

As the August morning sun chased the shadows from the roofs of houses and painted the sky gold, there was an **eerie** silence at Horribly Hard Middle School. In the dawning light, you could not see into the classrooms because of the dark curtains at every window. No early teacher rushed out of a car in the parking lot to set up a lab or to get an early start on preparation for the first day of school. Horribly Hard Middle School was like a spooky mansion: closed, dark, and abandoned.

In contrast, across town, as the sun rose a bit higher in the sky, Marvelously Magic Magnet Middle School (known popularly as MMMMS) burst with energy and noise. Coffee perked in the teachers' lounge. Cars roared into the parking lot, parked, and spilled out teachers of different sizes, shapes, and complexions. Boxes, books, bags, and piles of "stuff" filled their arms as they walked into the school early to be ready for the first day of classes for the year.

Finally, two cars drove up to the **dormant** and silent Horribly Hard Middle School; one a new mauve Lexus and the other an old blue Ford pick-up truck. A man stepped out of each. The man who exited the Lexus wore a suit and tie and carried a battered briefcase. His face mirrored anxiety. The owner of the pick-up climbed out of his truck and lifted a large black tool case out of the bed of his truck. He **sported** a denim shirt and overalls, a red handkerchief in his upper pocket, a wrench hanging out of his lower pocket, and an air of excitement and purpose.

The two men nodded solemnly to each other as they **trekked** in different directions, the suited one toward the school office and the man in overalls toward the sixth-grade wing and the custodian's office. No other human soul could be seen in the dim light of early morning.

Slowly, one after the other, classroom lights came on in HHMS. Soon the school was **ablaze** with light, and all classrooms were lit, but apart from Mr. **Adept** Fixit, the custodian, rushing from room to room to open the doors and turn on the lights, no sounds of people could be heard on the campus. If you listened carefully in the main office near the door to the principal's room, you could hear the faint click of computer keys as Mr. **Punctilious** Principal, a man who was always concerned with correct procedure, checked and rechecked the procedures which would be followed that first day as well as the list of students who would enter the **portals** of the HHMS in about an hour.

Half an hour later several more cars pulled up in front of the still silent Horribly Hard Middle School.

A lady, dressed in a long pink skirt and a **blousy** white shirt spattered with paint, hurried towards one of the still-dark classrooms with rolls of paper under her arm and a **myriad** of paint brushes in her mouth and hands. A man **ambled** toward a nearby dark classroom. He was burdened with various-sized instrument cases. His purple tie, decorated with yellow musical notes, was **askew**, and his glasses perched unevenly on his large nose.

Meanwhile, in a house not far from Horribly Hard Middle School, a **gaggle** of sixth-graders had gathered to gossip about the upcoming first day of school. They stood in the **foyer** of Isabelle's house, waiting for Olivia **Otiose** whose lazy nature always made her late to everything. Isabelle **Ingenuous**, always **animated**, twirled in nervousness and an excess of energy. Pauline **Puerile** whined in a babyish manner about Olivia's tardiness. Felicia **Fey**, always acting in a bizarre manner, muttered words of a spell, parts of which she could not remember, under her breath to encourage her friend Olivia **Otiose** to hurry. William **Waggish** made a tasteless but funny joke that **evoked titters** from the gathered friends. The last member of the troop, Sam **Sagacious**, simply stood wisely and silently with his backpack in his hand, waiting for the **clamor** to die down.

Isabelle **Ingenuous** danced out the open door, swiftly followed by her friends, with Pauline **Puerile** taking up the rear as she picked up her teddy bear that had fallen from her backpack and tucked it into the front pouch. Another girl joined them as they walked down the steps of Isabelle's house onto the sidewalk. Olivia **Otiose** had arrived, hair half combed and wrinkled blouse hanging out of her jeans. The group was ready but **reluctant** to face their first day of their new middle school: Horribly Hard Middle School.

A **myriad** of thoughts echoed and **rebounded** in each student's mind as the six sixth-graders **trudged** to their new school, a mile away, as if walking the plank of a pirate ship to their doom.

What would the new school be like? Would the new teachers be mean and hard? Were they going to have too much homework? Were the big eighth-graders going to **harass** them? Would they be able to remember the combinations of those shiny new locks in their backpacks? Were they dressed appropriately? Were the teachers nice? Would middle school be much different from elementary school? How would they find all their classes? Would their friends be in their classes? Would they get lost? Was the dean mean?

These questions and many more circled around in the six friends' heads as they silently **ambled**

towards the place where they would find out all the answers. All too soon, the brick walls of Horribly Hard Middle School **loomed** in front of them.

Introduction

Brown-faced with dark, expressive eyes, William **Waggish** recited a silly limerick to break the tension. (He always was composing poetry to try to **emulate** his hero, Langston Hughes.) The friends' steps matched the **cadence** of the hopeful poem.

There is a bizarre middle school
Where teachers are easy to fool.
They fall for our jokes
And don't call our folks
Even when we break every rule.