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The Monster School

Look Out, Fart-Pill Plot · Vol. 1

5+ / 128 pp. / hardcover with relief varnish / 4-colour print / € 14.00

ISBN 978-3-649-64054-7

English-language translation © Ruth Martin

Chapter 1:

The school for difficult children

Lukas Lornsen was a brave boy. At least, that's what his parents claimed. They were scientists and worked for a large environmental organisation. And so they were away a lot, and whenever they couldn't come home in the evening, they said things like, "You're such a brave little boy. We're very proud of you!"

Right at this moment, they probably would have been especially proud of him. Because Lukas was alone once again, but this time he wasn't at home – he was in a huge old, overgrown landscaped garden that didn't exactly give a friendly impression. That was partly due to the wisps of fog that were floating past him, and partly to the enormous bushes and trees, whose thick foliage seemed to swallow every last ray of sunlight. The sun was setting now, in any case.

Lukas wrestled his wheeie suitcase along the bumpy path that would take him to the place he was going to stay: Professor Gregorius Graghul's boarding school. As the fog lifted a little, Lukas could make out the stately home that had been converted into a school, shimmering between two pine trees – or at least part of it, because it seemed to be a gigantic building. Though it clearly wasn't in very good shape. Some of the windows had boards nailed across them, and others were completely covered in dirt. On the whole, it didn't really look like somewhere you wanted to be going, and when a delivery van for vending machines and breaktime snacks came towards him, Lukas felt like asking the driver to give him a lift out of there. But of course he couldn't; for one thing the professor was expecting him, and for another the sour-looking delivery driver rattled past Lukas at such a speed that he nearly ran over his suitcase.

Lukas sighed.

Professor Gregorius Graghul was Lukas's godfather. His parents had left that morning for a research trip that was going to take several months, and so they had phoned Uncle Gregorius, enrolled Lukas at the boarding school and taken him to the bus station.

It might have been good if they'd asked whether the bus went all the way to the school – because it didn't. Lukas had had to get off in a little town called Gammelbrügg and walk quite a long way, past a gloomy scrapyard, a bare beet field and across a dismal marsh. And so his mood had reached rock bottom. He was hungry, he was thirsty and he needed the loo.

But at least he was almost there. Though the sign next to the front door didn't exactly cheer him up. "School for difficult children" said the scratched brass plate.

"Well, that's just perfect," thought Lukas. He was finding it hard to keep being brave. He sighed again and pressed the bell underneath the brass sign. Nothing happened. Lukas pressed it again. Still nothing. He looked up at a narrow window, whose glass hadn't been cleaned for a long time. Were the "difficult" children watching him, thinking it was funny to keep him waiting at the door?

Lukas rang a third time and now the door was finally opened. In front of him stood a girl of about his age. She had very thin arms, red hair, quite a lot of freckles, and she was wearing a green jumper with an ornate coat of arms on the breast pocket.

"Good evening," the girl said. "I'm Nicoletta Amalia Dorothea von Blumenkohl, but everyone calls me Nicki. You must be Lukas, the professor's nephew."

"That's right," said Lukas. He took Nicki's outstretched hand and was pulled into the building.

Behind him, the door swung shut with a loud creak. After that it was very quiet, apart from a soft ticking sound. Lukas didn't think Nicki looked like a particularly difficult child, but then the entrance hall where he was now standing didn't look like a school, either. There was a large oriental rug, an old grandfather clock, an even older suit of armour, and on the walls hung strange wooden masks that seemed to be staring at him.

"So, where is everyone?" Lukas asked. "The other students, I mean."

"Oh, they're in their rooms," Nicki replied.

For some reason, Lukas had the impression that wasn't true. But because so far, he'd been well brought-up, he knew you mustn't just say what you suspected out loud. And so he asked, "And my uncle? Where's he?"

"Upstairs in his study," said Nicki. "He's prepared a little welcome for you. Come with me. You can leave your suitcase here. Whinny Horsebum will take care of it."

Nicki smiled at him and took his hand again. She led him to a wide wooden staircase that went up to the first floor.

"Did you just say horse bum?" said Lukas. "And something about whinnying?"

Nicki just rolled her eyes from left to right without saying anything. It looked funny, but all the same, Lukas had the feeling something wasn't right here.

Chapter 2:

A monstrous surprise

Uncle Gregorius's study looked similar to the entrance hall. There was a rug with an intricate pattern on it, some fierce-looking masks, a suit of armour in the corner next to a rubber plant, and another grandfather clock, too. There was also a huge desk covered in mountains of paper and piles of books.

There was no computer, but that wasn't really a surprise – Uncle Gregorius didn't like new-fangled machines, as Lukas's mother had told him.

Lukas peered past the mountains of paper, but his uncle was nowhere to be seen. He looked around for Nicki, but she had vanished, too. Then suddenly a deep voice rang out: "Bless my soul, here's another one!"

Lukas gave a start as an enormous man appeared behind the desk. He was as tall as a grizzly bear standing on its hind legs, and just as hairy. If not more so. A pair of glasses with round lenses was clamped to the middle of his bearded face. And behind the glasses, a pair of jolly eyes sparkled at Lukas.

"I love fruit gums," the man announced, in a voice like a hurricane. "Good thing I found one last packet in the bottom drawer. What colour?"

The man laughed so loud that the curtains at the windows quivered. Then he burst the packet of gummi bears and shook the contents into his hand.

"Er, as it comes," said Lukas, who had now realised two things: the grizzly bear was his uncle, the headteacher Professor Gregorius Graghul, and the question about colour related to the gummi bears.

"Good answer," Uncle Gregorius boomed, tipping the majority of the fruit gums into Lukas's outstretched hands. "I'm really delighted to welcome you to my school. The last time we saw each other, you were still running about in nappies."

After this greeting, Lukas's uncle took a deep breath, but didn't say anything else. For a while, the two of them ate red, green, yellow and black gummi bears in silence. They tasted a lot better than any kind Lukas had tried before. His uncle must have got them from a very special shop.

"Listen, my boy," the professor boomed at last, and Lukas knew that his uncle meant something like, "What I'm about to tell you is important."

"Listen," the headteacher repeated after another few minutes.

"Yes?" Lukas asked, hesitantly. Now there was something else he had realised: his uncle wanted to tell him something important, but he couldn't find the right words. He seemed downright nervous about it.

Suddenly, the door opened, and now Lukas was speechless, too – with shock. Otherwise he would probably have said something like: "Help! A monster!"

Chapter 3:

Uncle Gregorius's secret

In the doorway, there appeared a creature that before now, Lukas had only seen on film posters. Posters for films he wasn't allowed to watch because they were too scary. The creature was a lot taller than the professor, with countless tentacles, a wide mouth full of sharp teeth, and a horse's mane.

"Did you ring, professor?" it asked, in a posh, reedy voice.

Lukas noticed that one of the tentacles was clamped around his suitcase, while another held a feather duster and third a wooden spoon. Two more were balancing a basket of dirty laundry, and the remaining three were carrying a tray of glasses and a jug of lemonade.

"By golly, no, no I didn't, my dear Whinny – I hadn't got round to that yet," said Uncle Gregorius. "I was just about to explain to Lukas what makes our school special. But clearly he knows, now."

"Of course," Whinny replied. "It's spotless from top to bottom." The creature whisked the feather duster over the grandfather clock. At the same time, it poured lemonade into the two glasses and handed them to the professor and Lukas.

"That too, dear Whinny, of course, that too."

Uncle Gregorius threw Lukas a slightly troubled glance. "But that wasn't what I meant."

"Plus, dinner is served punctually here," Whinny explained. "It will be ready in fifteen minutes."

With these words, the creature disappeared down the hall, shutting the door behind it. The professor's office was completely silent. All you could hear was the ticking of the clock.

"What that a monster?" Lukas asked, breathlessly.

“He’s an Octopusterix,” Uncle Gregorius explained. He was looking thoroughly jolly again now, and not troubled at all. “An Octopusterix from the Octopolodode family, which...”

“Uncle Gregorius,” Lukas butted in, “That was a monster, wasn’t it?”

The professor popped the last gummi bear into his mouth and washed it down with a swig of lemonade. Then he gave himself a shake and said, “That’s right, Lukas. Well spotted. The yellow-tentacled Octopusterix is a monster.”

“Why does he have such a funny name?” Lukas asked, also taking a swig of lemonade, which – just like the gummi bears – tasted especially delicious.

“It’s Latin,” Uncle Gregorius explained. “Octo means eight, and...”

“No, no,” Lukas interrupted again. “I don’t mean that name – I mean the other one. Whinny Horsebum or something like that.”

“Oh, I see...” Uncle Gregorius beckoned Lukas closer and lowered his voice. “You mustn’t tease Whinny about his name, he doesn’t like it. Octopusterixes are aristocratic and very proud, even though most of them have extremely peculiar names. Whinny’s cousin, for instance, is called Hopple Galopple Popopple.”

Now Lukas lowered his voice as well. “Does this mean there are more monsters here?” he asked in a whisper.

“Indeed,” Uncle Gregorius confirmed. “That is the special thing about my school. I don’t teach difficult children here – that’s just a cover story for the education authority and the people who live in Gammelbrügg. A few of my monster students are in fact difficult, but I’ve already made great progress in that regard.”

For a moment, it was silent again in the study, and Lukas and his uncle sipped the delicious lemonade. Then Lukas said, “To be honest, I’ve always thought monsters existed, even though Mum and Dad said they didn’t. But why are they all here? You haven’t made a pact with them and sold your soul or something, have you?”

Uncle Gregorius laughed and ruffled Lukas’s hair with one of his giant hands.

“No, no, he said. “They’re all here of their own free will, because they’re fed up of living in gloomy caves and dark mine shafts or on lonely islands. They’d much rather live with us humans and do normal jobs. Whinny, for example, dreams of becoming a head butler at Buckingham Palace, in London.”

“Really?” Lukas marvelled, but then the next question occurred to him. “So where did you get the idea of teaching them?”

“We-ell, it just happened,” said the professor. “I’ve always had an interest in strange things. First I collected masks, but I soon began to find them too lifeless. Then I started studying giant insects, and finally I got into the science of monsters. And then – well, I realised it was much better to do something useful than to keep researching and studying, and then I started the secret monster school.”

“But isn’t it dangerous, teaching monsters?” Lukas asked.

“We-e-ell,” his uncle said. Then he took another sip of lemonade and fell silent for a while.

“No,” he said, finally.

Just then, a gong sounded in the distance.

“Ah, dinner is ready,” the professor announced. “To the dining room with you, quick smart – I’m sure you’re hungry, aren’t you?”

Lukas really did feel hungry. But he was feeling something else, too. He’d noticed that his uncle’s second “well” had been twice as long as the first. Did that mean something?