

## IT

Meg rushed at the man imprisoned in the column, but as she reached what seemed to be the open door she was hurled back as though she had crashed into a brick wall.

Calvin caught her. "It's just transparent like glass this time," he told her. "We can't go through it."

Meg was so sick and dizzy from the impact that she could not answer. For a moment she was afraid that she would throw up or faint. Charles Wallace laughed again, the laugh that was not his own, and it was this that saved her, for once more anger overcame her pain and fear. Charles Wallace, her own real, dear Charles Wallace, never laughed at her when she hurt herself. Instead, his arms would go quickly around her neck and he would press his soft cheek against hers in loving comfort. But the demon Charles Wallace snickered. She turned away from him and looked again at the man in the column.

"Oh, Father—" she whispered longingly, but the man in the column did not move to look at her. The horn-rimmed glasses, which always seemed so much a part of him, were gone, and the expression of his eyes was turned inward, as though he were deep in thought. He had grown a beard, and the silky brown was shot with gray. His hair, too, had not been cut. It wasn't just the overlong hair of the man in the snapshot at Cape Canaveral; it was pushed back from his high forehead and fell softly almost to his shoulders, so that he looked like someone in another century, or a shipwrecked sailor. But there was no question, despite the change in him, that he was her father, her own beloved father.

"My, he looks a mess, doesn't he?" Charles Wallace said, and sniggered.

Meg swung on him with sick rage. "Charles, that's Father! Father!"

"So what?"

Meg turned away from him and held out her arms to the man in the column.

"He doesn't see us, Meg," Calvin said gently.

"Why? Why?"

"I think it's sort of like those little peepholes they have in apartments, in the front doors," Calvin explained. "You know. From inside you can look through

and see everything. And from outside you can't see anything at all. We can see him, but he can't see us."

"Charles!" Meg pleaded. "Let me in to Father!"

"Why?" Charles asked placidly.

Meg remembered that when they were in the room with the man with red eyes she had knocked Charles Wallace back into himself when she tackled him and his head cracked the floor; so she hurled herself at him. But before she could reach him his fist shot out and punched her hard in the stomach. She gasped for breath. Sickly, she turned away from her brother, back to the transparent wall. There was the cell, there was the column with her father inside. Although she could see him, although she was almost close enough to touch him, he seemed farther away than he had been when she had pointed him out to Calvin in the picture on the piano. He stood there quietly as though frozen in a column of ice, an expression of suffering and endurance on his face that pierced into her heart like an arrow.

"You say you want to help Father?" Charles Wallace's voice came from behind her, with no emotion whatsoever.

"Yes. Don't you?" Meg demanded, swinging around and glaring at him.

"But of course. That is why we are here."

"Then what do we do?" Meg tried to keep the frantic-

ness out of her voice, trying to sound as drained of feeling as Charles, but nevertheless ending on a squeak.

"You must do as I have done, and go in to IT," Charles said.

"No."

"I can see you don't really want to save Father."

"How will my being a zombie save Father?"

"You will just have to take my word for it, Margaret," came the cold, flat voice from Charles Wallace. "IT wants you and IT will get you. Don't forget that I, too, am part of IT, now. You know I wouldn't have done IT if IT weren't the right thing to do."

"Calvin," Meg asked in agony, "will it really save Father?"

But Calvin was paying no attention to her. He seemed to be concentrating with all his power on Charles Wallace. He stared into the pale blue that was all that was left of Charles Wallace's eyes. "*And, for thou wast a spirit too delicate/To act her earthy and abhorr'd commands . . . /she did confine thee . . . into a cloven pine—*" he whispered, and Meg recognized Mrs Who's words to him.

For a moment Charles Wallace seemed to listen. Then he shrugged and turned away. Calvin followed him, trying to keep his eyes focused on Charles's. "If you want a witch, Charles," he said, "IT's the witch. Not our ladies. Good thing I had *The Tempest* at school this year, isn't it,



Charles? It was the witch who put Ariel in the cloven pine, wasn't it?"

Charles Wallace's voice seemed to come from a great distance. "Stop staring at me."

Breathing quickly with excitement, Calvin continued to pin Charles Wallace with his stare. "You're like Ariel in the cloven pine, Charles. And I can let you out. Look at me, Charles. Come back to us."

Again the shudder went through Charles Wallace.

Calvin's intense voice hit at him. "Come back, Charles. Come back to us."

Again Charles shuddered. And then it was as though an invisible hand had smacked against his chest and knocked him to the ground, and the stare with which Calvin had held him was broken. Charles sat there on the floor of the corridor whimpering, not a small boy's sound, but a fearful, animal noise.

"Calvin." Meg turned on him, clasping her hands intently. "Try to get to Father."

Calvin shook his head. "Charles almost came out. I almost did it. He almost came back to us."

"Try Father," Meg said again.

"How?"

"Your cloven pine thing. Isn't Father imprisoned in a cloven pine even more than Charles? Look at him, in that column there. Get him out, Calvin."

Calvin spoke in an exhausted way. "Meg. I don't know what to do. I don't know how to get in. Meg, they're asking too much of us."

"Mrs Who's spectacles!" Meg said suddenly. Mrs Who had told her to use them only as a last resort, and surely that was now. She reached into her pocket and the spectacles were there, cool and light and comforting. With trembling fingers she pulled them out.

"Give me those spectacles!" Charles Wallace's voice came in a harsh command, and he scrambled up off the floor and ran at her.

She barely had time to snatch off her own glasses and put on Mrs Who's, and, as it was, one earpiece dropped down her cheek and they barely stayed on her nose. As Charles Wallace lunged at her she flung herself against the transparent door and she was through it. She was in the cell with the imprisoning column that held her father. With trembling fingers she straightened Mrs Who's glasses and put her own in her pocket.

"Give them to me," came Charles Wallace's menacing voice, and he was in the cell with her, with Calvin on the outside pounding frantically to get in.

Meg kicked at Charles Wallace and ran at the column. She felt as though she were going through something dark and cold. But she was through. "Father!" she cried. And she was in his arms.

This was the moment for which she had been wait-

ing, not only since Mrs Which whisked them off on their journeys, but during the long months and years before, when the letters had stopped coming, when people made remarks about Charles Wallace, when Mrs. Murry showed a rare flash of loneliness or grief. This was the moment that meant that now and forever everything would be all right.

As she pressed against her father all was forgotten except joy. There was only the peace and comfort of leaning against him, the wonder of the protecting circle of his arms, the feeling of complete reassurance and safety that his presence always gave her.

Her voice broke on a happy sob. "Oh, Father! Oh, Father!"

"Meg!" he cried in glad surprise. "Meg, what are you doing here? Where's your mother? Where are the boys?"

She looked out of the column, and there was Charles Wallace in the cell, an alien expression distorting his face. She turned back to her father. There was no more time for greeting, for joy, for explanations. "We have to go to Charles Wallace," she said, her words tense. "Quickly."

Her father's hands were moving gropingly over her face, and as she felt the touch of his strong, gentle fingers, she realized with a flooding of horror that she could see him, that she could see Charles in the cell and Calvin in the corridor, but her father could not see them, could not see her. She looked at him in panic, but

his eyes were the same steady blue that she remembered. She moved her hand brusquely across his line of vision, but he did not blink.

"Father!" she cried. "Father! Can't you see me?"

His arms went around her again in a comforting, reassuring gesture. "No, Meg."

"But, Father, I can see you—" Her voice trailed off. Suddenly she shoved Mrs Who's glasses down her nose and peered over them, and immediately she was in complete and utter darkness. She snatched them off her face and thrust them at her father. "Here."

His fingers closed about the spectacles. "Darling," he said, "I'm afraid your glasses won't help."

"But they're Mrs Who's, they aren't mine," she explained, not realizing that her words would sound like gibberish to him. "Please try them, Father. Please!" She waited while she felt him fumbling in the dark. "Can you see now?" she asked. "Can you see now, Father?"

"Yes," he said. "Yes. The wall is transparent, now. How extraordinary! I could almost see the atoms rearranging!" His voice had its old, familiar sound of excitement and discovery. It was the way he sounded sometimes when he came home from his laboratory after a good day and began to tell his wife about his work. Then he cried out, "Charles! Charles Wallace!" And then, "Meg, what's happened to him? What's wrong? That is Charles, isn't it?"

"IT has him, Father," she explained tensely. "He's gone into IT. Father, we have to help him."

For a long moment Mr. Murry was silent. The silence was filled with the words he was thinking and would not speak out loud to his daughter. Then he said, "Meg, I'm in prison here. I have been for—"

"Father, these walls. You can go through them. I came through the column to get in to you. It was Mrs Who's glasses."

Mr. Murry did not stop to ask who Mrs Who was. He slapped his hand against the translucent column. "It seems solid enough."

"But I got in," Meg repeated. "I'm here. Maybe the glasses help the atoms rearrange. Try it, Father."

She waited, breathlessly, and after a moment she realized that she was alone in the column. She put out her hands in the darkness and felt its smooth surface curving about her on all sides. She seemed utterly alone, the silence and darkness impenetrable forever. She fought down panic until she heard her father's voice coming to her very faintly.

"I'm coming back in for you, Meg."

It was almost a tangible feeling as the atoms of the strange material seemed to part to let him through to her. In their beach house at Cape Canaveral there had been a curtain between dining and living room made of long strands of rice. It looked like a solid curtain, but

you could walk right through it. At first Meg had flinched each time she came up to the curtain; but gradually she got used to it and would go running right through, leaving the long strands of rice swinging behind her. Perhaps the atoms of these walls were arranged in somewhat the same fashion.

"Put your arms around my neck, Meg," Mr. Murry said. "Hold on to me tightly. Close your eyes and don't be afraid." He picked her up and she wrapped her long legs around his waist and clung to his neck. With Mrs. Who's spectacles on she had felt only a faint darkness and coldness as she moved through the column. Without the glasses she felt the same awful clamminess she had felt when they tessered through the outer darkness of Camazotz. Whatever the Black Thing was to which Camazotz had submitted, it was within as well as without the planet. For a moment it seemed that the chill darkness would tear her from her father's arms. She tried to scream, but within that icy horror no sound was possible. Her father's arms tightened about her, and she clung to his neck in a strangle hold, but she was no longer lost in panic. She knew that if her father could not get her through the wall he would stay with her rather than leave her; she knew that she was safe as long as she was in his arms.

Then they were outside. The column rose up in the middle of the room, crystal clear and empty.

Meg blinked at the blurred figures of Charles and her father, and wondered why they did not clear. Then she grabbed her own glasses out of her pocket and put them on, and her myopic eyes were able to focus.

Charles Wallace was tapping one foot impatiently against the floor. "IT is not pleased," he said. "IT is not pleased at all."

Mr. Murry released Meg and knelt in front of the little boy. "Charles," his voice was tender. "Charles Wallace."

"What do you want?"

"I'm your father, Charles. Look at me."

The pale blue eyes seemed to focus on Mr. Murry's face. "Hi, Pop," came an insolent voice.

"That isn't Charles!" Meg cried. "Oh, Father, Charles isn't like that. IT has him."

"Yes." Mr. Murry sounded tired. "I see." He held his arms out. "Charles. Come here."

Father will make it all right, Meg thought. Everything will be all right now.

Charles did not move toward the outstretched arms. He stood a few feet away from his father, and he did not look at him.

"Look at me," Mr. Murry commanded.

"No."

Mr. Murry's voice became harsh. "When you speak to me you will say 'No, Father,' or 'No, sir.'"

"Come off it, Pop," came the cold voice from Charles

Wallace—Charles Wallace who, outside Camazotz, had been strange, had been different, but never rude. “You’re not the boss around here.”

Meg could see Calvin pounding again on the glass wall. “Calvin!” she called.

“He can’t hear you,” Charles said. He made a horrible face at Calvin, and then he thumbed his nose.

“Who’s Calvin?” Mr. Murry asked.

“He’s—” Meg started, but Charles Wallace cut her short.

“You’ll have to defer your explanations. Let’s go.”

“Go where?”

“To IT.”

“No,” Mr. Murry said. “You can’t take Meg there.”

“Oh, can’t I!”

“No, you cannot. You’re my son, Charles, and I’m afraid you will have to do as I say.”

“But he isn’t Charles!” Meg cried in anguish. Why didn’t her father understand? “Charles is nothing like that, Father! You know he’s nothing like that!”

“He was only a baby when I left,” Mr. Murry said heavily.

“Father, it’s IT talking through Charles. IT isn’t Charles. He’s—he’s bewitched.”

“Fairy tales again,” Charles said.

“You know IT, Father?” Meg asked.

“Yes.”



"Have you seen IT?"

"Yes, Meg." Again his voice sounded exhausted. "Yes. I have." He turned to Charles. "You know she wouldn't be able to hold out."

"Exactly," Charles said.

"Father, you can't talk to him as though he were Charles! Ask Calvin! Calvin will tell you."

"Come along," Charles Wallace said. "We must go." He held up his hand carelessly and walked out of the cell, and there was nothing for Meg and Mr. Murry to do but to follow.

As they stepped into the corridor Meg caught at her father's sleeve. "Calvin, here's Father!"

Calvin turned anxiously toward them. His freckles and his hair stood out brilliantly against his white face.

"Make your introductions later," Charles Wallace said. "IT does not like to be kept waiting." He walked down the corridor, his gait seeming to get more jerky with each step. The others followed, walking rapidly to keep up.

"Does your father know about the Mrs W's?" Calvin asked Meg.

"There hasn't been time for anything. Everything's awful." Despair settled like a stone in the pit of Meg's stomach. She had been so certain that the moment she found her father everything would be all right. Everything would be settled. All the problems would be taken

out of her hands. She would no longer be responsible for anything.

And instead of this happy and expected outcome, they seemed to be encountering all kinds of new troubles.

"He doesn't understand about Charles," she whispered to Calvin, looking unhappily at her father's back as he walked behind the little boy.

"Where are we going?" Calvin asked.

"To IT. Calvin, I don't want to go! I can't!" She stopped, but Charles continued his jerky pace.

"We can't leave Charles," Calvin said. "They wouldn't like it."

"Who wouldn't?"

"Mrs Whatsit & Co."

"But they've betrayed us! They brought us here to this terrible place and abandoned us!"

Calvin looked at her in surprise. "You sit down and give up if you like," he said. "I'm sticking with Charles." He ran to keep up with Charles Wallace and Mr. Murry.

"I didn't mean—" Meg started, and pounded after them.

Just as she caught up with them Charles Wallace stopped and raised his hand, and there was the elevator again, its yellow light sinister. Meg felt her stomach jerk as the swift descent began. They were silent until the motion stopped, silent as they followed Charles Wallace through long corridors and out into the street. The

CENTRAL Central Intelligence Building loomed up, stark and angular, behind them.

—Do something, Meg implored her father silently.—  
Do something. Help. Save us.

They turned a corner, and at the end of the street was a strange, domelike building. Its walls glowed with a flicker of violet flame. Its silvery roof pulsed with ominous light. The light was neither warm nor cold, but it seemed to reach out and touch them. This, Meg was sure, must be where IT was waiting for them.

They moved down the street, more slowly now, and as they came closer to the domed building the violet flickering seemed to reach out, to envelop them, to suck them in: they were inside.

Meg could feel a rhythmical pulsing. It was a pulsing not only about her, but in her as well, as though the rhythm of her heart and lungs was no longer her own but was being worked by some outside force. The closest she had come to the feeling before was when she had been practicing artificial respiration with Girl Scouts, and the leader, an immensely powerful woman, had been working on Meg, intoning OUT goes the bad air, IN comes the good! while her heavy hands pressed, released, pressed, released.

Meg gasped, trying to breathe at her own normal rate, but the inexorable beat within and without continued. For a moment she could neither move nor look

around to see what was happening to the others. She simply had to stand there, trying to balance herself into the artificial rhythm of her heart and lungs. Her eyes seemed to swim in a sea of red.

Then things began to clear, and she could breathe without gasping like a beached fish, and she could look about the great, circular, domed building. It was completely empty except for the pulse, which seemed a tangible thing, and a round dais exactly in the center. On the dais lay—what? Meg could not tell, and yet she knew that it was from this that the rhythm came. She stepped forward tentatively. She felt that she was beyond fear now. Charles Wallace was no longer Charles Wallace. Her father had been found but he had not made everything all right. Instead everything was worse than ever, and her adored father was bearded and thin and white and not omnipotent after all. No matter what happened next, things could be no more terrible or frightening than they already were.

Oh, couldn't they?

As she continued to step slowly forward, at last she realized what the Thing on the dais was.

IT was a brain.

A disembodied brain. An oversized brain, just enough larger than normal to be completely revolting and terrifying. A living brain. A brain that pulsed and quivered, that seized and commanded. No wonder the

brain was called IT. IT was the most horrible, the most repellent thing she had ever seen, far more nauseating than anything she had ever imagined with her conscious mind, or that had ever tormented her in her most terrible nightmares.

But as she had felt she was beyond fear, so now she was beyond screaming.

She looked at Charles Wallace, and he stood there, turned toward IT, his jaw hanging slightly loose; and his vacant blue eyes slowly twirled.

Oh, yes, things could always be worse. These twirling eyes within Charles Wallace's soft round face made Meg icy cold inside and out.

She looked away from Charles Wallace and at her father. Her father stood there with Mrs Who's glasses still perched on his nose—did he remember that he had them on?—and he shouted to Calvin. "Don't give in!"

"I won't! Help Meg!" Calvin yelled back. It was absolutely silent within the dome, and yet Meg realized that the only way to speak was to shout with all the power possible. For everywhere she looked, everywhere she turned, was the rhythm, and as it continued to control the systole and diastole of her heart, the intake and outlet of her breath, the red miasma began to creep before her eyes again, and she was afraid that she was going to lose consciousness, and if she did that she would be completely in the power of IT.

Mrs Whatsit had said, "Meg, I give you your faults."

What were her greatest faults? Anger, impatience, stubbornness. Yes, it was to her faults that she turned to save herself now.

With an immense effort she tried to breathe against the rhythm of IT. But IT's power was too strong. Each time she managed to take a breath out of rhythm an iron hand seemed to squeeze her heart and lungs.

Then she remembered that when they had been standing before the man with red eyes, and the man with red eyes had been intoning the multiplication table at them, Charles Wallace had fought against his power by shouting out nursery rhymes, and Calvin by the Gettysburg Address.

"Georgie, porgie, pudding and pie," she yelled. "Kissed the girls and made them cry."

That was no good. It was too easy for nursery rhymes to fall into the rhythm of IT.

She didn't know the Gettysburg Address. How did the Declaration of Independence begin? She had memorized it only that winter, not because she was required to at school, but simply because she liked it.

"We hold these truths to be self-evident!" she shouted, "that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

As she cried out the words she felt a mind moving in on her own, felt IT seizing, squeezing her brain. Then she realized that Charles Wallace was speaking, or being spoken through by IT.

"But that's exactly what we have on Camazotz. Complete equality. Everybody exactly alike."

For a moment her brain reeled with confusion. Then came a moment of blazing truth. "No!" she cried triumphantly. "Like and equal are not the same thing at all!"

"Good girl, Meg!" her father shouted at her.

But Charles Wallace continued as though there had been no interruption. "In Camazotz all are equal. In Camazotz everybody is the same as everybody else," but he gave her no argument, provided no answer, and she held on to her moment of revelation.

*Like and equal are two entirely different things.*

For the moment she had escaped from the power of IT.

But how?

She knew that her own puny little brain was no match for this great, bodiless, pulsing, writhing mass on the round dais. She shuddered as she looked at IT. In the lab at school there was a human brain preserved in formaldehyde, and the seniors preparing for college had to take it out and look at it and study it. Meg had felt that when that day came she would never be able to endure it. But now she thought that if only she had a

dissecting knife she would slash at IT, cutting ruthlessly through cerebrum, cerebellum.

Words spoke within her, directly this time, not through Charles. "Don't you realize that if you destroy me, you also destroy your little brother?"

If that great brain were cut, were crushed, would every mind under ITs control on Camazotz die, too? Charles Wallace and the man with red eyes and the man who ran the number-one spelling machine on the second-grade level and all the children playing ball and skipping rope and all the mothers and all the men and women going in and out of the buildings? Was their life completely dependent on IT? Were they beyond all possibility of salvation?

She felt the brain reaching at her again as she let her stubborn control slip. Red fog glazed her eyes.

Faintly she heard her father's voice, though she knew he was shouting at the top of his lungs. "The periodic table of elements, Meg! Say it!"

A picture flashed into her mind of winter evenings spent sitting before the open fire and studying with her father. "Hydrogen. Helium," she started obediently. Keep them in their proper atomic order. What next. She knew it. Yes. "Lithium, Beryllium, Boron, Carbon, Nitrogen, Oxygen, Fluorine." She shouted the words at her father, turned away from IT. "Neon. Sodium. Magnesium. Aluminum. Silicon. Phosphorus."



"Too rhythmical," her father shouted. "What's the square root of five?"

For a moment she was able to concentrate. Rack your brains yourself, Meg. Don't let IT rack them. "The square root of five is 2.236," she cried triumphantly, "because 2.236 times 2.236 equals 5!"

"What's the square root of seven?"

"The square root of seven is—" She broke off. She wasn't holding out. IT was getting at her, and she couldn't concentrate, not even on math, and soon she, too, would be absorbed in IT, she would be an IT.

"Tesser, sir!" she heard Calvin's voice through the red darkness. "Tesser!"

She felt her father grab her by the wrist, there was a terrible jerk that seemed to break every bone in her body, then the dark nothing of tessering.

If tessering with Mrs Whatsit, Mrs Who, and Mrs Which had been a strange and fearful experience, it was nothing like tessering with her father. After all, Mrs Which was experienced at it, and Mr. Murry—how did he know anything about it at all? Meg felt that she was being torn apart by a whirlwind. She was lost in an agony of pain that finally dissolved into the darkness of complete unconsciousness.

## Absolute Zero

The first sign of returning consciousness was cold. Then sound. She was aware of voices that seemed to be traveling through her across an arctic waste. Slowly the icy sounds cleared and she realized that the voices belonged to her father and Calvin. She did not hear Charles Wallace. She tried to open her eyes but the lids would not move. She tried to sit up, but she could not stir. She struggled to turn over, to move her hands, her feet, but nothing happened. She knew that she had a body, but it was as lifeless as marble.

She heard Calvin's frozen voice: "Her heart is beating so slowly—"

Her father's voice: "But it's beating. She's alive."

"Barely."

"We couldn't find a heartbeat at all at first. We thought she was dead."

"Yes."

"And then we could feel her heart, very faintly, the beats very far apart. And then it got stronger. So all we have to do is wait." Her father's words sounded brittle in her ears, as though they were being chipped out of ice.

Calvin: "Yes. You're right, sir."

She wanted to call out to them. "I'm alive! I'm very much alive! Only I've been turned to stone."

But she could not call out anymore than she could move.

Calvin's voice again. "Anyhow you got her away from IT. You got us both away and we couldn't have gone on holding out. IT's so much more powerful and strong than—How did we stay out, sir? How did we manage as long as we did?"

Her father: "Because IT's completely unused to being refused. That's the only reason I could keep from being absorbed, too. No mind has tried to hold out against IT for so many thousands of centuries that certain centers have become soft and atrophied through lack of use. If you hadn't come to me when you did I'm not sure how much longer I would have lasted. I was on the point of giving in."

Calvin: "Oh, no, sir—"

Her father: "Yes. Nothing seemed important anymore but rest, and of course IT offered me complete rest. I had almost come to the conclusion that I was wrong to fight, that IT was right after all, and every-

thing I believed in most passionately was nothing but a madman's dream. But then you and Meg came in to me, broke through my prison, and hope and faith returned."

Calvin: "Sir, why were you on Camazotz at all? Was there a particular reason for going there?"

Her father, with a frigid laugh: "Going to Camazotz was a complete accident. I never intended even to leave our own solar system. I was heading for Mars. Tessering is even more complicated than we had expected."

Calvin: "Sir, how was IT able to get Charles Wallace before it got Meg and me?"

Her father: "From what you've told me it's because Charles Wallace thought he could deliberately go into IT and return. He trusted too much to his own strength—listen!—I think the heartbeat is getting stronger!"

His words no longer sounded to her quite as frozen. Was it his words that were ice, or her ears? Why did she hear only her father and Calvin? Why didn't Charles Wallace speak?

Silence. A long silence. Then Calvin's voice again: "Can't we do anything? Can't we look for help? Do we just have to go on waiting?"

Her father: "We can't leave her. And we must stay together. We must not be afraid to take time."

Calvin: "You mean we were? We rushed into things

on Camazotz too fast, and Charles Wallace rushed in too fast, and that's why he got caught?"

"Maybe. I'm not sure. I don't know enough yet. Time is different on Camazotz, anyhow. Our time, inadequate though it is, at least is straightforward. It may not be even fully one-dimensional, because it can't move back and forth on its line, only ahead; but at least it's consistent in its direction. Time on Camazotz seems to be inverted, turned in on itself. So I have no idea whether I was imprisoned in that column for centuries or only for minutes." Silence for a moment. Then her father's voice again. "I think I feel a pulse in her wrist now."

Meg could not feel his fingers against her wrist. She could not feel her wrist at all. Her body was still stone, but her mind was beginning to be capable of movement. She tried desperately to make some kind of a sound, a signal to them, but nothing happened.

Their voices started again. Calvin: "About your project, sir. Were you on it alone?"

Her father: "Oh, no. There were half a dozen of us working on it and I daresay a number of others we don't know about. Certainly we weren't the only nation to investigate along that line. It's not really a new idea. But we did try very hard not to let it be known abroad that we were trying to make it practicable."

"Did you come to Camazotz alone? Or were there others with you?"

"I came alone. You see, Calvin, there was no way to try it out ahead with rats or monkeys or dogs. And we had no idea whether it would really work or whether it would be complete bodily disintegration. Playing with time and space is a dangerous game."

"But why you, sir?"

"I wasn't the first. We drew straws, and I was second."

"What happened to the first man?"

"We don't—look! Did her eyelids move?" Silence. Then: "No. It was only a shadow."

But I did blink, Meg tried to tell them. I'm sure I did. And I can hear you! Do something!

But there was only another long silence, during which perhaps they were looking at her, watching for another shadow, another flicker. Then she heard her father's voice again, quiet, a little warmer, more like his own voice. "We drew straws, and I was second. We know Hank went. We saw him go. We saw him vanish right in front of the rest of us. He was there and then he wasn't. We were to wait for a year for his return or for some message. We waited. Nothing."

Calvin, his voice cracking: "Jeepers, sir. You must have been in sort of a flap."

Her father: "Yes. It's a frightening as well as an excit-

ing thing to discover that matter and energy are the same thing, that size is an illusion, and that time is a material substance. We can know this, but it's far more than we can understand with our puny little brains. I think you will be able to comprehend far more than I. And Charles Wallace even more than you."

"Yes, but what happened, please, sir, after the first man?"

Meg could hear her father sigh. "Then it was my turn. I went. And here I am. A wiser and a humbler man. I'm sure I haven't been gone two years. Now that you've come I have some hope that I may be able to return in time. One thing I have to tell the others is that we know nothing."

Calvin: "What do you mean, sir?"

Her father: "Just what I say. We're children playing with dynamite. In our mad rush we've plunged into this before—"

With a desperate effort Meg made a sound. It wasn't a very loud sound, but it was a sound. Mr. Murry stopped. "Hush. Listen."

Meg made a strange, croaking noise. She found that she could pull open her eyelids. They felt heavier than marble but she managed to raise them. Her father and Calvin were hovering over her. She did not see Charles Wallace. Where was he?

She was lying in an open field of what looked like rusty, stubby grass. She blinked, slowly, and with difficulty.

"Meg," her father said. "Meg. Are you all right?"

Her tongue felt like a stone tongue in her mouth, but she managed to croak, "I can't move."

"Try," Calvin urged. He sounded now as though he were very angry with her. "Wiggle your toes. Wiggle your fingers."

"I can't. Where's Charles Wallace?" Her words were blunted by the stone tongue. Perhaps they could not understand her, for there was no answer.

"We were knocked out for a minute, too," Calvin was saying. "You'll be all right, Meg. Don't get panicky." He was crouched over her, and though his voice continued to sound cross he was peering at her with anxious eyes. She knew that she must still have her glasses on because she could see him clearly, his freckles, his stubby black lashes, the bright blue of his eyes.

Her father was kneeling on her other side. The round lenses of Mrs Who's glasses still blurred his eyes. He took one of her hands and rubbed it between his. "Can you feel my fingers?" He sounded quite calm, as though there were nothing extraordinary in having her completely paralyzed. At the quiet of his voice she felt calmer. Then she saw that there were great drops of sweat standing out on his forehead, and she noticed



vaguely that the gentle breeze that touched her cheeks was cool. At first his words had been frozen and now the wind was mild: was it icy cold here or warm? "Can you feel my fingers?" he asked again.

Yes, now she could feel a pressure against her wrist, but she could not nod. "Where's Charles Wallace?" Her words were a little less blurred. Her tongue, her lips were beginning to feel cold and numb, as though she had been given a massive dose of novocaine at the dentist's. She realized with a start that her body and limbs were cold, that not only was she not warm, she was frozen from head to toe, and it was this that had made her father's words seem like ice, that had paralyzed her.

"I'm frozen—" she said faintly. Camazotz hadn't been this cold, a cold that cut deeper than the wind on the bitterest of winter days at home. She was away from IT, but this unexplained iciness was almost as bad. Her father had not saved her.

Now she was able to look around a little, and everything she could see was rusty and gray. There were trees edging the field in which she lay, and their leaves were the same brown as the grass. There were plants that might have been flowers, except that they were dull and gray. In contrast to the drabness of color, to the cold that numbed her, the air was filled with a delicate, spring-like fragrance, almost imperceptible as it blew softly against her face. She looked at her father and Calvin.

They were both in their shirt sleeves and they looked perfectly comfortable. It was she, wrapped in their clothes, who was frozen too solid even to shiver.

"Why am I so cold?" she asked. "Where's Charles Wallace?" They did not answer. "Father, where are we?"

Mr. Murry looked at her soberly. "I don't know, Meg. I don't tesser very well. I must have overshot, somehow. We're not on Camazotz. I don't know where we are. I think you're so cold because we went through the Black Thing, and I thought for a moment it was going to tear you away from me."

"Is this a dark planet?" Slowly her tongue was beginning to thaw; her words were less blurred.

"I don't think so," Mr. Murry said, "but I know so little about anything that I can't be sure."

"You shouldn't have tried to tesser, then." She had never spoken to her father in this way before. The words seemed hardly to be hers.

Calvin looked at her, shaking his head. "It was the only thing to do. At least it got us off Camazotz."

"Why did we go without Charles Wallace? Did we just leave him there?" The words that were not really hers came out cold and accusing.

"We didn't 'just leave him,'" her father said. "Remember that the human brain is a very delicate organism, and it can be easily damaged."

"See, Meg," Calvin crouched over her, tense and

worried, "if your father had tried to yank Charles away when he tessered us, and if IT had kept grabbing hold of Charles, it might have been too much for him, and we'd have lost him forever. And we had to do something right then."

"Why?"

"IT was taking us. You and I were slipping, and if your father had gone on trying to help us he wouldn't have been able to hold out much longer, either."

"You told him to tesser," Meg charged Calvin.

"There isn't any question of blame," Mr. Murry cut in severely. "Can you move yet?"

All Meg's faults were uppermost in her now, and they were no longer helping her. "No! And you'd better take me back to Camazotz and Charles Wallace quickly. You're supposed to be able to help!" Disappointment was as dark and corrosive in her as the Black Thing. The ugly words tumbled from her cold lips even as she herself could not believe that it was to her father, her beloved, longed-for father, that she was talking to in this way. If her tears had not still been frozen they would have gushed from her eyes.

She had found her father and he had not made everything all right. Everything kept getting worse and worse. If the long search for her father was ended, and he wasn't able to overcome all their difficulties, there was nothing to guarantee that it would all come out

right in the end. There was nothing left to hope for. She was frozen, and Charles Wallace was being devoured by IT, and her omnipotent father was doing nothing. She teetered on the seesaw of love and hate, and the Black Thing pushed her down into hate. "You don't even know where we are!" she cried out at her father. "We'll never see Mother or the twins again! We don't know where earth is! Or even where Camazotz is! We're lost out in space! What are you going to do!" She did not realize that she was as much in the power of the Black Thing as Charles Wallace.

Mr. Murry bent over her, massaging her cold fingers. She could not see his face. "My daughter, I am not a Mrs Whatsit, a Mrs Who, or a Mrs Which. Yes, Calvin has told me everything he could. I am a human being, and a very fallible one. But I agree with Calvin. We were sent here for something. And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

"The Black Thing!" Meg cried out at him. "Why did you let it almost get me?"

"You've never tessered as well as the rest of us," Calvin reminded her. "It never bothered Charles and me as much as it did you."

"He shouldn't have taken me, then," Meg said, "until he learned to do it better."

Neither her father nor Calvin spoke. Her father con-

tinued his gentle massage. Her fingers came back to life with tingling pain. "You're hurting me!"

"Then you're feeling again," her father said quietly. "I'm afraid it is going to hurt, Meg."

The piercing pain moved slowly up her arms, began in her toes and legs. She started to cry out against her father when Calvin exclaimed, "Look!"

Coming toward them, moving in silence across the brown grass, were three figures.

What were they?

On Uriel there had been the magnificent creatures. On Camazotz the inhabitants had at least resembled people. What were these three strange things approaching?

They were the same dull gray color as the flowers. If they hadn't walked upright they would have seemed like animals. They moved directly toward the three human beings. They had four arms and far more than five fingers to each hand, and the fingers were not fingers, but long waving tentacles. They had heads, and they had faces. But where the faces of the creatures on Uriel had seemed far more than human faces, these seemed far less. Where the features would normally be there were several indentations, and in place of ears and hair were more tentacles. They were tall, Meg realized as they came closer, far taller than any man. They had no eyes. Just soft indentations.

Meg's rigid, frozen body tried to shudder with ter-

ror, but instead of the shudder all that came was pain. She moaned.

The Things stood over them. They appeared to be looking down at them, except that they had no eyes with which to see. Mr. Murry continued to kneel by Meg, massaging her.

He's killed us, bringing us here, Meg thought. I'll never see Charles Wallace again, or Mother, or the twins. . . .

Calvin rose to his feet. He bowed to the beasts as though they could see him. He said, "How do you do, sir—ma'am—?"

"Who are you?" the tallest of the beasts said. His voice was neither hostile nor welcoming, and it came not from the mouthlike indentation in the furry face, but from the waving tentacles.

—They'll eat us, Meg thought wildly.—They're making me hurt. My toes—my fingers—I hurt. . . .

Calvin answered the beast's question. "We're—we're from earth. I'm not sure how we got here. We've had an accident. Meg—this girl—is—is paralyzed. She can't move. She's terribly cold. We think that's why she can't move."

One of them came up to Meg and squatted down on its huge haunches beside her, and she felt utter loathing and revulsion as it reached out a tentacle to touch her face.

But with the tentacle came the same delicate fragrance that moved across her with the breeze, and she felt a soft, tingling warmth go all through her that momentarily assuaged her pain. She felt suddenly sleepy.

I must look as strange to it as it looks to me, she thought drowsily, and then realized with a shock that of course the beast couldn't see her at all. Nevertheless a reassuring sense of safety flowed through her with the warmth which continued to seep deep into her as the beast touched her. Then it picked her up, cradling her in two of its four arms.

Mr. Murry stood up quickly. "What are you doing?"

"Taking the child."

## Aunt Beast

No!" Mr. Murry said sharply. "Please put her down."

A sense of amusement seemed to emanate from the beasts. The tallest, who seemed to be the spokesman, said, "We frighten you?"

"What are you going to do with us?" Mr. Murry asked.

The beast said, "I'm sorry, we communicate better with the other one." He turned toward Calvin. "Who are you?"

"I'm Calvin O'Keefe."

"What's that?"

"I'm a boy. A—a young man."

"You, too, are afraid?"

"I'm—not sure."

"Tell me," the beast said. "What do you suppose you'd do if three of us suddenly arrived on your home planet."

"Shoot you, I guess," Calvin admitted.



"Then isn't that what we should do with you?"

Calvin's freckles seemed to deepen, but he answered quietly. "I'd really rather you didn't. I mean, the earth's my home, and I'd rather be there than anywhere in the world—I mean, the universe—and I can't wait to get back, but we make some awful bloopers there."

The smallest beast, the one holding Meg, said, "And perhaps they aren't used to visitors from other planets."

"Used to it!" Calvin exclaimed. "We've never had any, as far as I know."

"Why?"

"I don't know."

The middle beast, a tremor of trepidation in his words, said, "You aren't from a dark planet, are you?"

"No." Calvin shook his head firmly, though the beast couldn't see him. "We're—we're shadowed. But we're fighting the shadow."

The beast holding Meg questioned, "You three are fighting?"

"Yes," Calvin answered. "Now that we know about it."

The tall one turned back to Mr. Murry, speaking sternly. "You. The oldest. Man. From where have you come? Now."

Mr. Murry answered steadily. "From a planet called Camazotz." There was a mutter from the three beasts. "We do not belong there," Mr. Murry said, slowly and distinctly. "We were strangers there as we are here. I was

a prisoner there, and these children rescued me. My youngest son, my baby, is still there, trapped in the dark mind of IT."

Meg tried to twist around in the beast's arms to glare at her father and Calvin. Why were they being so frank? Weren't they aware of the danger? But again her anger dissolved as the gentle warmth from the tentacles flowed through her. She realized that she could move her fingers and toes with comparative freedom, and the pain was no longer so acute.

"We must take this child back with us," the beast holding her said.

Meg shouted at her father. "Don't leave me the way you left Charles!" With this burst of terror a spasm of pain wracked her body and she gasped.

"Stop fighting," the beast told her. "You make it worse. Relax."

"That's what IT said," Meg cried. "Father! Calvin! Help!"

The beast turned toward Calvin and Mr. Murry. "This child is in danger. You must trust us."

"We have no alternative," Mr. Murry said. "Can you save her?"

"I think so."

"May I stay with her?"

"No. But you will not be far away. We feel that you are hungry, tired, that you would like to bathe and rest.

And this little—what is the word?” the beast cocked its tentacles at Calvin.

“Girl,” Calvin said.

“This little girl needs prompt and special care. The coldness of the—what is it you call it?”

“The Black Thing?”

“The Black Thing. Yes. The Black Thing burns unless it is counteracted properly.” The three beasts stood around Meg, and it seemed that they were feeling into her with their softly waving tentacles. The movement of the tentacles was as rhythmic and flowing as the dance of an undersea plant, and lying there, cradled in the four strange arms, Meg, despite herself, felt a sense of security that was deeper than anything she had known since the days when she lay in her mother’s arms in the old rocking chair and was sung to sleep. With her father’s help she had been able to resist IT. Now she could hold out no longer. She leaned her head against the beast’s chest, and realized that the gray body was covered with the softest, most delicate fur imaginable, and the fur had the same beautiful odor as the air.

I hope I don’t smell awful to it, she thought. But then she knew with a deep sense of comfort that even if she did smell awful the beasts would forgive her. As the tall figure cradled her she could feel the frigid stiffness of her body relaxing against it. This bliss could not come

to her from a thing like IT. IT could only give pain, never relieve it. The beasts must be good. They had to be good. She sighed deeply, like a very small child, and suddenly she was asleep.

When she came to herself again there was in the back of her mind a memory of pain, of agonizing pain. But the pain was over now and her body was lapped in comfort. She was lying on something wonderfully soft in an enclosed chamber. It was dark. All she could see were occasional tall moving shadows which she realized were beasts walking about. She had been stripped of her clothes, and something warm and pungent was gently being rubbed into her body. She sighed and stretched and discovered that she could stretch. She could move again, she was no longer paralyzed, and her body was bathed in waves of warmth. Her father had not saved her; the beasts had.

"So you are awake, little one?" The words came gently to her ears. "What a funny little tadpole you are! Is the pain gone now?"

"All gone."

"Are you warm and alive again?"

"Yes, I'm fine." She struggled to sit up.

"No, lie still, small one. You must not exert yourself as yet. We will have a fur garment for you in a moment, and then we will feed you. You must not even try to

feed yourself. You must be as an infant again. The Black Thing does not relinquish its victims willingly."

"Where are Father and Calvin? Have they gone back for Charles Wallace?"

"They are eating and resting," the beast said, "and we are trying to learn about each other and see what is best to help you. We feel now that you are not dangerous, and that we will be allowed to help you."

"Why is it so dark in here?" Meg asked. She tried to look around, but all she could see was shadows. Nevertheless there was a sense of openness, a feel of a gentle breeze moving lightly about, that kept the darkness from being oppressive.

Perplexity came to her from the beast. "What is this dark? What is this light? We do not understand. Your father and the boy, Calvin, have asked this, too. They say that it is night now on our planet, and that they cannot see. They have told us that our atmosphere is what they call opaque, so that the stars are not visible, and then they were surprised that we know stars, that we know their music and the movements of their dance far better than beings like you who spend hours studying them through what you call telescopes. We do not understand what this means, to *see*."

"Well, it's what things look like," Meg said helplessly.

"We do not know what things look like, as you say,"

the beast said. "We know what things are like. It must be a very limiting thing, this seeing."

"Oh, no!" Meg cried. "It's—it's the most wonderful thing in the world!"

"What a very strange world yours must be!" the beast said, "that such a peculiar-seeming thing should be of such importance. Try to tell me, what is this thing called light that you are able to do so little without?"

"Well, we can't see without it," Meg said, realizing that she was completely unable to explain vision and light and dark. How can you explain sight on a world where no one has ever seen and where there is no need of eyes? "Well, on this planet," she fumbled, "you have a sun, don't you?"

"A most wonderful sun, from which comes our warmth, and the rays which give us our flowers, our food, our music, and all the things which make life and growth."

"Well," Meg said, "when we are turned toward the sun—our earth, our planet, I mean, toward our sun—we receive its light. And when we're turned away from it, it is night. And if we want to see we have to use artificial lights."

"Artificial lights," the beast sighed. "How very complicated life on your planet must be. Later on you must try to explain some more to me."

"All right," Meg promised, and yet she knew that to

try to explain anything that could be seen with the eyes would be impossible, because the beasts in some way saw, knew, understood, far more completely than she, or her parents, or Calvin, or even Charles Wallace.

"Charles Wallace!" she cried. "What are they doing about Charles Wallace? We don't know what IT's doing to him or making him do. Please, oh, please, help us!"

"Yes, yes, little one, of course we will help you. A meeting is in session right now to study what is best to do. We have never before been able to talk to anyone who has managed to escape from a dark planet, so although your father is blaming himself for everything that has happened, we feel that he must be quite an extraordinary person to get out of Camazotz with you at all. But the little boy, and I understand that he is a very special, a very important little boy—ah, my child, you must accept that this will not be easy. To go back through the Black Thing, back to Camazotz—I don't know. I don't know."

"But Father left him!" Meg said. "He's got to bring him back! He can't just abandon Charles Wallace!"

The beast's communication suddenly became crisp. "Nobody said anything about abandoning anybody. That is not our way. But we know that just because we want something does not mean that we will get what we want, and we still do not know what to do. And we cannot allow you, in your present state, to do anything

that would jeopardize us all. I can see that you wish your father to go rushing back to Camazotz, and you could probably make him do this, and then where would we be? No. No. You must wait until you are more calm. Now, my darling, here is a robe for you to keep you warm and comfortable." Meg felt herself being lifted again, and a soft, light garment was slipped about her. "Don't worry about your little brother." The tentacles' musical words were soft against her. "We would never leave him behind the shadow. But for now you must relax, you must be happy, you must get well."

The gentle words, the feeling that this beast would be able to love her no matter what she said or did, lapped Meg in warmth and peace. She felt a delicate touch of tentacle to her cheek, as tender as her mother's kiss.

"It is so long since my own small ones were grown and gone," the beast said. "You are so tiny and vulnerable. Now I will feed you. You must eat slowly and quietly. I know that you are half starved, that you have been without food far too long, but you must not rush things or you will not get well."

Something completely and indescribably and incredibly delicious was put to Meg's lips, and she swallowed gratefully. With each swallow she felt strength returning to her body, and she realized that she had had nothing to eat since the horrible fake turkey dinner on Cama-



zotz which she had barely tasted. How long ago was her mother's stew? Time no longer had any meaning.

"How long does night last here?" she murmured sleepily. "It will be day again, won't it?"

"Hush," the beast said. "Eat, small one. During the coolness, which is now, we sleep. And, when you waken, there will be warmth again and many things to do. You must eat now, and sleep, and I will stay with you."

"What should I call you, please?" Meg asked.

"Well, now. First, try not to say any words for just a moment. Think within your own mind. Think of all the things you call people, different kinds of people."

While Meg thought, the beast murmured to her gently. "No, mother is a special, a one-name; and a father you have here. Not just friend, nor teacher, nor brother, nor sister. What is acquaintance? What a funny, hard word. Aunt. Maybe. Yes, perhaps that will do. And you think of such odd words about me. Thing, and monster! Monster, what a horrid sort of word. I really do not think I am a monster. Beast. That will do. Aunt Beast."

"Aunt Beast," Meg murmured sleepily, and laughed.

"Have I said something funny?" Aunt Beast asked in surprise. "Isn't Aunt Beast all right?"

"Aunt Beast is lovely," Meg said. "Please sing to me, Aunt Beast."

If it was impossible to describe sight to Aunt Beast, it

would be even more impossible to describe the singing of Aunt Beast to a human being. It was a music even more glorious than the music of the singing creatures on Uriel. It was a music more tangible than form or sight. It had essence and structure. It supported Meg more firmly than the arms of Aunt Beast. It seemed to travel with her, to sweep her aloft in the power of song, so that she was moving in glory among the stars, and for a moment she, too, felt that the words Darkness and Light had no meaning, and only this melody was real.

Meg did not know when she fell asleep within the body of the music. When she wakened Aunt Beast was asleep, too, the softness of her furry, faceless head drooping. Night had gone and a dull gray light filled the room. But she realized now that here on this planet there was no need for color, that the grays and browns merging into each other were not what the beasts knew, and that what she, herself, saw was only the smallest fraction of what the planet was really like. It was she who was limited by her senses, not the blind beasts, for they must have senses of which she could not even dream.

She stirred slightly, and Aunt Beast bent over her immediately, "What a lovely sleep, my darling. Do you feel all right?"

"I feel wonderful," Meg said. "Aunt Beast, what is this planet called?"

"Oh, dear," Aunt Beast sighed. "I find it not easy at all

to put things the way your mind shapes them. You call where you came from Camazotz?"

"Well, it's where we came from, but it's not our planet."

"You can call us Ixchel, I guess," Aunt Beast told her. "We share the same sun as lost Camazotz, but that, give thanks, is all we share."

"Are you fighting the Black Thing?" Meg asked.

"Oh, yes," Aunt Beast replied. "In doing that we can never relax. We are the called according to His purpose, and whom He calls, them He also justifies. Of course we have help, and without help it would be much more difficult."

"Who helps you?" Meg asked.

"Oh, dear, it is so difficult to explain things to you, small one. And I know now that it is not just because you are a child. The other two are as hard to reach into as you are. What can I tell you that will mean anything to you? Good helps us, the stars help us, perhaps what you would call light helps us, love helps us. Oh, my child, I cannot explain! This is something you just have to know or not know."

"But—"

"We look not at the things which are what you would call seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporal. But the things which are not seen are eternal."

"Aunt Beast, do you know Mrs Whatsit?" Meg asked with a sudden flooding of hope.

"Mrs Whatsit?" Aunt Beast was puzzled. "Oh, child, your language is so utterly simple and limited that it has the effect of extreme complication." Her four arms, tentacles waving, were outflung in a gesture of helplessness. "Would you like me to take you to your father and your Calvin?"

"Oh, yes, please!"

"Let us go, then. They are waiting for you to make plans. And we thought you would enjoy eating—what is it you call it? oh, yes, breakfast—together. You will be too warm in that heavy fur, now. I will dress you in something lighter, and then we will go."

As though Meg were a baby, Aunt Beast bathed and dressed her, and this new garment, though it was made of a pale fur, was lighter than the lightest summer clothes on earth. Aunt Beast put one tentacled arm about Meg's waist and led her through long, dim corridors in which she could see only shadows, and shadows of shadows, until they reached a large, columned chamber. Shafts of light came in from an open skylight and converged about a huge, round, stone table. Here were seated several of the great beasts, and Calvin and Mr. Murry, on a stone bench that circled the table. Because the beasts were so tall, even Mr. Murry's feet did not touch the ground, and lanky Calvin's long legs dangled as though he were

Charles Wallace. The hall was partially enclosed by vaulted arches leading to long, paved walks. There were no empty walls, no covering roofs, so that although the light was dull in comparison to earth's sunlight, Meg had no feeling of dark or of chill. As Aunt Beast led Meg in, Mr. Murry slid down from the bench and hurried to her, putting his arms about her tenderly.

"They promised us you were all right," he said.

While she had been in Aunt Beast's arms Meg had felt safe and secure. Now her worries about Charles Wallace and her disappointment in her father's human fallibility rose like gorge in her throat.

"I'm fine," she muttered, looking not at Calvin or her father, but at the beasts, for it was to them she turned now for help. It seemed to her that neither her father nor Calvin were properly concerned about Charles Wallace.

"Meg!" Calvin said gaily. "You've never tasted such food in your life! Come and eat!"

Aunt Beast lifted Meg up onto the bench and sat down beside her, then heaped a plate with food, strange fruits and breads that tasted unlike anything Meg had ever eaten. Everything was dull and colorless and unappetizing to look at, and at first, even remembering the meal Aunt Beast had fed her the night before, Meg hesitated to taste, but once she had managed the first bite she ate eagerly; it seemed that she would never have her fill again.

The others waited until she slowed down. Then Mr. Murry said gravely, "We were trying to work out a plan to rescue Charles Wallace. Since I made such a mistake in tessering away from IT, we feel that it would not be wise for me to try to get back to Camazotz, even alone. If I missed the mark again I could easily get lost and wander forever from galaxy to galaxy, and that would be small help to anyone, least of all to Charles Wallace."

Such a wave of despondency came over Meg that she was no longer able to eat.

"Our friends here," he continued, "feel that it was only the fact that I still wore the glasses your Mrs Who gave you that kept me within this solar system. Here are the glasses, Meg. But I am afraid that the virtue has gone from them and now they are only glass. Perhaps they were meant to help only once and only on Camazotz. Perhaps it was going through the Black Thing that did it." He pushed the glasses across the table at her.

"These people know about tessering," Calvin gestured at the circle of great beasts, "but they can't do it onto a dark planet."

"Have you tried to call Mrs Whatsit?" Meg asked.

"Not yet," her father answered.

"But if you haven't thought of anything else, it's the only thing to do! Father, don't you care about Charles at all!"

At that Aunt Beast stood up, saying, "Child," in a re-

proving way. Mr. Murry said nothing, and Meg could see that she had wounded him deeply. She reacted as she would have reacted to Mr. Jenkins. She scowled down at the table, saying, "We've got to ask them for help now. You're just stupid if you think we don't."

Aunt Beast spoke to the others. "The child is distraught. Don't judge her harshly. She was almost taken by the Black Thing. Sometimes we can't know what spiritual damage it leaves even when physical recovery is complete."

Meg looked angrily around the table. The beasts sat there, silent, motionless. She felt that she was being measured and found wanting.

Calvin swung away from her and hunched himself up. "Hasn't it occurred to you that we've been trying to tell them about our ladies? What do you think we've been up to all this time? Just stuffing our faces? Okay, you have a shot at it."

"Yes. Try, child." Aunt Beast seated herself again, and pulled Meg up beside her. "But I do not understand this feeling of anger I sense in you. What is it about? There is blame going on, and guilt. Why?"

"Aunt Beast, don't you know?"

"No," Aunt Beast said. "But this is not telling me about—whoever they are you want us to know. Try."

Meg tried. Blunderingly. Fumblingly. At first she described Mrs Whatsit and her man's coat and multicol-

ored shawls and scarves. Mrs Who and her white robes and shimmering spectacles, Mrs Which in her peaked cap and black gown quivering in and out of body. Then she realized that this was absurd. She was describing them only to herself. This wasn't Mrs Whatsit or Mrs Who or Mrs Which. She might as well have described Mrs Whatsit as she was when she took on the form of a flying creature of Uriel.

"Don't try to use words," Aunt Beast said soothingly. "You're just fighting yourself and me. Think about what they are. This look doesn't help us at all."

Meg tried again, but she could not get a visual concept out of her mind. She tried to think of Mrs Whatsit explaining tessering. She tried to think of them in terms of mathematics. Every once in a while she thought she felt a flicker of understanding from Aunt Beast or one of the others, but most of the time all that emanated from them was gentle puzzlement.

"Angels!" Calvin shouted suddenly from across the table. "Guardian angels!" There was a moment's silence, and he shouted again, his face tense with concentration, "Messengers! Messengers of God!"

"I thought for a moment—" Aunt Beast started, then subsided, sighing. "No. It's not clear enough."

"How strange it is that they can't tell us what they themselves seem to know," a tall, thin beast murmured.

One of Aunt Beast's tentacled arms went around



Meg's waist again. "They are very young. And on their earth, as they call it, they never communicate with other planets. They revolve about all alone in space."

"Oh," the thin beast said. "Aren't they lonely?"

Suddenly a thundering voice reverberated throughout the great hall:

"WWEEE ARRE HHERRE!"

## The Foolish and the Weak

Meg could see nothing, but she felt her heart pounding with hope. With one accord all the beasts rose to their feet, turned toward one of the arched openings, and bowed their heads and tentacles in greeting. Mrs Whatsit appeared, standing between two columns. Beside her came Mrs Who, behind them a quivering of light. The three of them were somehow not quite the same as they had been when Meg had first seen them. Their outlines seemed blurred; colors ran together as in a wet water color painting. But they were there; they were recognizable; they were themselves.

Meg pulled herself away from Aunt Beast, jumped to the floor, and rushed at Mrs Whatsit. But Mrs Whatsit held up a warning hand and Meg realized that she was not completely materialized, that she was light and not substance, and embracing her now would have been like trying to hug a sunbeam.

"We had to hurry so there wasn't quite time. . . . You wanted us?" Mrs Whatsit asked.

The tallest of the beasts bowed again and took a step away from the table and toward Mrs Whatsit. "It is a question of the little boy."

"Father left him!" Meg cried. "He left him on Camazotz!"

Appallingly, Mrs Whatsit's voice was cold. "And what do you expect us to do?"

Meg pressed her knuckles against her teeth so that her braces cut her skin. Then she flung out her arms pleadingly. "But it's Charles Wallace! IT has him, Mrs Whatsit! Save him, please save him!"

"You know that we can do nothing on Camazotz," Mrs Whatsit said, her voice still cold.

"You mean you'll let Charles be caught by IT forever?" Meg's voice rose shrilly.

"Did I say that?"

"But we can't do anything! You know we can't! We tried! Mrs Whatsit, you have to save him!"

"Meg, this is not our way," Mrs Whatsit said sadly. "I thought you would know that this is not our way."

Mr. Murry took a step forward and bowed, and to Meg's amazement the three ladies bowed back to him. "I don't believe we've been introduced," Mrs Whatsit said.

"It's Father, you know it's Father." Meg's angry impa-

tience grew. "Father—Mrs Whatsit, Mrs Who, and Mrs Which."

"I'm very glad to—" Mr. Murry mumbled, then went on, "I'm sorry, my glasses are broken, and I can't see you very well."

"It's not necessary to see us," Mrs Whatsit said.

"If you could teach me enough more about the tesseract so that I could get back to Camazotz—"

"Wwhatt tthen?" came Mrs Which's surprising voice.

"I will try to take my child away from IT."

"Annd yyou kknoww tthatt yyou wwill nnott ssucceedd?"

"There's nothing left except to try."

Mrs Whatsit spoke gently. "I'm sorry. We cannot allow you to go."

"Then let me," Calvin suggested. "I almost got him away before."

Mrs Whatsit shook her head. "No, Calvin. Charles has gone even deeper into IT. You will not be permitted to throw yourself in with him, for that, you must realize, is what would happen."

There was a long silence. All the soft rays filtering into the great hall seemed to concentrate on Mrs Whatsit, Mrs Who, and the faint light that must be Mrs Which. No one spoke. One of the beasts moved a tendril slowly back and forth across the stone tabletop. At

last Meg could stand it no longer and she cried out despairingly, "Then what are you going to do? Are you just going to throw Charles away?"

Mrs Which's voice rolled formidably across the hall. "Ssilencce, cchilldd!"

But Meg could not be silent. She pressed closely against Aunt Beast, but Aunt Beast did not put the protecting tentacles around her. "I can't go!" Meg cried. "I can't! You know I can't!"

"Ddidd annybbodyy asskk yyou tto?" The grim voice made Meg's skin prickle into gooseflesh.

She burst into tears. She started beating at Aunt Beast like a small child having a tantrum. Her tears rained down her face and spattered Aunt Beast's fur. Aunt Beast stood quietly against the assault.

"All right, I'll go!" Meg sobbed. "I know you want me to go!"

"We want nothing from you that you do without grace," Mrs Whatsit said, "or that you do without understanding."

Meg's tears stopped as abruptly as they had started. "But I do understand." She felt tired and unexpectedly peaceful. Now the coldness that, under Aunt Beast's ministrations, had left her body had also left her mind. She looked toward her father and her confused anger was gone and she felt only love and pride. She smiled at him, asking forgiveness, and then pressed up

against Aunt Beast. This time Aunt Beast's arm went around her.

Mrs Which's voice was grave. "Wwhatt ddo yyou unndderrsstannnd?"

"That it has to be me. It can't be anyone else. I don't understand Charles, but he understands me. I'm the one who's closest to him. Father's been away for so long, since Charles Wallace was a baby. They don't know each other. And Calvin's only known Charles for such a little time. If it had been longer then he would have been the one, but—oh, I see, I see, I understand, it has to be me. There isn't anyone else."

Mr. Murry, who had been sitting, his elbows on his knees, his chin on his fists, rose. "I will not allow it!"

"Wwhy?" Mrs Which demanded.

"Look, I don't know what or who you are, and at this point I don't care. I will not allow my daughter to go alone into this danger."

"Wwhy?"

"You know what the outcome will probably be! And she's weak, now, weaker than she was before. She was almost killed by the Black Thing. I fail to understand how you can even consider such a thing."

Calvin jumped down. "Maybe IT's right about you! Or maybe you're in league with IT. I'm the one to go if anybody goes! Why did you bring me along at all? To take care of Meg! You said so yourself!"

"But you have done that," Mrs Whatsit assured him.

"I haven't done anything!" Calvin shouted. "You can't send Meg! I won't allow it! I'll put my foot down! I won't permit it!"

"Don't you see that you're making something that is already hard for Meg even harder?" Mrs Whatsit asked him.

Aunt Beast turned tentacles toward Mrs Whatsit. "Is she strong enough to tesser again? You know what she has been through."

"If Which takes her she can manage," Mrs Whatsit said.

"If it will help I could go too, and hold her." Aunt Beast's arm around Meg tightened.

"Oh, Aunt Beast—" Meg started.

But Mrs Whatsit cut her off. "No."

"I was afraid not," Aunt Beast said humbly. "I just wanted you to know that I would."

"Mrs—uh—Whatsit." Mr. Murry frowned and pushed his hair back from his face. Then he shoved with his middle finger at his nose as though he were trying to get spectacles closer to his eyes. "Are you remembering that she is only a child?"

"And she's backward," Calvin bellowed.

"I resent that," Meg said hotly, hoping that indignation would control her trembling. "I'm better than you at math and you know it."

"Do you have the courage to go alone?" Mrs Whatsit asked her.

Meg's voice was flat. "No. But it doesn't matter." She turned to her father and Calvin. "You know it's the only thing to do. You know they'd never send me alone if—"

"How do we know they're not in league with IT?" Mr. Murry demanded.

"Father!"

"No, Meg," Mrs Whatsit said. "I do not blame your father for being angry and suspicious and frightened. And I cannot pretend that we are doing anything but sending you into the gravest kind of danger. I have to acknowledge quite openly that it may be a fatal danger. I know this. But I do not believe it. And the Happy Medium doesn't believe it, either."

"Can't she see what's going to happen?" Calvin asked.

"Oh, not in this kind of thing," Mrs Whatsit sounded surprised at his question. "If we knew ahead of time what was going to happen we'd be—we'd be like the people on Camazotz, with no lives of our own, with everything all planned and done for us. How can I explain it to you? Oh, I know. In your language you have a form of poetry called the sonnet."

"Yes, yes," Calvin said impatiently. "What's that got to do with the Happy Medium?"

"Kindly pay me the courtesy of listening to me." Mrs Whatsit's voice was stern, and for a moment Calvin



stopped pawing the ground like a nervous colt. "It is a very strict form of poetry, is it not?"

"Yes."

"There are fourteen lines, I believe, all in iambic pentameter. That's a very strict rhythm or meter, yes?"

"Yes." Calvin nodded.

"And each line has to end with a rigid rhyme pattern. And if the poet does not do it exactly this way, it is not a sonnet, is it?"

"No."

"But within this strict form the poet has complete freedom to say whatever he wants, doesn't he?"

"Yes." Calvin nodded again.

"So," Mrs Whatsit said.

"So what?"

"Oh, do not be stupid, boy!" Mrs Whatsit scolded. "You know perfectly well what I am driving at!"

"You mean you're comparing our lives to a sonnet? A strict form, but freedom within it?"

"Yes." Mrs Whatsit said. "You're given the form, but you have to write the sonnet yourself. What you say is completely up to you."

"Please," Meg said. "Please. If I've got to go I want to go and get it over with. Each minute you put it off makes it harder."

"Sshee iss rrightt," boomed Mrs Which's voice. "Itt iss ttime."

"You may say good-bye." Mrs Whatsit was giving her not permission, but a command.

Meg curtsied clumsily to the beasts. "Thank you all. Very much. I know you saved my life." She did not add what she could not help thinking: Saved it for what? So that IT could get me?

She put her arms about Aunt Beast, pressed up against the soft, fragrant fur. "Thank you," she whispered. "I love you."

"And I, you, little one." Aunt Beast pressed gentle tendrils against Meg's face.

"Cal—" Meg said, holding out her hand.

Calvin came to her and took her hand, then drew her roughly to him and kissed her. He didn't say anything, and he turned away before he had a chance to see the surprised happiness that brightened Meg's eyes.

At last she turned to her father. "I'm—I'm sorry, Father."

He took both her hands in his, bent down to her with his short-sighted eyes. "Sorry for what, Megatron?"

Tears almost came to her eyes at the gentle use of the old nickname. "I wanted you to do it all for me. I wanted everything to be all easy and simple. . . . So I tried to pretend that it was all your fault . . . because I was scared, and I didn't want to have to do anything myself—"

"But I wanted to do it for you," Mr. Murry said.

"That's what every parent wants." He looked into her dark, frightened eyes. "I won't let you go, Meg. I am going."

"No." Mrs Whatsit's voice was sterner than Meg had ever heard it. "You are going to allow Meg the privilege of accepting this danger. You are a wise man, Mr. Murry. You are going to let her go."

Mr. Murry sighed. He drew Meg close to him. "Little Megaparsec. Don't be afraid to be afraid. We will try to have courage for you. That is all we can do. Your mother—"

"Mother was always shoving me out in the world," Meg said. "She'd want me to do this. You know she would. Tell her—" she started, choked, then held up her head and said, "No. Never mind. I'll tell her myself."

"Good girl. Of course you will."

Now Meg walked slowly around the great table to where Mrs Whatsit was still poised between the columns. "Are you going with me?"

"No. Only Mrs Which."

"The Black Thing—" Fear made her voice tremble. "When Father tessered me through it, it almost got me."

"Your father is singularly inexperienced," Mrs Whatsit said, "though a fine man, and worth teaching. At the moment he still treats tessering as though he were working with a machine. We will not let the Black Thing get you. I don't think."

This was not exactly comforting.

The momentary vision and faith that had come to Meg dwindled. "But suppose I can't get Charles Wallace away from IT—"

"Stop." Mrs Whatsit held up her hand. "We gave you gifts the last time we took you to Camazotz. We will not let you go empty-handed this time. But what we can give you now is nothing you can touch with your hands. I give you my love, Meg. Never forget that. My love always."

Mrs Who, eyes shining behind spectacles, beamed at Meg. Meg felt in her blazer pocket and handed back the spectacles she had used on Camazotz.

"Your father is right," Mrs Who took the spectacles and hid them somewhere in the folds of her robes. "The virtue is gone from them. And what I have to give you this time you must try to understand not word by word, but in a flash, as you understand the tesseract. Listen, Meg. Listen well. The foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called, but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty. And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are." She paused, and then she said, "May the right pre-

vail." Her spectacles seemed to flicker. Behind her, through her, one of the columns became visible. There was a final gleam from the glasses, and she was gone. Meg looked nervously to where Mrs Whatsit had been standing before Mrs Who spoke. But Mrs Whatsit was no longer there.

"No!" Mr. Murry cried, and stepped toward Meg.

Mrs Which's voice came through her shimmer. "I ccannnott hholldd yyourr hanndd, chilldd."

Immediately Meg was swept into darkness, into nothingness, and then into the icy devouring cold of the Black Thing. Mrs Which won't let it get me, she thought over and over while the cold of the Black Thing seemed to crunch at her bones.

Then they were through it, and she was standing breathlessly on her feet on the same hill on which they had first landed on Camazotz. She was cold and a little numb, but no worse than she had often been in the winter in the country when she had spent an afternoon skating on the pond. She looked around. She was completely alone. Her heart began to pound.

Then, seeming to echo from all around her, came Mrs Which's unforgettable voice. "I hhave nnott ggivenn yyou mmyy ggiffitt. Yyou hhave ssomethinnngg thatt ITT hhas nnott. Thiss ssomethinnngg iss yyourr onlly wwapponn. Bbutt yyou mmüsstt ffinndd itt fforr yyourrssellff." Then the voice ceased, and Meg knew that she was alone.

She walked slowly down the hill, her heart thumping painfully against her ribs. There below her was the same row of identical houses they had seen before, and beyond these the linear buildings of the city. She walked along the quiet street. It was dark and the street was deserted. No children playing ball or skipping rope. No mother figures at the doors. No father figures returning from work. In the same window of each house was a light, and as Meg walked down the street all the lights were extinguished simultaneously. Was it because of her presence, or was it simply that it was time for lights out?

She felt numb, beyond rage or disappointment or even fear. She put one foot ahead of the other with precise regularity, not allowing her pace to lag. She was not thinking; she was not planning; she was simply walking slowly but steadily toward the city and the domed building where IT lay.

Now she approached the outlying buildings of the city. In each of them was a vertical line of light, but it was a dim, eerie light, not the warm light of stairways in cities at home. And there were no isolated brightly lit windows where someone was working late, or an office was being cleaned. Out of each building came one man, perhaps a watchman, and each man started walking the width of the building. They appeared not to see her. At any rate they paid no attention to her whatsoever, and she went on past them.

What have I got that IT hasn't got? she thought suddenly. What have I possibly got?

Now she was walking by the tallest of the business buildings. More dim vertical lines of light. The walls glowed slightly to give a faint illumination to the streets. CENTRAL Central Intelligence was ahead of her. Was the man with red eyes still sitting there? Or was he allowed to go to bed? But this was not where she must go, though the man with red eyes seemed the kind old gentleman he claimed to be when compared with IT. But he was no longer of any consequence in the search for Charles Wallace. She must go directly to IT.

IT isn't used to being resisted. Father said that's how he managed, and how Calvin and I managed as long as we did. Father saved me then. There's nobody here to save me now. I have to do it myself. I have to resist IT by myself. Is that what I have that IT hasn't got? No, I'm sure IT can resist. IT just isn't used to having other people resist.

CENTRAL Central Intelligence blocked with its huge rectangle the end of the square. She turned to walk around it, and almost imperceptibly her steps slowed.

It was not far to the great dome which housed IT.

I'm going to Charles Wallace. That's what's important. That's what I have to think of. I wish I could feel numb again the way I did at first. Suppose IT has him somewhere else? Suppose he isn't there?

I have to go there first, anyhow. That's the only way I can find out.

Her steps got slower and slower as she passed the great bronzed doors, the huge slabs of the CENTRAL Central Intelligence building, as she finally saw ahead of her the strange, light, pulsing dome of IT.

Father said it was all right for me to be afraid. He said to go ahead and be afraid. And Mrs Who said—I don't understand what she said but I think it was meant to make me not hate being only me, and me being the way I am. And Mrs Whatsit said to remember that she loves me. That's what I have to think about. Not about being afraid. Or not as smart as IT. Mrs Whatsit loves me. That's quite something, to be loved by someone like Mrs Whatsit.

She was there.

No matter how slowly her feet had taken her at the end, they had taken her there.

Directly ahead of her was the circular building, its walls glowing with violet flame, its silvery roof pulsing with a light that seemed to Meg to be insane. Again she could feel the light, neither warm nor cold, but reaching out to touch her, pulling her toward IT.

There was a sudden sucking, and she was within.

It was as though the wind had been knocked out of her. She gasped for breath, for breath in her own rhythm, not the permeating pulsing of IT. She could



feel the inexorable beat within her body, controlling her heart, her lungs.

But not herself. Not Meg. It did not quite have her.

She blinked her eyes rapidly and against the rhythm until the redness before them cleared and she could see. There was the brain, there was IT, lying pulsing and quivering on the dais, soft and exposed and nauseating. Charles Wallace was crouched beside IT, his eyes still slowly twirling, his jaw still slack, as she had seen him before, with a tic in his forehead reiterating the revolting rhythm of IT.

As she saw him it was again as though she had been punched in the stomach, for she had to realize afresh that she was seeing Charles, and yet it was not Charles at all. Where was Charles Wallace, her own beloved Charles Wallace?

What is it I have got that IT hasn't got?

"You have nothing that IT hasn't got," Charles Wallace said coldly. "How nice to have you back, dear sister. We have been waiting for you. We knew that Mrs Whatsit would send you. She is our friend, you know."

For an appalling moment Meg believed, and in that moment she felt her brain being gathered up into IT.

"No!" she screamed at the top of her lungs. "No! You lie!"

For a moment she was free from ITs clutches again. As long as I can stay angry enough IT can't get me.

Is that what I have that IT doesn't have?

"Nonsense," Charles Wallace said. "You have nothing that IT doesn't have."

"You're lying," she replied, and she felt only anger toward this boy who was not Charles Wallace at all. No, it was not anger, it was loathing; it was hatred, sheer and unadulterated, and as she became lost in hatred she also began to be lost in IT. The red miasma swam before her eyes; her stomach churned in IT's rhythm. Her body trembled with the strength of her hatred and the strength of IT.

With the last vestige of consciousness she jerked her mind and body. Hate was nothing that IT didn't have. IT knew all about hate.

"You are lying about that, and you were lying about Mrs Whatsit!" she screamed.

"Mrs Whatsit hates you," Charles Wallace said.

And that was where IT made IT's fatal mistake, for as Meg said, automatically, "Mrs Whatsit loves me; that's what she told me, that she loves me," suddenly she knew.

She knew!

Love.

That was what she had that IT did not have.

She had Mrs Whatsit's love, and her father's, and her mother's, and the real Charles Wallace's love, and the twins', and Aunt Beast's.

And she had her love for them.

But how could she use it? What was she meant to do?

If she could give love to IT perhaps it would shrivel up and die, for she was sure that IT could not withstand love. But she, in all her weakness and foolishness and baseness and nothingness, was incapable of loving IT. Perhaps it was not too much to ask of her, but she could not do it.

But she could love Charles Wallace.

She could stand there and she could love Charles Wallace.

Her own Charles Wallace, the real Charles Wallace, the child for whom she had come back to Camazotz, to IT, the baby who was so much more than she was, and who was yet so utterly vulnerable.

She could love Charles Wallace.

Charles. Charles, I love you. My baby brother who always takes care of me. Come back to me, Charles Wallace, come away from IT, come back, come home. I love you, Charles. Oh, Charles Wallace, I love you.

Tears were streaming down her cheeks, but she was unaware of them.

Now she was even able to look at him, at this animated thing that was not her own Charles Wallace at all. She was able to look and love.

I love you. Charles Wallace, you are my darling and my dear and the light of my life and the treasure of my heart. I love you. I love you. I love you.

Slowly his mouth closed. Slowly his eyes stopped their twirling. The tic in the forehead ceased its revolting twitch. Slowly he advanced toward her.

"I love you!" she cried. "I love you, Charles! I love you!"

Then suddenly he was running, pelting, he was in her arms, he was shrieking with sobs. "Meg! Meg! Meg!"

"I love you, Charles!" she cried again, her sobs almost as loud as his, her tears mingling with his. "I love you! I love you! I love you!"

A whirl of darkness. An icy cold blast. An angry, resentful howl that seemed to tear through her. Darkness again. Through the darkness to save her came a sense of Mrs Whatsit's presence, so that she knew it could not be IT who now had her in its clutches.

And then the feel of earth beneath her, of something in her arms, and she was rolling over on the sweet smelling autumnal earth, and Charles Wallace was crying out, "Meg! Oh, Meg!"

Now she was hugging him close to her, and his little arms were clasped tightly about her neck. "Meg, you saved me! You saved me!" he said over and over.

"Meg!" came a call, and there were her father and Calvin hurrying through the darkness toward them.

Still holding Charles she struggled to stand up and look around. "Father! Cal! Where are we?"

Charles Wallace, holding her hand tightly, was look-

ing around, too, and suddenly he laughed, his own, sweet, contagious laugh. "In the twins' vegetable garden! And we landed in the broccoli!"

Meg began to laugh, too, at the same time that she was trying to hug her father, to hug Calvin, and not to let go of Charles Wallace for one second.

"Meg, you did it!" Calvin shouted. "You saved Charles!"

"I'm very proud of you, my daughter." Mr. Murry kissed her gravely, then turned toward the house. "Now I must go in to Mother." Meg could tell that he was trying to control his anxiety and eagerness.

"Look!" she pointed to the house, and there were the twins and Mrs. Murry walking toward them through the long, wet grass.

"First thing tomorrow I must get some new glasses," Mr. Murry said, squinting in the moonlight, and then starting to run toward his wife.

Dennys's voice came crossly over the lawn. "Hey, Meg, it's bedtime."

Sandy suddenly yelled, "Father!"

Mr. Murry was running across the lawn, Mrs. Murry running toward him, and they were in each other's arms, and then there was a tremendous happy jumble of arms and legs and hugging, the older Murrys and Meg and Charles Wallace and the twins, and Calvin grinning by them until Meg reached out and pulled

him in and Mrs. Murry gave him a special hug all of his own. They were talking and laughing all at once, when they were startled by a crash, and Fortinbras, who could bear being left out of the happiness not one second longer, catapulted his sleek black body right through the screened door to the kitchen. He dashed across the lawn to join in the joy, and almost knocked them all over with the exuberance of his greeting.

Meg knew all at once that Mrs Whatsit, Mrs Who, and Mrs Which must be near, because all through her she felt a flooding of joy and of love that was even greater and deeper than the joy and love which were already there.

She stopped laughing and listened, and Charles listened, too. "Hush."

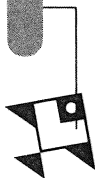
Then there was a whirring, and Mrs Whatsit, Mrs Who, and Mrs Which were standing in front of them, and the joy and love were so tangible that Meg felt that if she only knew where to reach she could touch it with her bare hands.

Mrs Whatsit said breathlessly, "Oh, my darlings, I'm sorry we don't have time to say good-bye to you properly. You see, we have to—"

But they never learned what it was that Mrs Whatsit, Mrs Who, and Mrs Which had to do, for there was a gust of wind, and they were gone.

# GO FISH

QUESTIONS FOR THE AUTHOR



**What did you want to be when you grew up?**

A writer.



**When did you realize you wanted to be a writer?**

Right away. As soon as I was able to articulate, I knew I wanted to be a writer. And I read. I adored *Emily of New Moon* and some of the other L. M. Montgomery books and they impelled me because I loved them.

**When did you start to write?**

When I was five, I wrote a story about a little "gurl."

**What was the first writing you had published?**

When I was a child, a poem in *CHILD LIFE*. It was all about a lonely house and was very sentimental.

SQUARE FISH



**Where do you write your books?**

Anywhere. I write in longhand first, and then type it. My first typewriter was my father's pre-World War One machine. It was the one he took with him to the war. It had certainly been around the world.

**What is the best advice you have ever received about writing?**

To just write.

**What's your first childhood memory?**

One early memory I have is going down to Florida for a couple of weeks in the summertime to visit my grandmother. The house was in the middle of a swamp, surrounded by alligators. I don't like alligators, but there they were, and I was afraid of them.

**What is your favorite childhood memory?**

Being in my room.

**As a young person, whom did you look up to most?**

My mother. She was a storyteller and I loved her stories. And she loved music and records. We played duets together on the piano.

**What was your worst subject in school?**

Math and Latin. I didn't like the Latin teacher.





**What was your best subject in school?**

English.

**What activities did you participate in at school?**

I was president of the student government in boarding school and editor of a literary magazine, and also belonged to the drama club.

**Are you a morning person or a night owl?**

Night owl.

**What was your first job?**

Working for the actress Eva La Gallienne, right after college.

**What is your idea of the best meal ever?**

Cream of Wheat. I eat it with a spoon. I love it with butter and brown sugar.

**Which do you like better: cats or dogs?**

I like them both. I once had a wonderful dog named Touche. She was a silver medium-sized poodle, and quite beautiful. I wasn't allowed to take her on the subway, and I couldn't afford to get a taxi, so I put her around my neck, like a stole. And she pretended she was a stole. She was an actor.



**What do you value most in your friends?**

Love.

**What is your favorite song?**

"Drink to Me Only with Thine Eyes."

**What time of the year do you like best?**

I suppose autumn. I love the changing of the leaves.

I love the autumn goldenrod, the Queen Anne's lace.

**What was the original title of *A Wrinkle in Time*?**

"Mrs Whatsit, Mrs Who and Mrs Which."

**How did you get the idea for *A Wrinkle in Time*?**

We were living in the country with our three kids on this dairy farm. I started reading what Einstein wrote about time. And I used a lot of those principles to make a universe that was creative and yet believable.

**How hard was it to get *A Wrinkle in Time* published?**

I was kept hanging for two years. Over and over again I received nothing more than the formal, printed rejection slip. Eventually, after twenty-six rejections, I called my agent and said, "Send it back. It's too different. Nobody's going to publish it." He sent it back, but a few days later a friend of my mother's insisted that I meet John Farrar,



the publisher. He liked the manuscript, and eventually decided to publish it. My first editor was Hal Vursell.

**Which of your characters is most like you?**

None of them. They're all wiser than I am.



## NEWBERY MEDAL ACCEPTANCE SPEECH

# The Expanding Universe

August 1963

For a writer of fiction to have to sit down and write a speech, especially a speech in which she must try to express her gratitude for one of the greatest honors of her life, is as difficult a task as she can face. She can no longer hide behind the printed page and let her characters speak for her; she must stand up in front of an illustrious group of librarians, editors, publishers, writers, feeling naked, the way one sometimes does in a dream. What then, does she say? Should she merely tell a series of anecdotes about her life and how she happened to write this book? Or should she try to be profound and write a speech that will go down in the pages of history, comparable only to the Gettysburg Address? Should she stick to platitudes that will offend no one and say nothing? Perhaps she tries all of these several times and then

tears them up, knowing that if she doesn't, her husband will do it for her, and decides simply to say some of the things she feels deeply about.

I can't tell you anything about children's books that you don't already know. I'm not teaching you; you're teaching me. All I can tell you is how Ruth Gagliardo's telephone call about the Newbery Medal has affected me over the past few years.

One of my greatest treasures is the letter Mr. Melcher wrote me, one of the last letters he wrote, talking about the medal and saying he had just read *A Wrinkle in Time* and had been excited about it. This was one of the qualities that made him what he was: the ability to be excited. Bertha Mahony Miller, in her article "Frederic G. Melcher—A Twentieth Century John Newbery," says that "The bookstore's stock trade is . . . explosive material, capable of stirring up fresh life endlessly. . . ." I like here to think of another Fred, the eminent British scientist Fred Hoyle, and his theory of the universe, in which matter is continuously being created, with the universe expanding but not dissipating. As island galaxies rush away from each other into eternity, new clouds of gas are condensing into new galaxies. As old stars die, new stars are being born. Mr. Melcher lived in this universe of continuous creation and expansion. It would be impossible to overestimate his influence on books, particularly children's books; impossible to overestimate his influ-

ence on the people who read books, write them, get enthusiastic about them. We are all here tonight because of his vision, and we would be less than fair to his memory if we didn't resolve to keep alive his excitement and his ability to grow, to change, to expand.

I am of the first generation to profit by Mr. Melcher's excitement, having been born shortly before he established the Newbery Award, and growing up with most of these books on my shelves. I learned about mankind from Hendrik Willem van Loon; I traveled with Dr. Dolittle, created by a man I called Hug Lofting; Will James taught me about the West with Smoky; in boarding school I grabbed *Invincible Louisa* the moment it came into the library because Louisa May Alcott had the same birthday that I have, and the same ambitions. And now to be a very small link in the long chain of those writers, of the men and women who led me into the expanding universe, is both an honor and a responsibility. It is an honor for which I am deeply grateful to Mr. Melcher and to those of you who decided *A Wrinkle in Time* was worthy of it.

The responsibility has caused me to think seriously during these past months on the subject of vocation, the responsibility added to the fact that I'm working now on a movie scenario about a Portuguese nun who lived in the mid-1600s, had no vocation, was seduced and then betrayed by a French soldier of fortune, and,

in the end, through suffering, came into a true vocation. I believe that every one of us here tonight has as clear and vital a vocation as anyone in a religious order. We have the vocation of keeping alive Mr. Melcher's excitement in leading young people into an expanding imagination. Because of the very nature of the world as it is today, our children receive in school a heavy load of scientific and analytic subjects, so it is in their reading for fun, for pleasure, that they must be guided into creativity. These are forces working in the world as never before in the history of mankind for standardization, for the regimentation of us all, or what I like to call making muffins of us, muffins all like every other muffin in the muffin tin. This is the limited universe, the drying, dissipating universe that we can help our children avoid by providing them with "explosive material capable of stirring up fresh life endlessly."

So how do we do it? We can't just sit down at our typewriters and turn out explosive material. I took a course in college on Chaucer, one of the most explosive, imaginative, and far-reaching in influence of all writers. And I'll never forget going to the final exam and being asked why Chaucer used certain verbal devices, certain adjectives, why he had certain characters behave in certain ways. And I wrote in a white heat of fury, "I don't think Chaucer had any idea why he did any of these things. That isn't the way people write."

I believe this as strongly now as I did then. Most of what is best in writing isn't done deliberately.

Do I mean, then, that an author should sit around like a phony Zen Buddhist in his pad, drinking endless cups of espresso coffee and waiting for inspiration to descend upon him? That isn't the way the writer works, either. I heard a famous author say once that the hardest part of writing a book was making yourself sit down at the typewriter. I know what he meant. Unless a writer works constantly to improve and refine the tools of his trade, they will be useless instruments if and when the moment of inspiration, of revelation, does come. This is the moment when a writer is spoken through, the moment that a writer must accept with gratitude and humility, and then attempt, as best he can, to communicate to others.

A writer of fantasy, fairy tale, or myth must inevitably discover that he is not writing out of his own knowledge or experience, but out of something both deeper and wider. I think that fantasy must possess the author and simply use him. I know that this is true of *A Wrinkle in Time*. I can't possibly tell you how I came to write it. It was simply a book I had to write. I had no choice. And it was only after it was written that I realized what some of it meant.

Very few children have any problem with the world of the imagination; it's their own world, the world of



their daily life, and it's our loss that so many of us grow out of it. Probably this group here tonight is the least grown-out-of-it group that could be gathered together in one place, simply by the nature of our work. We, too, can understand how Alice could walk through the mirror into the country on the other side; how often have our children almost done this themselves? And we all understand princesses, of course. Haven't we all been badly bruised by peas? And what about the princess who spat forth toads and snakes whenever she opened her mouth to speak, and the other whose lips issued forth pieces of pure gold? We all have had days when everything we've said has seemed to turn to toads. The days of gold, alas, don't come nearly as often.

What a child doesn't realize until he is grown is that in responding to fantasy, fairy tale, and myth he is responding to what Erich Fromm calls the one universal language, the one and only language in the world that cuts across all barriers of time, place, race, and culture. Many Newbery books are from this realm, beginning with Dr. Dolittle; books on Hindu myth, Chinese folklore, the life of Buddha, tales of American Indians, books that lead our children beyond all boundaries and into the one language of all mankind.

In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth. . . . The extraordinary, the marvelous thing about Genesis is not how unscientific it is, but how amazingly

accurate it is. How could the ancient Israelites have known the exact order of an evolution that wasn't to be formulated for thousands of years? Here is a truth that cuts across barriers of time and space.

But almost all of the best children's books do this, not only an *Alice in Wonderland*, a *Wind in the Willows*, a *Princess and the Goblin*. Even the most straightforward tales say far more than they seem to mean on the surface. *Little Women*, *The Secret Garden*, *Huckleberry Finn*—how much more there is in them than we realize at a first reading. They partake of the universal language, and this is why we turn to them again and again when we are children, and still again when we have grown up.

Up on the summit of Mohawk Mountain in northwest Connecticut is a large flat rock that holds the heat of the sun long after the last of the late sunset has left the sky. We take our picnic up there and then lie on the rock and watch the stars, one pulsing slowly into the deepening blue, and then another and another and another, until the sky is full of them.

A book, too, can be a star, "explosive material, capable of stirring up fresh life endlessly," a living fire to lighten the darkness, leading out into the expanding universe.

# THE L'ENGLE CAST

Books featuring the Murry-O'Keefes:

A Wrinkle in Time (WT)

A Wind in the Door (WD)

A Swiftly Tilting Planet (STP)

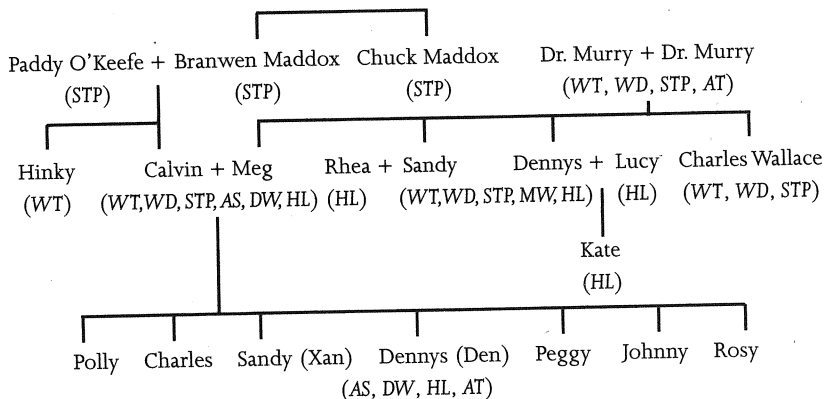
Many Waters (MW)

The Arm of the Starfish (AS)

Dragons in the Waters (DW)

A House Like a Lotus (HL)

An Acceptable Time (AT)



Characters who appear in books about both families:

Canon Tallis  
(AS, YU, DW)

Adam Eddington  
(AS, REL, TS)

Zachary Gray  
(HL, MN, REL, AT)

Mr. Theotocopoulous  
(YU, DW)

# OF CHARACTERS

## Books featuring the Austins:

Meet the Austins (MA)

The Young Unicorns (YU)

The Moon by Night (MN)

A Ring of Endless Light (REL)

The Twenty-four Days Before Christmas (TDC) Troubling a Star (TS)

