



Kevin Henkes

Kitten's First Full Moon
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The Story behind *Kitten's First Full Moon*

I've always been drawn to picture books for the youngest child. I love their simplicity and their poetic nature. When I became a parent, this attraction intensified, and so I tried my hand at creating board books. I also became interested in simple concept books and tried without success to write some. One failed attempt was all about circles—a ball, a bowl, a button, a plate, a marble. A line from that book read: "The cat thought the moon was a bowl of milk." The book idea didn't work, but I liked this line and it stuck with me. Over time—several years—the line expanded in my mind and finally became the text of *Kitten's First Full Moon*.

From the very beginning I pictured the book with black-and-white illustrations, bold sans serif type, a square trim size, and soft, creamy paper. I love to use color—even bright color—in most of my picture books, but for this book color seemed unnecessary. I thought that by keeping everything as simple and spare as possible, a better, tighter, more complete book would result. I liked the idea of having a white moon, a white cat, and a white bowl of milk surrounded by the black night.

When I draw, I usually use a crow-quill pen, which makes a rather thin line. This time I wanted a much thicker line, and I wanted the line to vary in thickness, so I drew with a brush—a technique I'd never used before in any of my books.

Although the finished art is very dissimilar to Clare Turlay Newberry's, I thought of *Kitten's First Full Moon* as a sort of tribute to her all the while I worked on the art. The black-and-white illustrations of cats in her books, including *Mittens*, *Pandora*, and *Marshmallow*, are masterful. I've always admired them. And, although she isn't given a name other than Kitten, I secretly think of my heroine as Clare.

I also admire the work of Jean Charlot. His illustrations for Margaret Wise Brown's *A Child's Good Night Book* and *Two Little Trains* and for Melcho F. Ferrer's *Tito's Hats* are some of my favorites in any children's books. His line work is simple, direct, and to my mind, perfect. I am struck by his ability to capture the essence of something beautifully, without one bit of excess. I looked to Jean Charlot for inspiration before I began to draw *Kitten*.

Illustrating *Kitten* was enjoyable, more enjoyable than I had any right to expect, perhaps because making the art for this book was different for me. But I am a creature of habit. I've begun work on a new picture book, and this time—like many other times—it's about a mouse, not a cat.

—Kevin Henkes