

CHAPTER FIVE

*...in which the protagonists don't
find answers to any questions*

Alex opened his eyes to find himself in an abundantly decorated room. A large chandelier with a diameter of five Labradors was shining brightly with a thousand lights. Paintings on the walls were moving as if they were alive, busts on the shelves were curiously watching the newcomers who appeared in the center of the room. Heavy curtains embroidered with scenes from the reverse world's history were drawn to protect visitors of the room from prying eyes.

Having realized that he was in a guestroom, Alex started looking for his friends. Luna and Astro were lying nearby and seemed unconscious. There was no sign of Bartholomeow or the gremlin. However, there was a lidded kitchen pot right between Alex and his friends, Luna and Astro. It looked similar to those Alex's mother used to bake potatoes with vegetables and mushrooms on weekends.





Alex hurried to Luna and Astro and checked their pulse. Both had had a heartbeat but seemed to be asleep.

“Luna, Astro, can you hear me?!”

Neither even moved.

“I haven’t caught the gremlin, and who knows what happened to my friends. What should I do now?!” Alex asked himself out loud.

“It’s alright, my friend.”

Alex looked around but didn’t see anyone.

“Who’s speaking? Who is here?”

He didn’t see anyone. The paintings soundlessly gleamed on the walls, the sculptures furtively smiled and watched Alex in silence. There was no one in the room except Astro and Luna, and the stupid empty pot. Alex even started thinking that he might have imagined the voice, but the curtain moved, and one of embroidered dragons flew out into the room, quickly getting bigger until it turned into... Professor Novus Wizword.

“Professor Wizword?!” Alex exclaimed.

The Professor smiled:

“Haven’t expected to see me, my friend?”

“Not at all, Sir! It’s just that my life is becoming increasingly strange: at first, my friends summon me to the Academy while we’re on break; then they tell me about the gremlin; then I find out that our pet Bartholomeow is some kind of an extraordinary magic cat. And now we’ve teleported here, my friends are unconscious, Bartholomeow and the gremlin are missing, and you appear so suddenly! So many events in one evening!”

“My friend,” Novus Wizword started, “teleportation is a huge stress for a wizard. Not everyone takes it well without practice. You are already accustomed to regular traveling from the human world to the Academy, but your friends are not. They have never used the teleportation spell until today.”

“So, it’s like going to the outer space for them?” Alex asked and explained immediately, “I watched a film about astronauts recently.”

“Yes, exactly. Any new beginning is difficult because you lack practice. One needs to work hard, and one day it will become easy. Your teleportation is just like that.”

“Well... I’m not sure I’ve actually worked so much,” Alex blushed from the Headmaster’s sudden praise. “Can we help them somehow?” He asked, turning to his friends.

“There is no need for this. They’ll come to their senses in a moment.”

“Good, the sooner the better. I have no idea what’s going on. I remember the gremlin and Bartholomeow reaching the center of the triangle. I remember us speaking the spell. I remember the gremlin getting scared, though he didn’t run away. And now we are here, but he is not.”



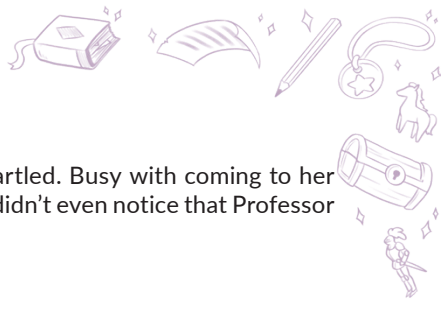
“How can we know?” Novus said and looked around. “This room hides many secrets. I asked you to bring our guest here for a reason.”

“What is so special about this room?” Alex asked with curiosity. “I’ve heard so much about the guestroom, but still don’t know what its secret is.”

“This room is so special,” Novus stretched his arms as if trying to embrace the entire room, “because it can be either tiny or huge, either cozy or bleak, either light or dark. In this room, everyone finds only things they bring with them. That’s why friends of the Novakid Academy are always satisfied with the time spent in this room, while the Academy’s enemies try to leave it as soon as possible.”

“Ouch!” Luna awoke from her coma.

“What happened here? How...” Luna seemed to have forgotten everything and then remembered all at once. “Alex! Astro! Astro!” Luna panicked when she saw her friend lying motionlessly next to her.



"He's alright," Professor Novus said soothingly.

"Professor Novus!" Luna exclaimed. She was startled. Busy with coming to her senses and remembering all the recent events, Luna didn't even notice that Professor Novus Wizword himself was in the room.

This was when Astro stirred, as well.

Luna and Alex rushed to him and asked in unison:

"Are you all right, Astro?"

"Ye-e-e-es..." Astro drawled and looked at his friends. "Where are His Catjesty and the gremlin?" Unlike Luna, he remembered everything correctly.



“They seem to be missing. When I came to my senses, there was nobody here but us,” Alex explained.

“What shall we do now?” Astro asked confusedly. “Apparently, we have failed to complete Professor Novus’s assignment.”

“My friends, you have done much more than that,” Professor Novus joined the conversation making Astro startle, just like Luna. He also didn’t expect seeing his Professor here. “You have combined your efforts and applied your knowledge of the magic language to save the Academy. It’s highly praiseworthy. As for the disappearance of the gremlin...” Professor picked up the pot from the floor, opened it, peeked inside, then paused to think, but eventually put it on the shelf next to the bust of some ancient thinker. “Well... I’ve lost my train of thought again. Where was I?”

“You were talking about the disappearance of the gremlin, Professor,” Luna helped.

“Ah, sure, well... As for the disappearance, I’m confident we’ll unravel this mystery very soon, though maybe not today. And now I suggest that we have tea together. It’s been a hard day, and all of us deserve a cup of delicious tea with fresh pastries and cookies.”

“Tea!” Luna exclaimed dreamily. “What can be better than tea with cookies?”

“Only tea with sweets!” Astro said.

Alex just smiled.

“Let’s go, my friends,” Professor Novus said.

And the four marched off to the door. They almost reached it when Astro smelled something suspiciously familiar. He remembered sensing the smell quite recently. He stopped and sniffed the air. Yes, it was definitely the same smell...

“Astro, are you all right, my friend?” Professor Novus asked. Luna and Alex followed his gaze.

Astro felt embarrassed. “Hmm... Must have imagined it,” he decided.

