

The New-School-Year Moon

“It hung over the school last night like a big white period,” said Mr. Leeks, the school janitor. He stood by the front door polishing the brass name plate:

W. T. MELON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL.

Morgan clutched her new lunchbox. Danny shuffled in his new sneakers.

“What did?” asked Kate. “What hung over our school?”

Mr. Leeks pointed toward the sky. “The full moon of September,” he said. “The New-School-Year Moon, it’s called. The moon that shines over every school the night before it opens. And last night the New-School-Year Moon shone over this school brighter than ever.”

Richard scratched his new haircut. Hari hung his thumbs on the straps of his new backpack.

“I’m telling you, youngsters, moonbeams lit up the playground,” Mr. Leeks went on. “And while I was watching, one moonbeam, moving slower than glue, flowed up these steps and right through the front door of the school.”

Joey stuffed his hands in the pockets of his new jeans.

The janitor rubbed his raspy chin before continuing. “And would you believe, that shaft of light oozed down the hallway, leaving a skinny white line across my clean floor. It passed the office and gym. It came out and entered the music room. Came out and slithered around the library. Then, don’t you know, the silver beam slid under the door of *that* classroom, the one down there at the end of the hall.”

“That’s our classroom,” said Mimi. “We’re in third grade.”

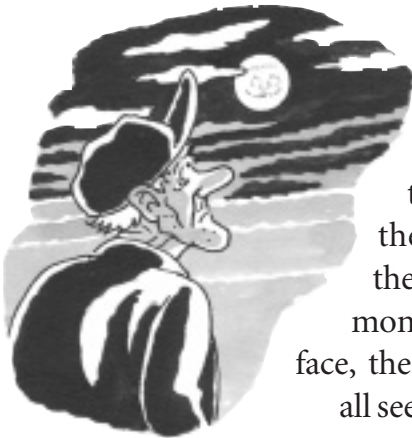
“We’ll be in the classroom at the end of the hall this year,” Andrew added.

The custodian looked at the third-graders hard. “Then, youngsters, there’s something else I better tell you. There’s something even more odd about the moon last night. You see, it changed.”

“Changed?” said George.

“Like how?” asked Kate.

“I’m telling you, one moment I saw the familiar Man-in-the-Moon face. And the next, well, the next moment I saw a different face, the face of a man you’ve all seen many times before.”



“Who?” asked Gabrielle. “When? Where?”

Mr. Leeks turned and pointed into the school. In a voice so low it was almost a whisper, he said, “I saw the same face that’s in the painting hanging in the hallway.” He pulled out his rag and resumed polishing the bronze sign.



“W. T. Melon?” the third-graders said in unison. The custodian nodded slowly. “You’re darn too-tin’,” he said. “The face on the New-School-Year Moon last night belonged to Walter Teach Melon himself. Gave me the willies, it did.”

RIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIING!

Mr. Leeks opened the front door. “Time to go to your classroom, youngsters,” he said. “Time to hit the books, study hard, get cracking on the lessons. And who knows, you might see changes too around the school real soon. It’s happened before. Youngsters go through this door in September and come out *different* in June. Just like the New-School-Year Moon last night. Now get. Hope you have yourselves a fine school year.”