Curtis shouted, swinging the flaming torch back and forth.

There was a yelp and the smell of singed fur as Curtis caught one of the werewolves across the chest with the torch. It retreated, batting the small flame that burned some of his hair away.

“We meet again, human girl,” a werewolf with dark, grey fur snarled as he shoved another werewolf aside to move in slowly toward Flo.

Flo instantly recognized it as Furry’s older brother, Gnash. He licked his fangs as if trying to moisten them before making a meal of her.

“Ugh, I hoped I wouldn’t have to,” Flo said,

backing up slowly.

“There are no golems to save you this time,” Gnash grunted, his eyes ablaze with anger.

“Back off, Gnash,” Furry shouted. “Or you’ll regret it!”

The elder werewolf laughed. “A lifetime of regret awaits you, little brother,” Gnash snarled and lunged.

As he did, Furry leapt straight up into the air, above his older brother’s head. When gravity caught up with him, he landed with both feet on Gnash’s neck. The blow knocked his brother down onto his face, just inches from Flo’s feet.

The four of them moved in unison through the werewolf pack, fighting and fending off attacks as best they could. As they drew closer to the raised floor where Rolvis ruled, Flo saw something blue and glowing.

The Veldir Stone, Flo thought to herself and got a

good look at it.

The majestic stone looked like a cluster of blue crystals stuck together, pointing in various directions. The bottom appeared flattened and sat atop a metal pedestal, adorned with strange runes and symbols. It glowed and hummed with a power Flo couldn't even begin to understand.

“We're losing this fight,” Curtis cried, sounding like he was in pain. Even so, Flo heard the whoosh of flames as he swung the torch back and forth to keep the werewolves away from him and Grandma.

Flo saw Rolvis watch his pack circle and close in around the four of them. He frowned from his raised spot above the fray. It was as if his face grew angrier with every second the “outsiders” weren't torn to pieces.

“Throw me up there near the stone,” Flo whispered to Furry, nodding in its direction. She

clunked another werewolf in the head, creating a massive dent in her beloved lunchbox.

“What?” Furry cried, “That’s crazy.”

“Not any crazier than chasing you here without a way home,” Flo shouted. “I have to get Curtis and Grandma out of here. Can you boost me up and over these guys?”

Furry shook his head. “I can, but I don’t know if I’ll be able to help-”

“Just do it,” Flo shouted. “Now!”

Without saying another word, Furry hooked his hands together and made a step. Flo stepped into his hands and held her breath. The next instant, she was launched up and over the swarming pack of werewolves.

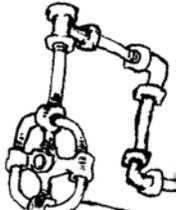
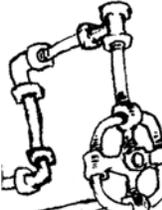
For a brief airborne instant, Flo was headed right for the troublesome Veldir Stone. She prepared for a hard landing, unsure how badly she’d hurt once she



did. As the glowing stone drew close, a large, black, werewolf arm knocked her down.

Flo landed hard at the base of the rock's pedestal. Her lunchbox clattered to the ground nearby and popped open. She rolled onto her back and looked up to see the large, looming form of Rolvis, King of the Werewolves, hovering above her.

SAYING
GOODBYE



CHAPTER 13



That didn't work, Flo thought helplessly. She felt like she had the wind knocked out of her and was worn down, beaten. Flo glanced down and noticed more than a few slashes in her leggings. The lid of her Dyno-Katz lunchbox had popped open, spilling its contents nearby.

"This was never going to end well, small one," Rolvis growled.

"No!" Furry shouted. He burst through the crowd of werewolves, clawing and biting his way there. Free of the

frenzy, Furry brushed past his dad and knelt near Flo's side.

“She meant to destroy the stone, son,” Rolvis shouted. “Step aside so I can end this once and for all.”

Flo shook her head.

“No,” she said. “I just wanted my friend back.”

Before Furry could do anything more, his brothers grabbed him. They dragged the smallest werewolf away from their father and Flo, leaving her alone to face the towering beast.

“Father, don't!” Furry shouted.

Flo felt tears well up in her eyes and she quickly wiped them away. She glanced past Rolvis to see the werewolves circling the others.

“Please don't kill my Grandma and Curtis,” Flo said. “Coming here wasn't their idea. It was mine.”

“HEEL,” Rolvis shouted.

Immediately the werewolves stopped attacking. They stood above their prey, as if waiting for the final command to end the lives of the intruders who'd snuck into Denn.

"I promise I didn't want to hurt your glow-y stone," Flo cried. "I just wanted to get them back home. They followed me here when I came to rescue Furry."

Rolvis didn't correct Flo. Instead, he eyed the girl suspiciously.

"I wish you could've seen how happy he was in my world," Flo said quietly. "He and I had so much fun together and I just don't want to lose him. He's the best friend I've ever had."

Flo crawled slowly over to her spilled lunchbox. She picked up one of the juice boxes and stuck it back inside. She wasn't sure why she was putting everything back, especially when she probably wouldn't be alive much longer.



As she reached for the small, flat, square shaped item on the ground, a big, furry paw beat her to it. Rolvis picked it up, turned it over and looked at it. The photo was tiny in his massive, hairy hands.

“Please don’t wreck that,” Flo pleaded. “It’s important to me.”

Flo thought about the photo she’d kept safeguarded in her Dyno-Katz lunchbox. After keeping it close to her for the last few years, the thought of some monster tearing it apart felt like a punch in her stomach.

“An image of an adult human and a youngling,” Rolvis grunted. “Why do you keep it?”

Flo could see the image in her mind and knew every detail. She’d looked at it nearly everyday since her whole world changed. It was a photo of her dad, Steve Gardner, holding Flo when she was just a baby. It was taken the day they brought her home from the

hospital for the first time.

In her mind, Flo saw the big, beaming smile on her dad's face.

"It's my dad," Flo said quietly. "It's my favorite picture of him."

"It's my favorite too," Grandma said from the middle of the large cavern, surrounded by waiting werewolves. "Two people I love more than anything, together. That man was my son."

Rolvis tilted his head a bit as if giving thought to what he was hearing.

"You speak of him as though he has fallen," Rolvis said. "Has he?"

"Yeah," Flo said. "My dad died a few years ago. He was one of my favorite people in the whole wide world. And just like that, he was gone."

Flo felt the tears coming hot and quick as she remembered the last few months she'd had with her

dad. The medicine that made him sick, his struggles getting out of bed. Even though he wasn't the same guy she'd known growing up, he did his best to hide what was happening to him.

“And the small one in this image,” Rolvis said.
“Who is that?”

“That's me,” Flo said. “When I was a baby.”

Rolvis stared at the photo in silence.

Grandma spoke up again.

“Stevie was never happier than when Flo was born,” she said proudly. “And I was just as happy as he was. I had become a grandmother.”

Flo touched her lunchbox and gazed wearily at the scratched and dented cartoon cats on the front lid.

“I lost a lot over the past few years,” she said, wiping the steady tears from her eyes. “I just didn't want to lose Furry, too.”



“Please, Father,” Furry begged. “Please let them go.”

Rolvis eyed his son silently and then looked again at the photo of Steve and Baby Flo Gardner. Though Flo couldn't be completely sure, she swore she heard a slight whimper in the giant werewolf's throat. The other werewolves watched their fearless leader in awe. They seemed stunned that Rolvis hadn't already ended the lives of the three intruders.

“My own son would never mourn for me the way you mourn yours,” Rolvis said quietly. “I've driven him to seek life in a world far from our own.”

Furry took a deep, shuddery breath and looked over at his father.

“That's not true,” Furry said. “I just never felt as though I belonged here.”

Furry watched Rolvis cautiously, as if afraid of what his father might do next.

“I’m smaller than the rest of the pack. I don’t hunt,” Furry said. “I also don’t eat what werewolves eat. I’m different and I knew I would never be like Gnash, Ragon or any of the others.”

Rolvis studied his son, standing there in a pair of human swimming trunks.

“In time you would’ve grown and accepted your true nature,” Rolvis said.

“No,” Furry said. “I wouldn’t. I know who I am and though I might be a werewolf, I’m not like you guys...and I never will be.”

Rolvis exhaled.

“Then I have failed you,” the werewolf king said quietly.

“I know I can’t go back, but you can let them go,” Furry said. “They don’t pose a threat to our world and none of them wanted to steal the Veldir Stone. Flo just wanted to bring me back to where I was happiest.

Please don't kill her or Grandma or Curtis for that."

Flo watched her best friend beg for their lives and wiped the tears from her eyes.

A brown-furred werewolf with one eye scratched out grunted from the crowd. "My king, you can't—"

"SILENCE!" Rolvis roared. He turned his head and narrowed his eyes at the werewolf who spoke out of turn. The beast cringed and stepped back, looking like a scolded puppy.

Flo braced herself for what was next. She wasn't sure any of them would see another sunrise, either in Furry's world or hers. In her heart, Flo knew she'd done all she could to save her friend. Her fate was in Rolvis' powerful paws.

She flinched as the giant werewolf stepped forward. On instinct, she scrambled back to the Veldir Stone pedestal. When Rolvis reached out to her, she grabbed the handle of her lunchbox in

a last-ditch effort to defend herself.

“Please, small one,” Rolvis said. “Do not.”

Before Flo could respond, the werewolf squatted and handed the photograph of her dad back to her. She took it carefully from his mighty paw and looked into the monster’s eyes.

“Hold tight to this,” Rolvis commanded.

Flo nodded and prepared herself for the worst.

“You and your elders are free to leave Denn,” he said and stood. “No further harm will befall you.”

Flo nodded and smiled weakly at the werewolf. She’d been so certain wouldn’t live to see the 5th grade, that it made her cry all over again.

“Thank you, Father,” Furry said, looking up at the giant werewolf.

Rolvis nodded to his son and reached over Flo’s head. With enormous hand, he grasped the Veldir

Stone, swallowing it whole within his grasp. The stone glowed blue between his powerful fingers.

“Come,” he said. “It’s time you return home.”

- - -

Flo, Grandma, Curtis gathered near the portal stone in the cave passageway. Across from them stood Rolvis and Furry.

The werewolf pressed Veldir Stone’s the jagged top into the portal’s flat surface. Magically, the stone absorbed the relic until just the base remained. The entire flat surface of the portal ignited blue and Rolvis turned it, forming a giant, blue glowing circle.

It was nothing like the blue crack Furry’s portal shard had created when they’d passed between their worlds. What they all witnessed was the Veldir stone’s true purpose.

“I guess this is goodbye,” Flo said and walked over to Furry.

The little werewolf nodded and met her halfway, wrapping her in his thin, hairy arms. Flo hugged him back.

“I’m sorry for all of the trouble I caused you,” Furry said, crying into Flo’s shoulder. “I never meant for anyone to get hurt, I just-”

“I know, I know,” Flo said, her tears watering her eyes all over again. “And it doesn’t matter. I’d do it all again in a heartbeat. You’re the best friend I ever had.”

Curtis and Grandma walked over and wrapped their arms around the duo.

“Please take care of yourself, Ferdinand,” Curtis whispered.

“Thank you for being my granddaughter’s friend,” Grandma said. “You meant the world to her. You were a friend when she needed one most.”

After they pulled away, both Curtis and Grandma

nodded respectfully to Rolvis as if to say *thank you*.

With a *WHOOSH*, they stepped into the portal and were gone.

“Okay,” Flo said. “If I don’t let go now, I probably never will.”

“I’m going to miss you forever,” Furry said.

“And ever,” Flo returned.

Flo let go of her friend and looked at him for a moment longer. She wanted to burn his goofy, furry face into her brain.

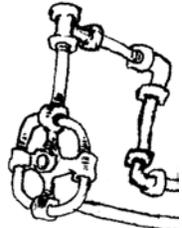
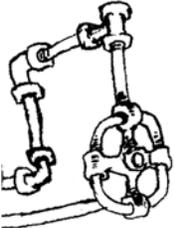
Immediately, Furry began to sob as he realized he’d never see Flo again.

“Please be good to him,” Flo said, looking up at Rolvis. “He’s the best guy I know.”

Rolvis nodded.

“That is no longer up to me, small one,” the werewolf king said quietly.

HOME



CHAPTER 14



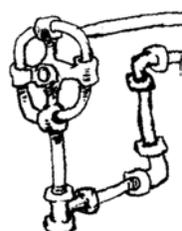
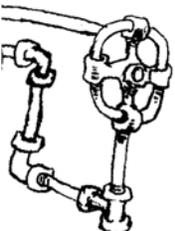
Flo stood there, stunned and confused. Furry did too.

“I’m not sure I...” she whispered, mostly to herself.

“Go,” Rolvis said, placing his hand on Furry’s shoulder. “Your home is with your friend now, my son.”

“Holy socks!” Flo shouted. “Are you serious?”

Furry immediately sprang forward and hugged his father around the waist, burying his face into Rolvis’ hairy stomach.





Rolvis whimpered a bit, but fought back what Flo imagined were tears just waiting to pour from his scary eyes.

The werewolf king crouched down and whispered something into Furry's ears that Flo couldn't hear.

"Okay," Furry replied. "I know and I love you too, Dad."

Rolvis stood up and released his son. He glanced over his shoulder, looking down the hall to Denn's great cavern.

"Now go," Rolvis said. "And remember your promise, Fiercas."

"I will," Furry said, swiping a hairy arm across his eyes to dry them.

Flo looked up at Rolvis and nodded.

"Thanks, Furry's dad," Flo said with a smile. "I'll keep him safe."

"Yeah, whatever," Furry said.

“And little one,” Rolvis said. “My apologies for the way I behaved at your elder’s home. I am sorry if I scared or hurt you.”

“I’ll be okay,” Flo said. “And I forgive you.”

Rolvis nodded and Flo could’ve sworn she saw the big bad werewolf smile.

Furry took Flo’s hand and she took his. With a quick wave, both of them stepped into the portal, leaving Denn forever.

WHOOSH.

- - -

Hurling through time and space didn’t bother Flo as much as it had in the past. She wasn’t sure if it was because it would be her last time or knowing that Furry was with her. Either way, she screeched in delight, almost like she was on a roller coaster.

Furry howled.

When they landed on the damp grass of the woods behind Grandma's house, Flo was surprised to see that it was already early morning in Spring Falls.

"We're back!" Furry announced as he leapt to his human bare feet. He turned as Flo stood up on her own. "Oh, hi."

Flo saw who Furry was saying "oh, hi" to. She found Grandma, Curtis and her mother standing about 4 feet away. Her mom looked completely shocked.

"I told you, Maggie," Grandma said. "I couldn't believe it myself."

"Mom," Flo said, seeing the worried look on her face. "I can explain everything."

"I should hope so," Mom replied. "Grandma told me a little and until the two of you just...appeared there, I didn't know what to think. I'm still not sure I do."

Furry looked at Flo and nodded.

“She should know everything,” he said. “Even my big, hairy secret. Right? It’s only fair.”

“You’re right,” Flo said. “Do it.”

Instantly, Furry plugged his nose and transformed himself into the little werewolf right in front of Flo’s mom.

Maggie Gardner screamed and her voice echoed through the small, wooded town of Spring Falls.

- - -

It took a moment for Flo’s mom to recover from watching her daughter’s best friend change from a boy in swimming trunks to a werewolf in swimming trunks. A juice box and a belch later, Furry was back in his human form and she calmed down.

“Okay,” Flo’s mom said. “What the heck is happening right now?”

“There’s a different world out there,” Flo said.

“Full of all kinds of monst...”

Furry elbowed her in the ribs, stopping her short.

“We really need to stop calling creatures that are different, monsters,” Furry said.

“Sorry, you’re right. There’s a place where all kinds of creatures live,” Flo finished, correcting herself. “That’s where Furry is from.”

“No way would I have ever believed it myself if I hadn’t seen it through my own thick glasses,” Curtis said. He pulled them off and wiped them with his shirt before fitting them back onto his nose. “But it’s true.”

Flo smiled. Curtis knew Furry was a werewolf all along, but that didn’t change a thing. He’d never been to Furry’s world or had any idea how many werewolves were really out there.

“So...” Mom began. “I have a million questions,

but here's the biggest one: Do I have to worry about you biting my daughter?"

"Oh, no, no!" Furry cried. "I don't even like hot dogs. I'm a vegetarian!"

Flo watched as her mom struggled to take all the information in. She blinked three times and shook her head as if she still couldn't believe it.

"Here's the deal, Mom," Flo said. "We can't tell anyone what Furry really is...or about the portal or anything. Do you have any idea what other people would do if they realized he's really a werewolf?"

"Yeah," Mom said. Her eyebrows raised with concern. "Don't worry, I'm not sure anyone would believe me anyway."

"Good. Thanks, Mom."

"Then my secret doesn't leave this group," Furry said. "Right?"

All of them nodded and murmured in agreement.

Furry gave two thumbs up in approval.

“So what I wasn’t telling you before, when we were missing for a few days...” Flo began, already feeling the weight lift from her shoulders. “We got stuck in his world and were portal bouncing back and forth until we got back home. It took us longer than we expected. I’m sorry I worried you. I just wasn’t sure you’d understand.”

Maggie smiled a little. “Please don’t keep things from me again, okay? I’m your mom and I’m going to understand.”

“Even something like this?”

“Especially something like this,” Maggie replied. “Well, it might take me a minute, but I’ll come around. I promise.”

Flo hugged her mom tight.

“Let’s stick together, okay?” Maggie said. “We’ve been through a lot, but we can handle anything.”

“Okay,” Flo said. “You’re right...and I’m sorry.”

“Apology accepted,” Maggie said, hugging her daughter close.

After a moment, they let go of each other. Her mom wiped a tear away and so did Flo. Furry managed a little whimper, much like his dad did back in Denn.

As Flo bent to pick up her lunchbox from the ground, she noticed something. She hadn’t seen it the night before when it was dark, but in the early morning light it was clear as day.

There, on the surface of the portal stone, were faint, colorful drawings. She crouched down to get a better look. In a child’s hand were pictures of small, cat-like creatures. One of them held a sword. Another had what looked like a bomb. And the last one looked like it was ready to do a back-flip at any second.

Flo glanced over at her battered lunchbox and her

eyes lit up.

“Dyno-Katz,” she whispered.

“What?” Furry asked, picking up her words as though she shouted them. “Where?”

“Right here,” Flo said. She pointed as Furry crouched next to her. “My dad must have drawn them right here on the portal stone when he was a kid!”

Grandma laughed. “Stevie was always doodling anywhere he could and lots of places he shouldn’t,” she said. “I had to have him scrub the walls more than a few times. Looks like the little stinker found a place to draw out here.”

Flo couldn’t stop staring at the drawings. It was crazy enough, knowing there was a portal stone in the backyard where her dad grew up. But to see that he’d drawn at an early age what would one day become his short-lived legacy was incredible.

How many of these stones are scattered around the

world? Flo wondered, knowing she'd passed through a handful of them in different countries, even.

“Maybe he went to your world from time to time,” Flo whispered.

Furry shrugged. “Not sure how without a piece of the Veldir stone, but I guess it's possible. Maybe he saw them somewhere there in real life.”

Flo traced the drawings with her finger and smiled. Even after leaving the world so soon, her dad still found ways to reach out to her from the great beyond.

- - -

The Gardners and Furry decided it was time to leave Grandma's house after promising to get together more often. Curtis offered to stay behind to help fix her door.

“I have to admit,” he said. “I sometimes miss being the fix-it guy. It's the least I could do for your

sweet Grandma.”

Flo shot him a look.

“Calm down, kid. She’s a nice lady,” Curtis admitted. “What would you do? Leave her here with no front door?”

After a series of hugs for everyone involved, Furry and Flo piled into the minivan after her mom, waving to Grandma and Curtis.

“See you soon!” Grandma shouted. She waved by opening and closing her raised hand.

“I promise,” Flo shouted back, throwing her a kiss or two for good measure.

They drove the few hours it took, heading through the woods and over the river bridge leading back into the city. As they entered into the busy, bustling streets and surrounded themselves by tall buildings, Flo felt comforted. It had taken a while, but she finally felt like she was where she belonged.

Sure, her apartment wasn't the nicest and her best friend was a third grade werewolf, but after everything she'd been through in the past few years, she'd finally found her place.

As her mom pulled into a parking spot, Flo found her best friend had fallen asleep against the car door. He breathed heavy with his mouth partially open, completely zonked out.

Flo didn't want to wake him, but was pretty sure his adoptive parents were worried sick about him. She didn't know if it was the right time to tell Jorge and Mona Babbitt that their son was from another world.

Or why Furry sometimes got extra hungry around a full moon.

Or that they had saved the city plenty of times from monsters coming out of a glowing crack in the basement laundry room floor.

All of that could wait.

“Hey,” Flo whispered, nudging the little guy.

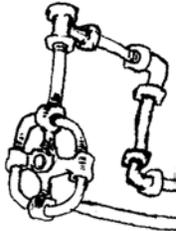
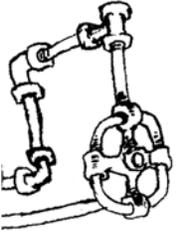
“Wake up, Furry.”

“Huh?” Furry murmured sleepily. “Where are we?”

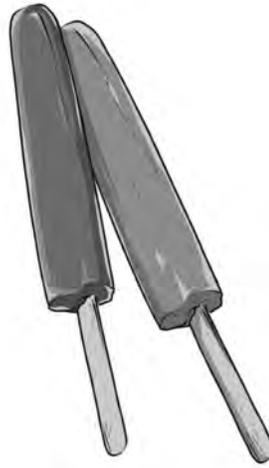
“We’re home.”



EPILOGUE



EPILOGUE



Three days later, Furry and Flo sat on the steps in front of the Corman Towers apartment building. They held Popsicles in their hands and watched the traffic roll by.

“Does it feel weird?” Flo asked.

“Huh?” Furry replied, biting the end off of his frozen grape treat. “Does what feel weird?”

Flo shrugged a shoulder and waved at the rest of the world with her orange Popsicle.

“You know, being here for good. Not having to worry about your dad coming to drag you back to Denn or wherever.”

Furry nodded. “Yeah, a little. I guess so. I definitely don’t miss that glowing blue crack in the basement, though.”

Neither did Flo. Even though every piece of the Veldir stone was back in Furry’s world and their way to his home had sealed up, she’d checked it out herself just to be sure.

Flo was almost surprised to find no trace of the crack behind the dryers in the laundry room. It was as if it never existed. There would be no more spiders, goblins, mummies, skeletons, golems or anything else showing up uninvited to her world.

Even so, there was something Flo needed to know.

“So maybe it’s none of my business,” Flo began. “But what did your dad say to you before we left?”

Furry bit the rest of his Popsicle off and swallowed the purple chunk whole.

“He wants to come visit me from time to time,” Furry said. He looked at Flo carefully. “You know, like on my birthday and stuff. I hope that’s okay.”

Flo smiled.

“Of course,” she said. “As long as he behaves himself and doesn’t flip any more cars over.”

“Yeah,” Furry said. “Pretty sure that won’t be a problem.”

As if on cue, a car honked and a man in a taxi cab shouted at the truck in front of him. The words he said made both Furry and Flo raise their eyebrows and look at each other.

“I guess even humans can be monsters sometimes,” Furry said, making Flo laugh.

Furry reached behind her and pulled another Popsicle from the box.

Hey,” Flo said. “Easy on those, man! They should last more than a day or two.”

Furry ripped the white waxy paper from the frozen delight and promptly put it into his mouth before Flo could stop him.

“Full moon tonight,” Furry said, pointing to the blue sky above. “I can’t help myself.”

Flo narrowed her eyes. She didn’t have the phases of the moon memorized, but was pretty sure her best friend only said that so he could eat whatever he wanted.

“I just noticed something,” Furry said. “You don’t have your lunchbox with you.”

Flo shrugged. “Yeah,” she said. “It’s up in my room where it’s safe.”

Furry wrinkled his eyebrows in confusion. “Wow! I thought you needed to have it with you wherever you went.”

“I did too,” Flo admitted. “It was how I kept my dad close to me, I think. You know, seeing the front of the lunchbox with all the characters he created...”

“And the picture of you and your dad,” Furry added, watching Flo as she spoke.

“Right,” Flo said with a little smile. “But I know now he’s always close to me, no matter if I’ve got his picture or my poor, beat-up lunchbox nearby,” Flo said. “He’s in here.”

Flo tapped the middle of her chest.

“On your shirt?” Furry asked.

“In my heart, goofball,” Flo said. She shoved his shoulder, almost knocking him down.

“I know, I know,” Furry said. “But that was kind of funny, right?”

“Sort of,” Flo admitted and smiled. “It was pretty funny.”

“You know, I’m glad we finally have our dads figured out,” Furry said.

“Me too,” Flo replied.



AUTHOR'S NOTE

Hey everyone! Thomas Kingsley Troupe here, the writer guy behind this much-delayed finale to the FURRY & FLO series. I'm guessing some of you original readers are all grown up now. How did your driver's test go? Have you started college yet?

I feel awful that it took SOOO long to finally get BIG BAD DAD out into the world. Like...4 years? I had grand plans to release it right after PORTAL BOUNCE, but ended up getting busy with other things like life, other book deadlines, raising boys, etc...

Anyway, enough excuses! It's done and I can't say I wasn't a little scared to write the ending. So many movies and books have a hard time making the ending great, and this goofy little set of books was no different. I didn't want to disappoint and I wanted to wrap everything up in a nice little bow. I think it turned out okay. I hope you agree!

I know this book ended up being longer than all the others, so let me make this quick: Thank you for hanging in there with Furry, Flo and me. All your e-mails and words of encouragement really pushed me to get this done. I really appreciate each and every one of you!

Holy socks!

- TKT