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The New Teacher

Chapter 1

She's Completely Bonkers!

Normally teachers walk very fast. They're always in a hurry. Their heels go click! clack! click! clack! click! in the corridor. That morning, it was different. Our new teacher seemed to take her time. We heard two or three little tap-taps. Then, nothing. As if our new teacher were dawdling in the corridor instead of hurrying up.

The class was silent. You could have heard a pea roll across the floor. We were all dying with curiosity to see what our new teacher looked like. We'd been talking about nothing else all week. No one knew what

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this mysterious person from another town might look like. Our old teacher was having a baby. She'd left us to look after her big round tummy.

Suddenly the door opened and a very tall and very thin lady appeared. She was wearing a strange hat. It was like a witch's hat, except that the top was round instead of long and pointy. Her dress, however, was nothing like a witch's outfit. It was an old-fashioned evening gown with bows and lace, a bit faded but still pretty.

And that was not all. Our new teacher didn't wear tiny shoes with high heels like the others. She was wearing big leather ones with thick soles. These were shoes made for hiking in forests, climbing up mountains or walking to the ends of the earth... Not for going to school at any rate.

We all opened our eyes as wide as planets, and quite a few jaws dropped too. As always, it was Alex who spoke first.

“She's not a teacher: she's a scarecrow!”



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Some of us chuckled. Then, nothing. Our eyes were riveted on that weird old lady. She slowly walked to the window, the one from where you can see the little wood where Matthieu and Julie meet to kiss. Our new teacher looked out of the window. Then she smiled. She had a lovely smile.

Normally teachers present themselves. They say: “Good morning children, I am Mrs Lagalipette.” Or else: “Hello, my name is Nathalie.” Their voice is soft or shrill, their tone harsh or cheerful. You get an idea who you’re dealing with. But our new teacher didn’t say a word.

She went to her desk, and then I realized she didn’t even have a bag with books or anything. That funny old teacher had come to school empty-handed! If we forget our school bag, we have to go and see the head teacher, Mr Cracpote, and explain why. I always find that a little difficult, because if you forget something, you forget something. That’s all there is to it. You can’t really explain why.

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Then at last our beanpole of a teacher sat down. Everyone was holding their breath. We'd finally find out if she was obsessed with maths or with spelling tests. Or if she was the kind who makes a fuss about nothing.

There are teachers who go berserk when words go any which way on the page instead of neatly staying on the lines of our exercise books. Others panic at the slightest noise. A mouse's fart would wake them up at night.

What I wanted to find out most of all was if our new teacher liked – a little, a lot or an awful lot – to put people in detention. Because with the old one, let's just say I got my fair share.

Our new teacher was now well and truly installed behind her desk, but she didn't seem to be in a hurry. She quietly smoothed out the hem of her dress and then, without even looking at us, she delicately took off her huge hat, holding it by its broad brim, and placed it on the desk.

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Her grey hair was held together in a bun. She wore her hair like many old ladies do, except that she had a strange object on her head. It was the size of, say, a tangerine, a golf ball or a big marble. A few pupils got up to have a better look, and Benoît even climbed onto his desk.

It was a pebble!

Very carefully, our new teacher picked it up, as if it were a very rare and fragile



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object. Then – believe it or not – she gave it a huge smile, gently stroking it with the tip of her index finger, like a parent tickling a child!

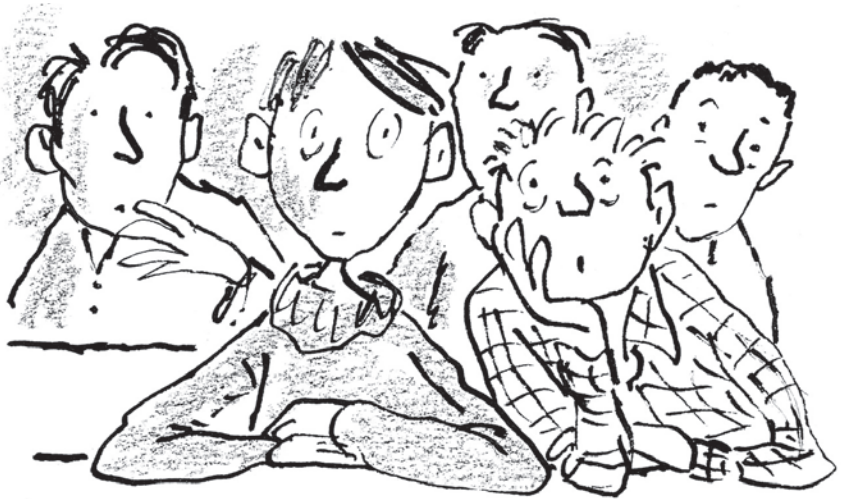
Then she finally spoke. But not to us. To her pebble!

“Hello my pumpkin. Aww, poor little peanut. I woke you up, didn’t I? I’m sorry. I was feeling a bit lonely... We’re in the new class now. Are they friendly? I don’t know yet. They’re all looking at me as if I’ve forgotten to put my dress on. As if I’m walking around in my pyjamas or in my knickers. I’m going to have to say hello to them. But first I wanted to have a chat with you. Don’t worry... I’m feeling better already.”

The teacher put her pebble on the corner of her desk and, for a few seconds, I had the impression it was alive, that it would start to yap, grunt or miaow. From the back of the class Alex shouted, with his usual tact:

“She’s bonkers!”

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I looked at my friend Léa. She tapped her forehead with her index finger a couple of times. I knew exactly what she meant. And I agreed. Our new teacher was stark raving mad. Off her rocker. Barmy. Mental.

The class began to be noisy. Everyone was wondering what to do in a situation like this. Warn Miss Lamerlotte in the classroom next door? Get Mr Cracpote? Or the police, a doctor, the fire brigade?

Suddenly our new teacher got up. She slowly walked around her desk, and when she got to the front she sat down... on top of her desk.

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Even sitting down our new teacher was tall. She cleared her throat and gave us a smile. Immediately the class fell silent. Everyone stopped whispering, as if spellbound.

“Hello...”

Her voice was reedy but cheerful, with a hint of shyness.

“Would you like to do some... err... maths?” she asked.

No one answered. We were all a bit shocked. Then she addressed Guillaume.

“You, would you like to start the day with some divisions or a bit of geometry?”

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Guillaume can't stand anything that even remotely resembles a number. Although our new teacher had made quite an impression on him, he still managed to reply:

“No... No, ma'am... Err... No, miss. Err... Not at all.”

The funniest thing was that our new teacher seemed to be over the moon with his reply.

“Would you like to do a spelling test then?”

This time Alex didn't hesitate. He replied:

“No. We all hate spelling tests here. They get on our nerves...”

The way he said it almost sounded like a threat. Alex enjoys being the class clown, and our new teacher gave him a delighted smile. Her eyes sparkled with joy.

“Really? That's great! Me too.”

That's literally what our new teacher said. And she sounded perfectly sincere. That's when it occurred to me that perhaps this weird old lady is from another planet. That normally she's small and green with three eyes in her

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head. Her pebble must be some sort of two-way radio allowing her to stay in touch with a marvellous spaceship twirling around in space, billions of light years away from our classroom.

The worst thing was that, basically, I probably wasn't far wrong.