

Penguin



Readers

MADELEINE L'ENGLE



A WRINKLE
IN TIME

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CHAPTER ONE

Mrs. Whatsit

It was a dark night, and there was a terrible storm. In her room at the top of the house, Meg Murry sat in bed and watched the trees in the wind. The clouds were moving quickly across the moon.

The house **shook**. Meg was shaking, too. She was not usually afraid in storms, but everything felt difficult now. She thought about school that morning.

“Meg,” said one of her teachers. “Your parents are intelligent, and you’re not stupid, but your work isn’t good. If it isn’t better soon, you’ll **stay** in this class next year.”

Later, Meg was walking home from school, and a boy said something about her “stupid baby brother.” She attacked the boy and came home with a black eye.

The **twins**, Sandy and Dennys, her ten-year-old brothers, were not happy. “You mustn’t fight,” they told her. “We’ll fight if it’s important.”

“They all think that I’m bad,” thought Meg, listening to the wind. “Well, not Mother and

Father. But Father isn't here —”

Mother talked about Father sometimes. “Your father will come back soon . . .” she often said.

“But where is he?” thought Meg.

Meg sometimes heard other people talking about him. “Mr. Murry’s never coming back,” they said. “He’s left his family!”

The wind shook the windows again. Meg heard Fortinbras, their dog. He was downstairs in the kitchen, and he was **barking**. Was he frightened of the storm, too? “I’ll go make some hot chocolate,” she thought.

She walked past Charles Wallace’s room. Her baby six-year-old brother was quiet. Then, she passed her parents’ room. Her mother was sleeping there **alone**. Meg looked into the twins’ room. Sandy and Dennys worked hard enough at school, and they were good at sports. “They have no problems,” Meg thought.

The light was already on in the kitchen. Charles Wallace was sitting at the table in his **pajamas**, eating bread and butter.

“Hi,” he said. “I was waiting for you. There’s some hot milk ready.”

How did Charles Wallace always know about



her? He did not understand the twins like this, but he understood Meg and her mother very well. Charles Wallace did not often speak to people outside of the family, so they thought that he was stupid and could not talk. But he was very smart and different from other children.

“I don’t want him to be stupid, like me,” Meg remembered saying to her father one day.

“You’re not stupid,” her father said. “You and Charles Wallace are different. Wait and see!”

Meg looked at the hot milk. “There’s too much,” she said.

Charles Wallace shook his head. “Mother will want some.”

“What will I want?” a voice asked, and there was Mother by the door.

“Hot chocolate,” said Charles Wallace. “And would you like a cheese sandwich?”

“Yes, please,” said Mrs. Murry.

Charles Wallace jumped off of his chair and went to the refrigerator.

Mother sat down next to Meg and put her hand on Meg’s face. “Does your eye hurt?” she asked.

“I’m sorry about the fight, Mother,” said Meg. “But I get angry. I want to be like other people, but I can’t do it.”

“Things will get easier for you one day,” said her mother.

“And I’m ugly,” cried Meg. “Why aren’t I pretty like you?”

“Mother hasn’t always been beautiful,” said Charles Wallace. “One day, you’ll be beautiful, too. Do you want tomato in your sandwich, Mother?”

“No, thanks.”

“Meg, I’ll make you a sandwich, too,” said Charles Wallace. “And I’ll talk to Mrs. Whatsit about you.”

“Who’s Mrs. Whatsit?” asked Meg.

“You know the old house in the forest?” said

Charles Wallace. “Mrs. Whatsit lives there with two friends.”

“How did you meet her?” asked Mrs. Murry.

“I was walking in the forest with Fortinbras,” said Charles Wallace.

Fortinbras suddenly started barking again, and ran to the back door.

Mrs. Murry stood up. “What’s the matter?” she asked, and she followed Fortinbras through the house to the back door. Meg and Charles Wallace waited.

After a few minutes, Mrs. Murry came back with somebody very strange. The person was wearing a big old coat with a pink scarf round it. There were more scarves of different colors round their head, and a hat on the top.



“Mrs. Whatsit!” said Charles Wallace. “Why are you here in the middle of the night?”

“Don’t worry, dear,” said a voice from inside the coat and scarves. “I was going home, and I smelled your house. Can I rest for a minute?”

Under Mrs. Whatsit’s hat and scarves, Meg saw gray hair, bright eyes, a small round nose, and **wrinkles** around her mouth.

“Please sit down,” said Mrs. Murry.

“Thank you,” said Mrs. Whatsit, sitting down.

“Your sister doesn’t **trust** me. But I’m a good person, you know that!” Mrs. Whatsit told Charles Wallace. “Now, I can’t stay long. I must go soon.”

“But it’s still raining,” said Mrs. Murry. “Wait a little longer.”

“No, dear,” said Mrs. Whatsit. “There’s too much to do. But I want to tell you this, dear. There really *is* something called the tesseract.”

Mrs. Murry went very white. “What did you say?” she asked.

“There really is something called the tesseract,” said Mrs. Whatsit.

“The tesseract,” said Mrs. Murry, quietly. “How does she know?”