

...in which another disappearance is revealed

At home, before falling asleep, Alex was tormented with a single question: whether he would find Bartholomeow in the kitchen or elsewhere in the apartment when the morning came. The cat had teleported from the library somewhere, either back home, or... Alex didn't even want to think about the second option. However, it was highly likely that his beloved cat went missing. This thought kept Alex awake and restless under the blanket until two in the morning. The rest of the night he was tormented by nightmares of Bartholomeow flying away to the outer space without anyone to rescue him.

That's why in the morning, when Alex's mother woke him up, he was very grumpy. And who would be happy to go to school at an early hour without having any proper sleep? But as soon as Alex remembered his worries of the previous day, instead of his usual morning rumble, he asked his mother,

"Mo-o-o-o-om, have you seen Bartholomeow?"



“No, not yet. He must be sleeping somewhere. Why?”

“Well, it’s nothing. He was in my room in the evening yesterday, and now he isn’t.”

“Oh, you know him. He’s here today and there tomorrow. Cats. They like walking wherever they want,” his mother said.

Alex wasn’t satisfied with the answer at all, so before going to the bathroom he examined his room, and on his way to the kitchen—the living room. There was no sign of Bartholomeow.

“Alex, hurry up. You are going to be late for school,” his mother reminded.

“Yeah, sure, mom, I’m coming,” Alex said and peeked into the closet. “Kitty-kitty, Bartholomeow, are you here?”

No cat in the closet.

“Well, we’re in trouble,” Alex thought, weariness and sleep forgotten. “We must have lost him.”

Eventually, Alex reached the kitchen and sat down to have breakfast. Bartholomeow went missing; Alex wanted to sleep instead of going to school; but what he had to do was make a plan. A million thoughts swarmed his mind while he was forcing himself to eat a sandwich.

“Can’t stand mornings. When I grow up, I will sleep till midday every day,” Alex thought, drinking his coffee.

“So you went to bed early yesterday and still didn’t have enough sleep?” Alex’s father asked as soon as he entered the kitchen.

“No, I’ve slept enough. It’s fine,” Alex responded drowsily.

“I’ll drive you to school, so that you don’t fall asleep while walking,” his father said and took a big gulp of coffee.

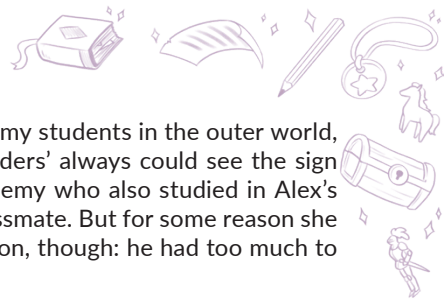
“I’ll manage,” Alex countered. He wanted to spend the time of his walk thinking through the plan for Bartholomeow’s rescue.

“Well, no. If I decided to drive you, I’ll do it,” his father said.

There was no use to argue, and Alex didn’t have enough willpower. So he just nodded in agreement.

Of course, in the car Alex managed to have a nap: when you don’t have enough sleep, any opportunity is precious.

The noise of school corridors made Alex perk up a bit. He spent the entire day thinking through the plan, during classes and breaks. He knew that some pupils of his school were also students of the Novakid Magic Academy, but they were hardly acquainted. Still, he always crossed his fingers in a sign of greeting when meeting



them. It was a special secret password of the Academy students in the outer world, its human half. The gesture was subtle, but all ‘insiders’ always could see the sign and gestured back. Of all the students of the Academy who also studied in Alex’s school, he knew only Lisa well, since she was his classmate. But for some reason she was absent that day. Alex didn’t pay it much attention, though: he had too much to think about.

Alex had absolutely no desire to listen to what was going around him. “I am well prepared for my classes, so it will be easy to answer,” Alex decided during the first lesson and went on recollecting the previous day. Everything was fine until the last class.

“So, if Bartholomeow disappeared in the moment of teleportation and landed neither in the guestroom nor at home, where was he? He might be anywhere. Though... What if he stayed in the library? We never came back there yesterday.” While they were drinking tea, no one even thought about the library, too focused on discussing the marvel that was the guestroom. Alex was so excited to know more than others this time, that he repeated Novus Wizword’s words to Luna and Astro, while Professor Wizword was nodding and drinking fragrant tea. “So I need to come back to the Academy and examine the library...”

“Alex? Are you with us?” Professor Georgieva was looking at him gravely. She must have asked him the question several times.

It was the last lesson, arithmetic, and Alex spent half of it lost in thoughts.

“Uh... Yes...”

Someone laughed in the back of the classroom.

“Is your homework ready?”

“Yes,” Alex said confidently, opened the notebook and realized it was the wrong one.

“Then solve the third problem,” the professor instructed.

“This school is a nuisance,” Alex thought, getting the right notebook from his bag. “They’ll never let me think through the plan.”

When Alex came home from school, instead of her usual “How’s life?”, his mother exclaimed:

“You know, Bartholomeow has really gone missing! You were looking for him in the morning and rightly so! He must have escaped when the courier came yesterday.”

“He must have...” Alex muttered. He knew so much more than his mother could even imagine.

