

Prologue

The Punishment

Mr and Mrs Watson gripped the bars of the viewing area as they watched the Movers march Luke, Resus and Cleo over to the trapdoor. Niles Farr and Resus's mum and dad were with them. The trip through the Hex Hatch to G.H.O.U.L. headquarters had been made in silence, apart from the occasional sob from Bella Negative.

The trio had their hands tied and they stood, staring miserably at their parents as Acrid Belcher approached, clutching a roll of parchment. Cleo began to shake. Resus fought back tears as he caught sight of his mum's stricken face.

"Defendants," the slime beast gurgled. "You have been charged with opening a magical doorway out of a G.H.O.U.L. community, allowing thousands of normals to enter and disrupt the lives of its residents. Do you deny these charges?"

“You don’t understand,” protested Luke. “I just wanted a way to take my mum and dad home...”

“Then you admit to collecting the six founding fathers’ relics and using their power to open a doorway back to your old world?”

“Yes, but—”

“Enough!” barked Belcher. “You are guilty of the charges brought against you, and sentence will now be passed.”

Luke gulped and didn’t say any more.

“Luke Watson, Resus Negative, Cleo Farr – you will now be banished to the Underlands for the rest of your natural lives, however long that may be.”


Acrid Belcher grasped the lever beside him and pulled it back hard. The trapdoor swung open with a barely audible creak, plunging Luke, Resus and Cleo into the dark, swirling abyss beneath...

Chapter One


The Underlands



As Luke tumbled through the purple clouds he found himself in the middle of a violent storm. He could just make out the desolate features below: black soil, twisted trees and a raging river of churning, dark water.



Then he caught sight of Resus and Cleo, also mid-fall, being buffeted by the wind as the ground sped towards them. Luke felt consumed with guilt. This was all his fault. His friends hadn't been in any danger until he had involved them in his quest to find the founding fathers' relics. "I'M SORRY!" he bellowed.



Cleo managed to flash him a quick smile before a crackling bolt of purple lightning shot between them, sending her spiralling backwards. Resus grabbed the mummy's foot before she could disappear into the sheets of torrential rain, pulling her towards him so that Luke could catch her other hand.

"HOLD ON!" shouted the vampire, then he plunged his hand into his cape and pulled out a large golfing umbrella, forcing it open against the howling wind. Instantly, the trio's descent slowed as the umbrella acted like a parachute. They were still falling, but the ground wasn't rushing up to meet them quite so quickly. Maybe they could survive this fall after all...

"YOU'RE A GENIUS!" cried Luke.

"*FINALLY* YOU REALIZE!" Resus grinned.

"AFTER ALL—"

His words were cut off abruptly as another fork of fiery lightning arced towards them, slamming into the handle of the umbrella with the force of a charging bull. Both vampire and umbrella were flung away across the sky in a blaze of fizzing violet sparks.

“RESUS!” screamed Cleo.

Luke twisted round, trying to spot a flash of the blue lining of his friend’s cape among the pounding sheets of grey rain, but there was nothing. Resus was gone.

Then Luke plunged into the heaving waters of the river and pain exploded in his knee as it smashed against a rock.

The freezing water bit at Luke. He opened his eyes but could see nothing in the inky blackness. The river spun him around and around, and he could feel his lungs burning. He needed to work out which way was up and get to the surface so he could breathe again – but he had lost all sense of direction in the turbulent water.

The pain in his knee began to overwhelm him and he found himself thinking about his mum and dad. He’d started searching for Scream Street’s hidden relics as a way to take his parents

back to their old world. They hadn't asked to be moved – it had all been because he had started transforming into his werewolf. Now he would never see them again. A veil of unconsciousness began to wash over him...

Then, suddenly, a hand plunged into the water, grabbed the collar of his T-shirt and dragged him to the surface. Luke gulped down a lungful of freezing air.

"I'm not losing you, too!" gasped Cleo as she pumped her legs to try to keep the two of them afloat. Lashing rain hammered down all around them like needles. "Can you swim to the riverbank?" she shouted.

Luke shook his head. "I hit my leg," he replied weakly.

Gritting her teeth, Cleo wrapped her arm around Luke's chest and began to swim towards the bank. A deep red stain spread out behind them in the water as blood gushed from Luke's injured knee.

Finally, Cleo found she was able to stand. Her legs tired and shaking from the cold, she dragged Luke clear of the water, then slumped to the ground beside him. As the pair struggled to catch

their breath, the charred remnant of the umbrella handle was whipped out of the sky and embedded itself in the mud next to them.

“Resus!” croaked Luke. Then the world went black.

When Luke opened his eyes again, the rain had stopped – although dense, plum-coloured clouds still rolled across the sky and a strong breeze made him shiver in his wet clothes. Cleo was kneeling beside him, wrapping a length of her own bandages around his injured knee.

“How does it look?” he asked, trying unsuccessfully to ignore the pain.

Cleo tied the makeshift dressing in place. “Pretty bad,” she said. “It’s bleeding quite heavily. I think it’ll need stitches.”

“Not much chance of that here,” said Luke glumly.

“No,” Cleo agreed. “Think you can stand?”

“I’ll give it a go...”

Cleo grabbed Luke’s arm and helped him to his feet. He took a tentative step, but the pain exploded in his knee and he fell back to the ground.

“Get me that stick,” he said through gritted teeth, pointing to a blackened branch that had been washed up by the river.

Cleo retrieved the branch and handed it over. Luke plunged one end into the soft, wet mud and used it to drag himself upright. “There!” he smiled, wedging it under his arm. “I can use this as a crutch. Come on – we need to find Resus.”

But before he could take a step, an unexpected noise reached him – the sound of wet, ragged breathing. He froze.

“Behind you...” Cleo warned.

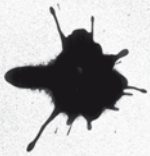
Luke turned to find a huge troll lumbering towards them, teeth bared. “Stay back!” he cried.

The troll grunted and took another step towards them.

“I’m warning you!” Luke declared, sounding braver than he felt. “I’m a werewolf, and I’m prepared to attack...”

Still the troll kept coming.

Luke tossed the stick aside, closed his eyes and tried to trigger his werewolf transformation. He felt the rage begin to build at the back of his mind and he held his muscles taut, ready to be reshaped.



The troll was almost upon them now.

“Any time you like...” hissed Cleo, struggling to keep the panic out of her voice.

Luke opened his eyes again. “I can’t transform,” he breathed. “I’m just too exhausted. Sorry...”

Before Cleo could reply, the troll grabbed both children and held them up to its face. “You two are comin’ wiv me!” it growled.

