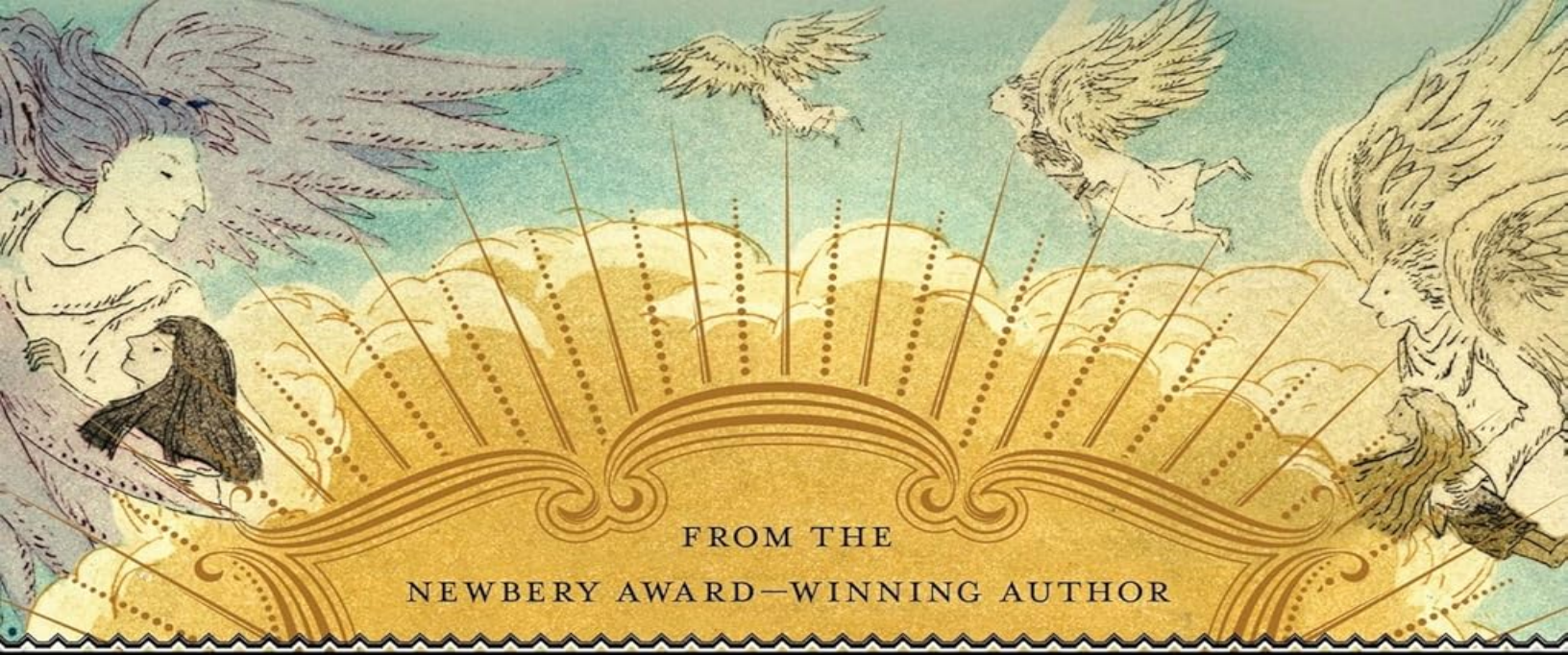
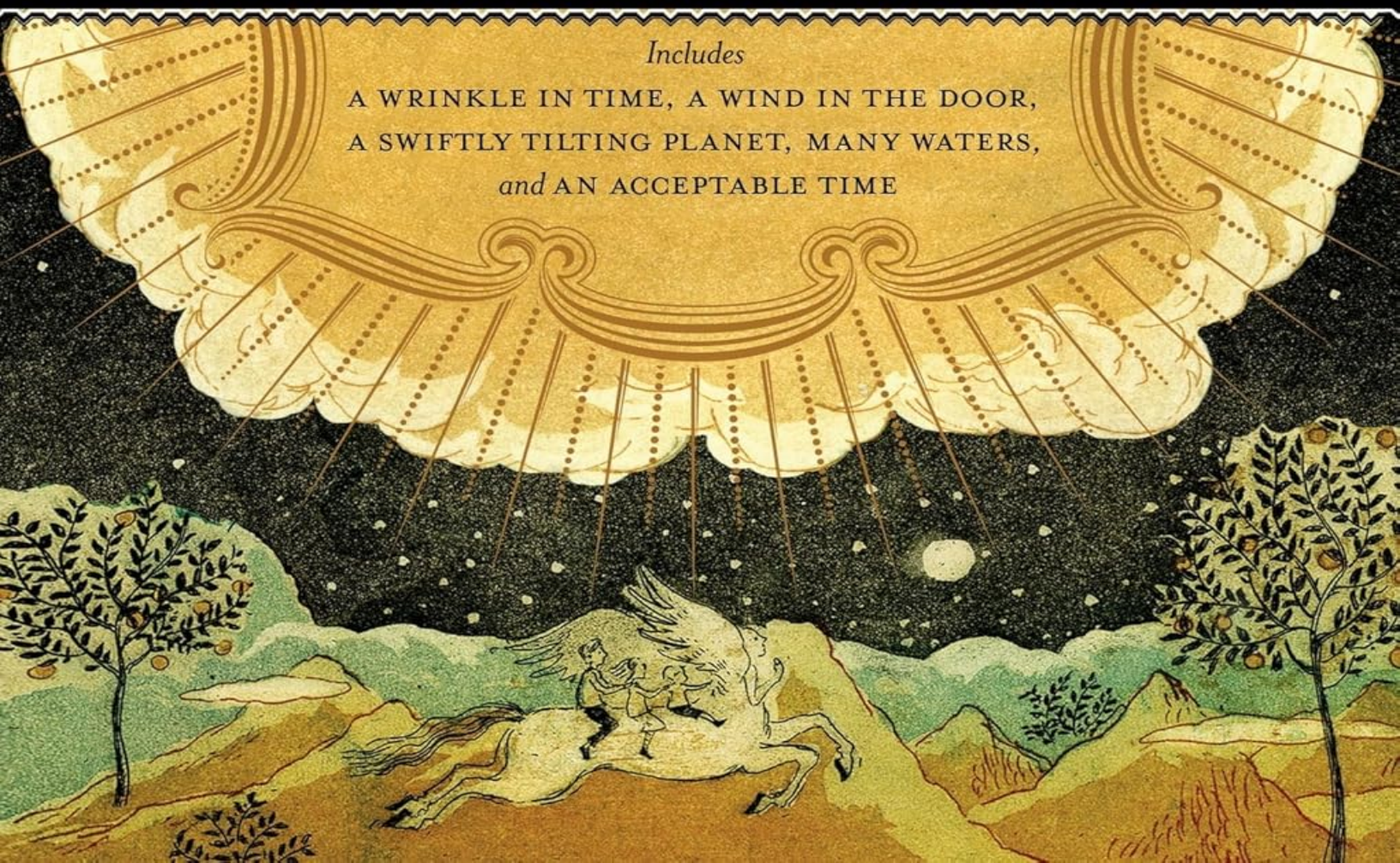


FROM THE
NEWBERY AWARD—WINNING AUTHOR

MADELEINE L'ENGLE

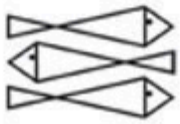
A WRINKLE IN TIME QUINTET

Includes
A WRINKLE IN TIME, A WIND IN THE DOOR,
A SWIFTLY TILTING PLANET, MANY WATERS,
and AN ACCEPTABLE TIME



A Wrinkle in Time
A Wind in the Door
A Swiftly Tilting Planet
Many Waters
An Acceptable Time

MADELEINE L'ENGLE



Contents

8 Journey into the Interior
9 Farandolae and Mitochondria
10 Yadah
11 Sporos
12 A Wind in the Door

A Swiftly Tilting Planet
1 In this fateful hour
2 All Heaven with its power
3 The sun with its brightness
4 The snow with its whiteness
5 The fire with all the strength it hath
6 The lightning with its rapid wrath
7 The winds with their swiftness
8 The sea with its deepness
9 The rocks with their steepness
10 The earth with its starkness
11 All these I place
12 Between myself and the powers of darkness

Many Waters
1. Virtual particles and virtual unicorns
2. Pelican in the wilderness
3. Japheth's sister Yalith
4. Grandfather Lamech and Grandfather Enoch
5. The nephilim
6. Adnarel and the quantum leap
7. The seraphim
8. Oholibamah, Japheth's wife
9. Mahlah's time, Lamech's time
10. The song of the stars

A Wrinkle in Time

MADELEINE L'ENGLE

A Wrinkle
in Time

OTHER NOVELS IN THE TIME QUINTET

An Acceptable Time

Many Waters

A Swiftly Tilting Planet

A Wind in the Door

Square Fish
An Imprint of Holtzbrinck Publishers

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
L'Engle, Madeleine.
A wrinkle in time.
p. cm.
Summary: Meg Murry and her friends become involved with unearthly strangers and a search for Meg's father, who has disappeared while engaged in secret work for the government.
ISBN-13: 978-0-312-36755-8
ISBN-10: 0-312-36755-4
[1. Science fiction.] I. Title.
PZ7.L5385 Wr 1962
62-7203

Originally published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux
Book design by Jennifer Browne
First Square Fish Mass Market Edition: May 2007
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

For Charles Wadsworth Camp

and

Wallace Collin Franklin

An Appreciation

BY ANNA QUINDLEN

The most memorable books from our childhoods are those that make us feel less alone, convince us that our own foibles and quirks are both as individual as a finger-print and as universal as an open hand. That's why I still have the copy of *A Wrinkle in Time* that was given to me when I was twelve years old. It long ago lost its dust jacket, the fabric binding is loose and water-stained, and the soft and loopy signature on its inside cover bears little resemblance to the way I sign my name today. The girl who first owned it has grown up and changed, but the book she loved, though battered, is still magical.

Its heroine is someone who feels very much alone indeed. Meg Murry has braces, glasses, and flyaway hair. She can't seem to get anything right in school, where everyone thinks she is strange and stupid. And she runs up against some real nastiness at a young age in the form of all those snide looks and comments about her father, a scientist who seems to have mysteriously vanished—or, town gossip has it, run off with another woman.

But Meg doesn't know real evil until she sets out on a journey to find her father and bring him home, along with her little brother, Charles Wallace, and a boy named Calvin. As they transcend time, space, and the limitations of their own minds, they get help from individuals of great goodness: Mrs Whatsit, Mrs Which, Mrs Who, the Happy Medium, and Aunt Beast. But the climax of their journey is a showdown with IT, the cold and calculating disembodied intelligence that has cast a black shadow over the universe in its quest to make everyone behave and believe the same.

If that sounds like science fiction, it's because that's one way to describe the story. Or perhaps you could call it the fiction of science. The action of the book, the search for Meg and Charles Wallace's missing father, relies on something called a tesseract, which is a way to travel through time and space using a fifth dimension. Although there's even a little illustration to make it easier to visualize, I still am not certain I do. Of course, Meg, who is so bright she can do square roots in her head, doesn't entirely understand it either. "For just a moment I got it!" she says. "I can't possibly explain it now, but for a second I saw it!"

The truth is, I'm not a fan of science fiction, and my math and physics gene has always been weak. But there's plenty in the book for those of us predisposed toward the humanities as well. Mrs Who, who remedies her language deficit by using the words of others to explain herself, quotes Dante, Euripides, and Cervantes, to name just a few. When Meg is trying to keep IT from invading her brain, she realizes the multiplication tables are too rote to do the trick and instead shouts out the opening of the Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal." IT retorts that that's the point: "Everybody exactly alike." Meg replies triumphantly, "No! *Like* and *equal* are not the same thing at all!"

Madeline L'Engle published *Wrinkle* in 1962, after it was rejected by dozens of publishers. And her description of the tyranny of conformity clearly reflects that time. The identical houses outside which identical children bounce balls and jump rope in mindless unison evoke

the fear so many Americans had of Communist regimes that enshrined the interests of state-mandated order over the rights of the individual. “Why do you think we have wars at home?” Charles Wallace asks his sister, channeling the mind of IT. “Why do you think people get confused and unhappy? Because they all live their own separate individual lives.” He tells Meg what she already knows from her own everyday battles: “Differences create problems.”

But while L’Engle’s story may have originally been inspired by the gray sameness of those Communist countries, it still feels completely contemporary today, except maybe for Meg’s desire for a typewriter to get around her dreadful penmanship. The Murry home is fractured by Mr. Murry’s mysterious absence and Meg’s “mother sleeping alone in the great double bed” Calvin may look like a golden boy, but his family barely notices he’s alive. Even more timeless is the sense Meg has of herself as someone who doesn’t fit in, who does “everything wrong.” Conformity knows no time or place; it is the struggle all of us face, to be ourselves despite the overwhelming pressure to be like everyone else. Perhaps one of the most compelling and moving descriptions of that internal battle comes near the end of the book, when Mrs Whatsit tells the children that life, with its rules, its obligations, and its freedoms, is like a sonnet: “You’re given the form, but you have to write the sonnet yourself. What you say is completely up to you.”

On its surface this is a book about three children who fight an evil force threatening their planet. But it is really about a more primal battle all human beings face, to respect, defend, and love themselves. When Meg pulls the ultimate weapon from her emotional arsenal to fight, for her little brother and for good, it is a great moment, not just for her, but for every reader who has ever felt overlooked, confused, alone. It has been more than four decades since I first read *A Wrinkle in Time*. If I could tesser, perhaps in some different time and place I would find a Meg Murry just my age, a grown woman with an astonishing brain, a good heart, and a unique perspective on how our differences are what makes life worth living. Oh, how I would like to meet her!

ONE

Mrs Whatsit

It was a dark and stormy night.

In her attic bedroom Margaret Murry, wrapped in an old patchwork quilt, sat on the foot of her bed and watched the trees tossing in the frenzied lashing of the wind. Behind the trees clouds scudded frantically across the sky. Every few moments the moon ripped through them, creating wraithlike shadows that raced along the ground.

The house shook.

Wrapped in her quilt, Meg shook.

She wasn't usually afraid of weather.—It's not just the weather, she thought.—It's the weather on top of everything else. On top of me. On top of Meg Murry doing everything wrong.

School. School was all wrong. She'd been dropped down to the lowest section in her grade. That morning one of her teachers had said crossly, "Really, Meg, I don't understand how a child with parents as brilliant as yours are supposed to be can be such a poor student. If you don't manage to do a little better you'll have to stay back next year."

During lunch she'd rough-housed a little to try to make herself feel better, and one of the girls said scornfully, "After all, Meg, we aren't grammar-school kids anymore. Why do you always act like such a baby?"

And on the way home from school, walking up the road with her arms full of books, one of the boys had said something about her "dumb baby brother." At this she'd thrown the books on the side of the road and tackled him with every ounce of strength she had, and arrived home with her blouse torn and a big bruise under one eye.

Sandy and Dennys, her ten-year-old twin brothers, who got home from school an hour earlier than she did, were disgusted. "Let *us* do the fighting when it's necessary," they told her.

—A delinquent, that's what I am, she thought grimly.—That's what they'll be saying next. Not Mother. But Them. Everybody Else. I wish Father—

But it was still not possible to think about her father without the danger of tears. Only her mother could talk about him in a natural way, saying, "When your father gets back—"

Gets back from where? And when? Surely her mother must know what people were saying, must be aware of the smugly vicious gossip. Surely it must hurt her as it did Meg. But if it did she gave no outward sign. Nothing ruffled the serenity of her expression.

—Why can't I hide it, too? Meg thought. Why do I always have to *show* everything?

The window rattled madly in the wind, and she pulled the quilt close about her. Curled up on one of her pillows a gray fluff of kitten yawned, showing its pink tongue, tucked its head under again, and went back to sleep.

Everybody was asleep. Everybody except Meg. Even Charles Wallace, the "dumb baby brother," who had an uncanny way of knowing when she was awake and unhappy, and who would come, so many nights, tiptoeing up the attic stairs to her—even Charles Wallace was asleep.

How could they sleep? All day on the radio there had been hurricane warnings. How could they leave her up in the attic in the rickety brass bed, knowing that the roof might be blown

right off the house, and she tossed out into the wild night sky to land who knows where?

Her shivering grew uncontrollable.

—You asked to have the attic bedroom, she told herself savagely.—Mother let you have it because you're the oldest. It's a privilege, not a punishment.

"Not during a hurricane, it isn't a privilege," she said aloud. She tossed the quilt down on the foot of the bed, and stood up. The kitten stretched luxuriously, and looked up at her with huge, innocent eyes.

"Go back to sleep," Meg said. "Just be glad you're a kitten and not a monster like me." She looked at herself in the wardrobe mirror and made a horrible face, baring a mouthful of teeth covered with braces. Automatically she pushed her glasses into position, ran her fingers through her mouse-brown hair, so that it stood wildly on end, and let out a sigh almost as noisy as the wind.

The wide wooden floorboards were cold against her feet. Wind blew in the crevices about the window frame, in spite of the protection the storm sash was supposed to offer. She could hear wind howling in the chimneys. From all the way downstairs she could hear Fortinbras, the big black dog, starting to bark. He must be frightened, too. What was he barking at? Fortinbras never barked without reason.

Suddenly she remembered that when she had gone to the post office to pick up the mail she'd heard about a tramp who was supposed to have stolen twelve sheets from Mrs. Buncombe, the constable's wife. They hadn't caught him, and maybe he was heading for the Murrys' house right now, isolated on a back road as it was; and this time maybe he'd be after more than sheets. Meg hadn't paid much attention to the talk about the tramp at the time, because the postmistress, with a sugary smile, had asked if she'd heard from her father lately.

She left her little room and made her way through the shadows of the main attic, bumping against the ping-pong table.—Now I'll have a bruise on my hip on top of everything else, she thought.

Next she walked into her old dolls' house, Charles Wallace's rocking horse, the twins' electric trains. "Why must everything happen to me?" She demanded of a large teddy bear.

At the foot of the attic stairs she stood still and listened. Not a sound from Charles Wallace's room on the right. On the left, in her parents' room, not a rustle from her mother sleeping alone in the great double bed. She tiptoed down the hall and into the twins' room, pushing again at her glasses as though they could help her to see better in the dark. Dennys was snoring. Sandy murmured something about baseball and subsided. The twins didn't have any problems. They weren't great students, but they weren't bad ones, either. They were perfectly content with a succession of B's and an occasional A or C. They were strong and fast runners and good at games, and when cracks were made about anybody in the Murry family, they weren't made about Sandy and Dennys.

She left the twins' room and went on downstairs, avoiding the creaking seventh step. Fortinbras had stopped barking. It wasn't the tramp this time, then. Fort would go on barking if anybody was around.

—But suppose the tramp *does* come? Suppose he has a knife? Nobody lives near enough to hear if we screamed and screamed and screamed. Nobody'd care, anyhow.

—I'll make myself some cocoa, she decided.—That'll cheer me up, and if the roof blows off at least I won't go off with it.

In the kitchen a light was already on, and Charles Wallace was sitting at the table drinking milk and eating bread and jam. He looked very small and vulnerable sitting there alone in the big old-fashioned kitchen, a blond little boy in faded blue Dr. Dentons, his feet swinging a good six inches above the floor.

"Hi," he said cheerfully. "I've been waiting for you."

From under the table where he was lying at Charles Wallace's feet, hoping for a crumb or two, Fortinbras raised his slender dark head in greeting to Meg, and his tail thumped against the floor. Fortinbras had arrived on their doorstep, a half-grown puppy, scrawny and abandoned, one winter night. He was, Meg's father had decided, part Llewellyn setter and part greyhound, and he had a slender, dark beauty that was all his own.

"Why didn't you come up to the attic?" Meg asked her brother, speaking as though he were at least her own age. "I've been scared stiff."

"Too windy up in that attic of yours," the little boy said. "I knew you'd be down. I put some milk on the stove for you. It ought to be hot by now."

How did Charles Wallace always know about her? How could he always tell? He never knew—or seemed to care—what Dennys or Sandy were thinking. It was his mother's mind, and Meg's, that he probed with frightening accuracy.

Was it because people were a little afraid of him that they whispered about the Murrys' youngest child, who was rumored to be not quite bright? "I've heard that clever people often have subnormal children," Meg had once overheard. "The two boys seem to be nice, regular children, but that unattractive girl and the baby boy certainly aren't all there."

It was true that Charles Wallace seldom spoke when anybody was around, so that many people thought he'd never learned to talk. And it was true that he hadn't talked at all until he was almost four. Meg would turn white with fury when people looked at him and clucked, shaking their heads sadly.

"Don't worry about Charles Wallace, Meg," her father had once told her. Meg remembered it very clearly because it was shortly before he went away. "There's nothing the matter with his mind. He just does things in his own way and in his own time."

"I don't want him to grow up to be dumb like me," Meg had said.

"Oh, my darling, you're not dumb," her father answered. "You're like Charles Wallace. Your development has to go at its own pace. It just doesn't happen to be the usual pace."

"How do you *know?*" Meg had demanded. "How do you *know* I'm not dumb? Isn't it just because you love me?"

"I love you, but that's not what tells me. Mother and I've given you a number of tests, you know."

Yes, that was true. Meg had realized that some of the "games" her parents played with her were tests of some kind, and that there had been more for her and Charles Wallace than for the twins. "IQ tests, you mean?"

"Yes, some of them."

"Is my IQ okay?"

"More than okay."

"What is it?"

"That I'm not going to tell you. But it assures me that both you and Charles Wallace will be able to do pretty much whatever you like when you grow up to yourselves. You just wait till Charles Wallace starts to talk. You'll see."

How right he had been about that, though he himself had left before Charles Wallace began to speak, suddenly, with none of the usual baby preliminaries, using entire sentences. How proud he would have been!

"You'd better check the milk," Charles Wallace said to Meg now, his diction clearer and cleaner than that of most five-year-olds. "You know you don't like it when it gets a skin on top."

"You put in more than twice enough milk." Meg peered into the saucepan.

Charles Wallace nodded serenely. “I thought Mother might like some.”

“I might like what?” a voice said, and there was their mother standing in the doorway.

“Cocoa,” Charles Wallace said. “Would you like a liverwurst-and-cream-cheese sandwich? I’ll be happy to make you one.”

“That would be lovely,” Mrs. Murry said, “but I can make it myself if you’re busy.”

“No trouble at all.” Charles Wallace slid down from his chair and trotted over to the refrigerator, his pajamaed feet padding softly as a kitten’s. “How about you, Meg?” he asked. “Sandwich?”

“Yes, please,” she said. “But not liverwurst. Do we have any tomatoes?”

Charles Wallace peered into the crisper. “One. All right if I use it on Meg, Mother?”

“To what better use could it be put?” Mrs. Murry smiled. “But not so loud, please, Charles. That is, unless you want the twins downstairs, too.”

“Let’s be exclusive,” Charles Wallace said. “That’s my new word for the day. Impressive, isn’t it?”

“Prodigious,” Mrs. Murry said. “Meg, come let me look at that bruise.”

Meg knelt at her mother’s feet. The warmth and light of the kitchen had relaxed her so that her attic fears were gone. The cocoa steamed fragrantly in the saucepan; geraniums bloomed on the window sills and there was a bouquet of tiny yellow chrysanthemums in the center of the table. The curtains, red, with a blue and green geometrical pattern, were drawn, and seemed to reflect their cheerfulness throughout the room. The furnace purred like a great, sleepy animal; the lights glowed with steady radiance; outside, alone in the dark, the wind still battered against the house, but the angry power that had frightened Meg while she was alone in the attic was subdued by the familiar comfort of the kitchen. Underneath Mrs. Murry’s chair Fortinbras let out a contented sigh.

Mrs. Murry gently touched Meg’s bruised cheek. Meg looked up at her mother, half in loving admiration, half in sullen resentment. It was not an advantage to have a mother who was a scientist and a beauty as well. Mrs. Murry’s flaming red hair, creamy skin, and violet eyes with long dark lashes, seemed even more spectacular in comparison with Meg’s outrageous plainness. Meg’s hair had been passable as long as she wore it tidily in braids. When she went into high school it was cut, and now she and her mother struggled with putting it up, but one side would come out curly and the other straight, so that she looked even plainer than before.

“You don’t know the meaning of moderation, do you, my darling?” Mrs. Murry asked. “A happy medium is something I wonder if you’ll ever learn. That’s a nasty bruise the Henderson boy gave you. By the way, shortly after you’d gone to bed his mother called up to complain about how badly you’d hurt him. I told her that since he’s a year older and at least twenty-five pounds heavier than you are, I thought I was the one who ought to be doing the complaining. But she seemed to think it was all your fault.”

“I suppose that depends on how you look at it,” Meg said. “Usually no matter what happens people think it’s my fault, even if I have nothing to do with it at all. But I’m sorry I tried to fight him. It’s just been an awful week. And I’m full of bad feeling.”

Mrs. Murry stroked Meg’s shaggy head. “Do you know why?”

“I *hate* being an oddball,” Meg said. “It’s hard on Sandy and Dennys, too. I don’t know if they’re really like everybody else, or if they’re just able to pretend they are. I try to pretend, but it isn’t any help.”

“You’re much too straightforward to be able to pretend to be what you aren’t,” Mrs. Murry said. “I’m sorry, Meglet. Maybe if Father were here he could help you, but I don’t think I can do anything till you’ve managed to plow through some more time. Then things will be easier for you. But that isn’t much help right now, is it?”

"Maybe if I weren't so repulsive-looking—maybe if I were pretty like you—"

"Mother's not a bit pretty; she's beautiful," Charles Wallace announced, slicing liverwurst. "Therefore I bet she was awful at your age."

"How right you are," Mrs. Murry said. "Just give yourself time, Meg."

"Lettuce on your sandwich, Mother?" Charles Wallace asked.

"No, thanks."

He cut the sandwich into sections, put it on a plate, and set it in front of his mother. "Yours'll be along in just a minute, Meg. I think I'll talk to Mrs Whatsit about you."

"Who's Mrs Whatsit?" Meg asked.

"I think I want to be exclusive about her for a while," Charles Wallace said. "Onion salt?"

"Yes, please."

"What's Mrs Whatsit stand for?" Mrs. Murry asked.

"That's her name," Charles Wallace answered. "You know the old shingled house back in the woods that the kids won't go near because they say it's haunted? That's where they live."

"They?"

"Mrs Whatsit and her two friends. I was out with Fortinbras a couple of days ago—you and the twins were at school, Meg. We like to walk in the woods, and suddenly he took off after a squirrel and I took off after him and we ended up by the haunted house, so I met them by accident, as you might say."

"But nobody lives there," Meg said.

"Mrs Whatsit and her friends do. They're very enjoyable."

"Why didn't you tell me about it before?" Mrs. Murry asked. "And you know you're not supposed to go off our property without permission, Charles."

"I know," Charles said. "That's one reason I didn't tell you. I just rushed off after Fortinbras without thinking. And then I decided, well, I'd better save them for an emergency, anyhow."

A fresh gust of wind took the house and shook it, and suddenly the rain began to lash against the windows.

"I don't think I like this wind," Meg said nervously.

"We'll lose some shingles off the roof, that's certain," Mrs. Murry said. "But this house has stood for almost two hundred years and I think it will last a little longer, Meg. There's been many a high wind up on this hill."

"But this is a hurricane!" Meg wailed. "The radio kept saying it was a hurricane!"

"It's October," Mrs. Murry told her. "There've been storms in October before."

As Charles Wallace gave Meg her sandwich Fortinbras came out from under the table. He gave a long, low growl, and they could see the dark fur slowly rising on his back. Meg felt her own skin prickle.

"What's wrong?" she asked anxiously.

Fortinbras stared at the door that opened into Mrs. Murry's laboratory which was in the old stone dairy right off the kitchen. Beyond the lab a pantry led outdoors, though Mrs. Murry had done her best to train the family to come into the house through the garage door or the front door and not through her lab. But it was the lab door and not the garage door toward which Fortinbras was growling.

"You didn't leave any nasty-smelling chemicals cooking over a Bunsen burner, did you, Mother?" Charles Wallace asked.

Mrs. Murray stood up. "No. But I think I'd better go see what's upsetting Fort, anyhow."

"It's the tramp, I'm sure it's the tramp," Meg said nervously.

"What tramp?" Charles Wallace asked.

"They were saying at the post office this afternoon that a tramp stole all Mrs. Buncombe's sheets."

"We'd better sit on the pillow cases, then," Mrs. Murry said lightly. "I don't think even a tramp would be out on a night like this, Meg."

"But that's probably why he *is* out," Meg wailed, "trying to find a place *not* to be out."

"In which case I'll offer him the barn till morning." Mrs. Murry went briskly to the door.

"I'll go with you." Meg's voice was shrill.

"No, Meg, you stay with Charles and eat your sandwich."

"Eat!" Meg exclaimed as Mrs. Murry went out through the lab. "How does she expect me to eat?"

"Mother can take care of herself," Charles said. "Physically, that is." But he sat in his father's chair at the table and his legs kicked at the rungs; and Charles Wallace, unlike most small children, had the ability to sit still.

After a few moments that seemed like forever to Meg, Mrs. Murry came back in, holding the door open for—was it the tramp? It seemed small for Meg's idea of a tramp. The age or sex was impossible to tell, for it was completely bundled up in clothes. Several scarves of assorted colors were tied about the head, and a man's felt hat perched atop. A shocking pink stole was knotted about a rough overcoat, and black rubber boots covered the feet.

"Mrs Whatsit," Charles said suspiciously, "what are you doing here? And at this time of night, too?"

"Now don't you be worried, my honey." A voice emerged from among turned-up coat collar, stole, scarves, and hat, a voice like an unoiled gate, but somehow not unpleasant.

"Mrs—uh—Whatsit—says she lost her way," Mrs. Murry said. "Would you care for some hot chocolate, Mrs Whatsit?"

"Charmed, I'm sure," Mrs Whatsit answered, taking off the hat and the stole. "It isn't so much that I lost my way as that I got blown off course. And when I realized that I was at little Charles Wallace's house I thought I'd just come in and rest a bit before proceeding on my way."

"How did you know this was Charles Wallace's house?" Meg asked.

"By the smell." Mrs Whatsit untied a blue and green paisley scarf, a red and yellow flowered print, a gold Liberty print, a red and black bandanna. Under all this a sparse quantity of grayish hair was tied in a small but tidy knot on top of her head. Her eyes were bright, her nose a round, soft blob, her mouth puckered like an autumn apple. "My, but it's lovely and warm in here," she said.

"Do sit down." Mrs. Murry indicated a chair. "Would you like a sandwich, Mrs Whatsit? I've had liverwurst and cream cheese; Charles has had bread and jam; and Meg, lettuce and tomato."

"Now, let me see," Mrs Whatsit pondered. "I'm passionately fond of Russian caviar."

"You peeked!" Charles cried indignantly. "We're saving that for Mother's birthday and you can't have any!"

Mrs Whatsit gave a deep and pathetic sigh.

"No," Charles said. "Now, you mustn't give in to her, Mother, or I shall be very angry. How about tuna-fish salad?"

"All right," Mrs Whatsit said meekly.

"I'll fix it," Meg offered, going to the pantry for a can of tuna fish.

—For crying out loud, she thought,—this old woman comes barging in on us in the middle of the night and Mother takes it as though there weren't anything peculiar about it at all. I'll bet

she *is* the tramp. I'll bet she *did* steal those sheets. And she's certainly no one Charles Wallace ought to be friends with, especially when he won't even talk to ordinary people.

"I've only been in the neighborhood a short time," Mrs Whatsit was saying as Meg switched off the pantry light and came back into the kitchen with the tuna fish, "and I didn't think I was going to like the neighbors at all until dear little Charles came over with his dog."

"Mrs Whatsit," Charles Wallace demanded severely, "why did you take Mrs. Buncombe's sheets?"

"Well, I *needed* them, Charles dear."

"You must return them at once."

"But Charles, dear, I *can't*. I've *used* them."

"It was very wrong of you," Charles Wallace scolded. "If you needed sheets that badly you should have asked me."

Mrs Whatsit shook her head and clucked. "You can't spare any sheets. Mrs. Buncombe can."

Meg cut up some celery and mixed it in with the tuna. After a moment's hesitation she opened the refrigerator door and brought out a jar of little sweet pickles.—Though why I'm doing it for her I don't know, she thought, as she cut them up.—I don't trust her one bit.

"Tell your sister I'm all right," Mrs Whatsit said to Charles. "Tell her my intentions are good."

"The road to hell is paved with good intentions," Charles intoned.

"My, but isn't he cunning." Mrs Whatsit beamed at him fondly. "It's lucky he has someone to understand him."

"But I'm afraid he doesn't," Mrs. Murry said. "None of us is quite up to Charles."

"But at least you aren't trying to squash him down." Mrs Whatsit nodded her head vigorously. "You're letting him be himself."

"Here's your sandwich," Meg said, bringing it to Mrs Whatsit.

"Do you mind if I take off my boots before I eat?" Mrs Whatsit asked, picking up the sandwich nevertheless. "Listen." She moved her feet up and down in her boots, and they could hear water squelching. "My toes are ever so damp. The trouble is that these boots are a mite too tight for me, and I never can take them off by myself."

"I'll help you," Charles offered.

"Not you. You're not strong enough."

"I'll help." Mrs. Murry squatted at Mrs Whatsit's feet, yanking on one slick boot. When the boot came off it came suddenly. Mrs. Murry sat down with a thump. Mrs Whatsit went tumbling backward with the chair onto the floor, sandwich held high in one old claw. Water poured out of the boot and ran over the floor and the big braided rug.

"Oh, dearie me," Mrs Whatsit said, lying on her back in the overturned chair, her feet in the air, one in a red and white striped sock, the other still booted.

Mrs. Murry got to her feet. "Are you all right, Mrs Whatsit?"

"If you have some liniment I'll put it on my dignity," Mrs Whatsit said, still supine. "I think it's sprained. A little oil of cloves mixed well with garlic is rather good." And she took a large bite of sandwich.

"Do please get up," Charles said. "I don't like to see you lying there that way. You're carrying things too far."

"Have you ever tried to get to your feet with a sprained dignity?" But Mrs Whatsit scrambled up, righted the chair, and then sat back down on the floor, the booted foot stuck out in front of her, and took another bite. She moved with great agility for such an old woman. At least Meg was reasonably sure that she was an old woman, and a very old woman at that.

Mrs Whatsit, her mouth full, ordered Mrs. Murry, "Now pull while I'm already down."

Quite calmly, as though this old woman and her boots were nothing out of the ordinary, Mrs. Murry pulled until the second boot relinquished the foot. This foot was covered with a blue and gray Argyle sock, and Mrs Whatsit sat there, wriggling her toes, contentedly finishing her sandwich before scrambling to her feet. "Ah," she said, "that's ever so much better," and took both boots and shook them out over the sink. "My stomach is full and I'm warm inside and out and it's time I went home."

"Don't you think you'd better stay till morning?" Mrs. Murry asked.

"Oh, thank you, dearie, but there's *so* much to do I just can't waste time sitting around frivoling."

"It's much too wild a night to travel in."

"Wild nights are my glory," Mrs Whatsit said. "I just got caught in a down draft and blown off course."

"Well, at least till your socks are dry—"

"Wet socks don't bother me. I just didn't like the water squishing around in my boots. Now don't worry about me, lamb." (Lamb was not a word one would ordinarily think of calling Mrs. Murry.) "I shall just sit down for a moment and pop on my boots and then I'll be on my way. Speaking of ways, pet, by the way, there *is* such a thing as a tesseract."

Mrs. Murry went very white and with one hand reached backward and clutched at a chair for support. Her voice trembled. "What did you say?"

Mrs Whatsit tugged at her second boot. "I said," she grunted, shoving her foot down in, "that there is"—shove—"such a thing"—shove—"as a tesseract." Her foot went down into the boot, and grabbing shawls, scarves, and hat, she hustled out the door. Mrs. Murry stayed very still, making no move to help the old woman. As the door opened, Fortinbras streaked in, panting, wet and shiny as a seal. He looked at Mrs. Murry and whined.

The door slammed.

"Mother, what's the matter!" Meg cried. "What did she say? What is it?"

"The tesseract—" Mrs. Murry whispered. "What did she mean? How could she have known?"