

## CHAPTER FOUR

*...in which someone fluffy suddenly comes out of the dark and suggests an excellent plan*

There was silence in the room. The discussion obviously came to a deadlock. And then, as it often happens, the decision appeared by itself.

"I know!" Someone said in the darkness.

"Who's here?" The three friends exclaimed in one voice.

"Don't you worry, I'm a friend. And I know how to solve your problem." The contour of some long-tailed, large, and fluffy creature appeared from the shadows. When the mysterious stranger approached the three friends, they all saw that it was a cat. Alex didn't recognize his pet at once, because Bartholomeow changed so much! In this half of the world, he was walking on two paws like Luna, which made him look much larger and taller than his usual self.





"To everyone who doesn't know me, let me introduce myself: hereditary eater of sour cream and milk, chevalier of the Three Sausages Order, Bartholomeow George Innocentius VI. Magic cat in the sixth generation."

Alex completely lost the power of speech. He has been a student of the Magic Academy for two years already, but only now did he find out that Bartholomeow was some magic cat. He had always considered him small fluffy lazybones who was either eating something or sleeping somewhere.

"Bartholomeow ..." Alex muttered, confused.

"My dears, please call me Bartholomeow George Innocentius!" Bartholomeow reprimanded. He paused and added, "or Your Catjesty."

"Fancy that, so pompous!" Astro exclaimed—he never liked smarty-pants.

"Sure, not the best behavior for a well-behaved cat," Luna added.

"Look at these children!" The cat sighed. "No sign of respect for grown-ups. Well, anyway, it's not you I've come here for. I'm here to protect monsieur Alexander."

"Bartholo... George Innocentius, what protection are you talking about? And how did you come here?"

"I will be happy to tell you this story later, monsieur Alexander. As for how I have come to be here, the answer is simple—by magic! Though it's not a matter to discuss now, either. We have a more important task at hand: specifically, to help your friends catch that mouse. Ha-ha-ha! A great joke, right?"

Everyone was silent.

"Um... Wasn't that funny? Well, fine. Irony is something I'll teach you later. As for now, here is my plan: you two, hide behind the curtain at the door. Monsieur Alexander will stay here. This way we'll get a triangle—a solid geometrical figure." The cat held one paw behind his back and used the other to gesticulate. As a true commander, Bartholomeow pointed at something in the air with his paw—most likely, some point on an imaginary map—and explained, "You stand still while I attract the attention to myself. The object sees me, chases me to pet me, finds himself trapped inside the triangle. When he and I are in the center of the geometric figure, I turn around and say loudly: 'Meow!' Then you pronounce the relocation spell all together, and we find ourselves in the guestroom. Is that clear?"

"It is!" Astro said. "But why do you think the gremlin will not get scared of you and run away somewhere?"

"Elementary! Everybody loves cats! Everybody wants to pet cats! He will not be able to resist!"

"Not so much of a plan, honestly," Astro said, frowning.

\*\*\*

Alex still couldn't get over the surprise. On top of having to catch the gremlin, his beloved cat turned out to be some magic Bartholomeow George Innocentius the Sixth, to think of it! It was all too weird. Alex even thought he might be dreaming. To make sure he wasn't asleep, the boy pinched his arm. But no, it wasn't a dream. He did feel the pain.



Meanwhile, everybody was waiting for him to say something.

"Alex, can you hear us?" Luna asked.

"What?" Alex asked in his turn. "What, what now?"

"We are voting. Who is in favor of acting as per the plan of His Catjesty," Astro explained. At the end of the sentence, he lowered his voice meaningfully.

"Okay. Fine. So, who said what? Sorry, I got distracted."

"I'm against it," Astro said grumpily.

"You don't understand a thing, young man," the cat countered. "My plan is immaculate."

Luna still hadn't cast her voice. But she, too, looked away.

"Well, I don't know..."

Alex saw her problem: she had to take Bartholomeow's side as a cat, and Astro's side as a good friend. The final word rested with Alex. Actually, it seemed they would do as he said.

Alex trusted his cat. The plan might not be perfect, but Alex never doubted that Bartholomeow would attract the gremlin's attention.

"I think it's worth a try. This one," Alex pointed at the gremlin, "will definitely not be scared of a cat. And if we don't manage to entrap him, we'll think of something else."

"Fine, let's try it," Astro surrendered.

\*\*\*

Bartholomeow was moving towards the center of the room lightly, as if he wasn't touching the floor with his paws. Usually, steps echoed in the huge hall, but Bartholomeow's step was noiseless, like that of a large striped fluffy cloud floating over the floor. While everyone was watching him in silence, amazed by the trick, Bartholomeow reached the point of his destination. He sat right in front of the gremlin and started grooming himself. Bartholomeow was scratching himself and licking his fur in an eloquently demonstrative manner. He was making sure everyone around could hear him having his cat bath.



It didn't take long for the gremlin to notice Bartholomeow. Sure, within the walls of the Academy, anyone could disguise himself as a cat—even Professor Wizword. However, the gremlin didn't seem to be in a hurry to run away. He was curious how the cat had got into the library. He had never seen that cat before.

Meanwhile, the cat paid the surrounding world no attention and went on with his grooming ritual. The gremlin moved closer for a better view. Suddenly the cat seemed to bite his own tail too painfully and started flicking it. As soon as the tail started moving, the cat fixed his gaze on it. He tried to catch it with one paw, then with another. He jumped and landed on all four paws and started swirling in one place, trying to catch himself. The gremlin was hooked.

Eventually, he scratched the table with his long claw, making a nasty sound. Then the gremlin scratched again. The cat froze and started listening. Now it was hooked, in its turn, looking at the gremlin. Or, to be precise, at his finger. Still, the cat seemed reluctant to make a jump. On the contrary, he retreated a bit, sat down and kept on watching. The gremlin obviously wanted to play with the cat. But the latter didn't hurry to do the same. The gremlin jumped off the table and started moving his finger in circles on the floor. At first, the cat observed but didn't dare come closer. Then he stretched one paw towards the gremlin and tried to reach. But he didn't quite manage to.

Bartholomeow was planning to come closer, but a sudden noise distracted him. The gremlin didn't hear the noise, because cats have much better hearing. So, the cat moved towards the source of noise. The frustrated gremlin slowly followed. This way, they covered some space of the library: the cat was prowling toward the library's exit, and the gremlin was prowling after the cat. The gremlin didn't even suspect that Bartholomeow, with his ears pricked up, was not actually hunting someone out there, in the dark...

After they had covered half of their way and the gremlin had nearly reached out to the cat to pet him, the latter stopped, turned around and uttered a loud "Me-e-e-e-o-o-o-o-ow!"

At the same instant, voices from all around pronounced:

"Teleport us!"

Everything became cloudy. The frightened gremlin closed his eyes, covered his head with his small paws and trembled. There was a sound similar to a train coming to an abrupt halt. The floor under his feet shook.

"No, no, please don't!" The gremlin thought, trembling from fear and grasping his big-eared head with short, hooked paws.

