

A Wrinkle in Time



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF MADELEINE L'ENGLE

Madeleine L'Engle wrote her first story when she was five years old. She did not perform well at the NYC private school she attended, and spent the subsequent years at different boarding schools and traveling extensively with her parents, who disagreed about how she ought to be raised. France and Switzerland were among the countries she lived in in her youth. Her father died in 1935 while she was living at a boarding school in South Carolina. In 1937, she attended Smith College, and graduated four years later *cum laude*. The next year, once she had moved to New York City, she met her husband, actor Hugh Franklin, when she had a role in Chekhov's [The Cherry Orchard](#), and they married four years later. They had two children, Josephine and Bion, and adopted Maria, the 7-year-old daughter of family friends who had died. For a while the family lived in an ancient farmhouse in Connecticut and ran a general store to supply their income. In 1959, they returned to New York City so Hugh could keep acting, during which time L'Engle first thought of and wrote *A Wrinkle in Time*. She had a hard time finding a publisher, and was rejected over thirty times before Farrar, Straus and Giroux picked it up in 1962. Many of her other books occur in the same universe as that of *A Wrinkle in Time*. In her years in New York City, L'Engle (a strong Episcopalian) was a volunteer librarian and writer-in-residence at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, where she was buried after dying of natural causes in 2007.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The novels most closely similar to *A Wrinkle in Time*, with its combination of science fiction and its exploration of a personal Christian-based morality (though not an endorsement of institutional Christianity) are the sequels that Madeleine L'Engle wrote to her original novel, which follow the further experiences of the Murry children: *A Wind in the Door*, *A Swiftly Tilting Planet*, and *Many Waters*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *A Wrinkle in Time*
- **When Written:** 1959-60
- **Where Written:** New York City
- **When Published:** 1962
- **Literary Period:** Post-War American Literature
- **Genre:** Young adult fantasy
- **Setting:** Earth, the planet Camazotz, the universe

- **Climax:** Meg saves Charles Wallace, her younger brother, from the clutches of IT by simply loving him.
- **Antagonist:** The Black Thing, the Darkness, or IT
- **Point of View:** Limited third-person narrative from Meg Murry's point of view

EXTRA CREDIT

Meg and Madeleine. Like Meg, Madeleine L'Engle was a shy and clumsy girl who struggled in school and was looked down on by the teachers, though she was intelligent. And like the Murrays, the L'Engles lived for a while in an old farmhouse in rural New England.

Is time travel possible? Einstein's theory of relativity suggests time travel should be possible in theory, but it is still unknown as to whether man can actually do it. Still, there's plenty of real enough math in *A Wrinkle in Time* to begin understanding what time represented as the fifth dimension is.



PLOT SUMMARY

Meg Murry is a thirteen-year-old, plain-looking girl who can't seem to get along at school, despite unusual intelligence and a wonderful family. Impatient by nature, she quickly gets into trouble with her teachers, though the real source of her unhappiness is her missing father, who vanished a year ago on mysterious government business. Meg has two younger, perfectly normal twin brothers, Sandy and Dennys (10-years-old) and an extraordinary 5-year-old brother, Charles Wallace, who has intelligence and intuition beyond his years. Their mother, Mrs. Murry, is a Ph.D. like her husband, Mr. Murry, and while she tries to focus on her work and on the children, she is very unhappy and worried by her husband's absence.

One stormy night, an old funnily-dressed woman shows up at the Murry's house: Mrs. Whatsit. Though Charles seems to know her, Mrs. Whatsit has come to deliver a message to Mrs. Murry: there is such a thing as a **tesseract**. Meg and Charles are mystified by the incident, and go to find Mrs. Whatsit the next day for answers (she's staying at a supposedly haunted house just off their property). On their way there, they come across Calvin O'Keefe, an athletic and popular boy who Meg knows only vaguely from school. It turns out that like Charles and Meg, he is unusually intelligent, and possesses a gift for communication. Though at first suspicious of him, Charles thinks he must be a good egg, and allows Calvin to come along with him and Meg. Mrs. Whatsit is not there, but they meet her friend, Mrs. Who, and then the three children head home to the Murrays to have dinner. Calvin straightaway feels at home with

the Murrys.

After Calvin has put Charles down for bed, he takes Meg for a walk in the garden behind the Murrys' house, and suddenly Charles, Mrs. Whatsit, Mrs. Who, and Mrs. Which (their third companion) are there. The Mrs. W's **tesser** the children to another planet (tessering is a painful but quick way to travel through space and time; a "wrinkle" in time), where they show them **the Black Thing**: a shadow that has fallen across many parts of the universe, representing Evil. The Black Thing has captured Mr. Murry, and the children must save him. They then tesser to another planet, where they meet the Happy Medium, an oracle-like woman who shows them in her crystal ball a way in which the Darkness can be destroyed: a star can give its life to destroy the Black Thing, and that is precisely what Mrs. Whatsit did.

The time for action has come: Meg, Calvin, and Charles tesser to the planet Camazotz, an evil planet entirely taken over by the Black Thing, where Mr. Murry is. On Camazotz, everyone is exactly alike, every house, child, and adult is almost exactly the same. This is because every individual is controlled by IT, an enormous brain which thinks for everyone on the planet, destroying individuality. The children (whom the Mrs. W's can no longer accompany) find Mr. Murry and rescue him from his prison, but in the process Charles has his mind taken over by IT, and becomes IT's minion. This evil Charles takes his father, sister, and Calvin to IT, and Mr. Murry is forced to tesser himself, Meg, and Calvin away to save their own minds.

The three of them land on another planet in Camazotz's system, and Meg is instantly enraged with her father for leaving Charles. She has, however, been physically and mentally wounded by tessering through the Black Thing, and the tentacled natives of that planet (especially Aunt Beast) tend to her until she is well. A council is held with the tentacled natives, the Mrs. W's, and Calvin, Meg and Mr. Murry, and Meg sees that only she can save Charles from IT, since she knows and loves Charles best of all of them. She tessers with Mrs. Which back to Camazotz, and manages to free Charles from IT's grasp by simply looking at him and loving him, for love is the one thing IT cannot stand. They then tesser back to the Murrys' backyard, where they find Calvin and Mr. Murry also returned. Mrs. Murry and the twins, upon hearing the commotion, run outside, and a very happy family reunion ensues.

with his loving, close-knit family since. With the help of her younger brother Charles Wallace and newfound friend Calvin, she embarks on an adventure with Mrs. Whatsit and co. to save her father, who is trapped on another planet by the powers of darkness.

Charles Wallace Murry – Meg's gifted five-year-old brother, Charles Wallace's talents extend from advanced factual and scientific knowledge to an unusual ability to penetrate and understand the minds of others. His assurance of his abilities proves to be his vulnerability as he believes he can mentally fight IT, and ends up being absorbed into IT, until Meg's love brings him back.

Calvin O'Keefe – Calvin, a fourteen-year-old boy who's so smart he's in eleventh grade and a talented athlete at that, enters the Murrys' lives in a most unexpected way at the beginning of the novel and is practically one of the family at the end (though he may mean something more to Meg). He has a talent for communication which comes in handy on other planets, and his warm love for Meg and Charles Wallace in addition to his courage sustains the group as they fight against the terrible Darkness.

Mrs. Murry – A beautiful, brilliant scientist with a wonderful family, Mrs. Murry does her best to lovingly take care of her children while her husband has mysteriously disappeared on government business, and hides her unhappiness at his absence. The children love her dearly in return, and are partly inspired by their love for their mother and their knowledge of her unhappiness in their quest to save their father.

Mr. Murry – Mr. Murry, the children's long disappeared father, is a brilliant physicist who landed on a planet overtaken by the Black Thing when he tried to tesseract for the first time. He's been missing for over a year when his children rescue him from Camazotz. Meg, who had dreamed of everything being all right when they found him, must grow up and take responsibility when she realizes her father cannot save Charles from the clutches of IT: only she can.

Mrs. Whatsit – First appearing to Meg, Charles Wallace, and Calvin as an old, funnily dressed woman, Mrs. Whatsit is nothing close to what she appears to be. She was a star who gave her life to fight the darkness—now she is a beautiful winged centaur-like creature, when she's not taken on the form of an eccentrically dressed tramp. Calvin describes her—along with Mrs. Who, and Mrs. Which— as angels and messengers of God, for they are fighters for the good, are on the side of God, and are there to help but not directly intervene in what the children must do to save their father and themselves from IT.

Mrs. Who – A plump old woman with huge spectacles, Mrs. Who's unique trait is that she speaks mostly in quotations, since she can't communicate so well on her own. Shakespeare, Dante, and above all Scripture feature prominently in her speech. Her glasses allow Meg to free her father from the



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Meg Murry – Meg is a thirteen-year-old girl who is a misfit at school, despite her unusual intelligence that the teachers can't seem to appreciate. The main source of her unhappiness, however, comes from the fact that her brilliant scientist father disappeared a number of years ago, and has made no contact

transparent column in which he is stuck by rearranging the atoms of the wall.

Mrs. Which – Mrs. Which never seems to be able to fully materialize wherever they are, but the one time she does, it is as a witch on a broomstick, to the great amusement of Mrs. Whatsit and Mrs. Who. She seems to be the head of their trio, the wisest and most experienced and most solemn of them all, though she is not as affectionate with the children as Mrs. Whatsit is.

The Happy Medium – Before going to the dark planet, Camazotz, the Mrs. W's take the children to see the Happy Medium, who lives on a planet on Orion's belt and who can show them in her crystal ball things that are happening all over the universe. The Medium shows them the evil that is happening, but also the good that is being done to fight the evil, so that the children can achieve a happy medium in their outlook going in to fight the Black Thing.

Aunt Beast – When Mr. Murry tesser himself, Calvin, and Meg away from Camazotz in a desperate attempt to save themselves from IT and Meg is subsequently injured, Aunt Beast is one of the tentacle beasts native to the planet they then land on who nurses Meg back to help. She is kind and loving, and helps to heal Meg's body and mind.

The Man with the Red Eyes – The children find the man with the red eyes waiting for them on Camazotz, once they enter the CENTRAL Central Intelligence building and are sent to speak with whoever is in authority. Like all those under IT's control, it is never really him who is speaking to the children, but IT. He (or rather, IT) manages to bring Charles' mind under the control of IT, but after the IT-controlled Charles then takes Meg and Calvin to see Mr. Murry's prison cell, the man with the red eyes is seen no more.

IT – IT is a gigantic, disgusting brain that controls the minds of all the inhabitants of Camazotz and does all the thinking for them. IT is pure evil, total Darkness, and is what captured Mr. Murry when he tesserred to Camazotz by accident some time before the action of the book begins. IT, which claims to have all intelligence and all efficiency, is vulnerable only to the one thing it lacks: love.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Sandy and Dennys Murry – The twins are the only "normal" members of the Murry family. They are well-adjusted, average students, and try to protect their siblings from being bullied too much at school.

Mr. Jenkins – The principal at Meg's school. He tries to get Meg to improve her attitude, but also seems to take a rather unpleasant interest in the absence of Mr. Murry.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



NONCONFORMITY

At the beginning of the book, Meg is unhappy because she doesn't fit in at school, and desperately wishes she could be the same as everyone else.

She's smarter than most kids, but her unorthodox way of thinking is not understood by her school, and she reacts by being sulky and stubborn. Her five-year-old brother, Charles Wallace, is also made fun of for being abnormally intelligent and different. But then the two meet Calvin, a "cool" kid who is unhappy because he hides his differences, and the Mrs. W's, who are the weirdest and most wonderful people they have ever met, and Meg begins to reconsider the value of her "differences".

The final nail in the coffin of Meg's desires for sameness come when the children visit the planet Camazotz, which has been entirely taken over by **the Black Thing**. On Camazotz, everyone is the same, everyone conforms to the standards set by IT, and it is the unhappiest place in the book. When Charles Wallace gets assimilated IT and becomes the same as everyone on Camazotz, Meg realizes just how much she *doesn't* want herself or anyone she loves to have their differences taken away.

The novel also contains many quotes from and references to great writers, thinkers, and scientists of the past (Shakespeare, Einstein, Goethe, etc.), all of whom were very "different" but accomplished great things for the good and the light through their work, and who are presented as the Earth's greatest fighter's against the Black Thing. In other words, the novel presents difference as not just a fact of life, but as a vital thing, the most important thing in the fight against evil.



THE VALUE OF LOVE

While Meg focuses on her unhappiness at her father's absence and her problems at school, Calvin must remind her how lucky she is to have a family

like hers in which there is so much love. Meg's love for her father enables to her to undertake the journey with the Mrs. W's in the first place, and Meg's love for Charles Wallace is the weapon with which she is able to save Charles Wallace and defeat IT. Love is the only thing she has that IT doesn't have—love is something that can only exist between different people, while IT destroys all difference. While Meg may think love a paltry thing at the beginning of the book, by the end she

realizes she could possess nothing more empowering or valuable.



DECEPTIVE APPEARANCES

Whether looking at Mrs. Whatsit, Aunt Beast, Camazotz, or even Meg Murry, one cannot trust appearances. As Mrs. Murry said of Charles Wallace to Meg, "...people are more than just the way they look. Charles Wallace's difference isn't physical. It's in essence." Frumpy looking Mrs. Whatsit is in reality a gorgeous centaur-like fallen star, tentacled Aunt Beast is a warm, motherly figure, and Camazotz, as innocuous as it looks when first landed on, is the unhappiest place one can imagine. To know what something is really like, the novel insists, one can't rely on one's eyes and must seek a deeper understanding of the mind and heart of the other.



LANGUAGE AND KNOWING

If Meg thought comprehending her and Charles Wallace's differences was hard, understanding the people and planets of a universe she never knew existed outside Earth is even more difficult. The Mrs. W's communicate in ways of their own—Mrs. Who, for example, hasn't really mastered the human language, so she quotes often from great authors to get her point across. Indeed many of the characters—Meg, Mrs. Whatsit, Mr. Murry—incorporate Shakespeare, Scripture, and other famous works into their thoughts and words to best express their feelings.

But there is communication beyond the written and spoken word, which often fails (as seen best when Meg tries to explain light to animals that come from a sunless world). Meg can sometimes best tell Charles Wallace, Calvin, or her father that she loves them through a tender gesture or a warm embrace. Charles Wallace can somehow intuit the feelings of his mother, Meg, and Calvin without even being in the same room. Calvin's gift of communication, too, is intuitive and mental.

Yet just as Aunt Beast will never understand the human sense of sight, all three children learn through their journey that there are some things they *can't* understand, and they must come to terms with this. As a talented math student who uses shortcuts, Meg always wants an easy and quick final answer, but her experiences and the wise people in her life teach her that she can't always get it. When she reaches Camazotz, she finally realizes that an effortless understanding of the universe is not something one ought to want, because IT is bent on total understanding, total control, and this world of total understanding and control is evil and suffocating. Meg is able to defeat IT not through her own knowledge but through a love that is more profound than words.



CHRISTIAN REFERENCES

Though not an overtly Christian work (there are no priests, churches or religious ceremonies), there are many Scriptural quotations in *A Wrinkle in Time*.

Christ is cited as one of the great warriors of light, next to the likes of Leonardo da Vinci and Beethoven, and many different books of the Bible are quoted alongside of Shakespeare and Goethe and others. Underlying all of this is the author's belief that the core beliefs of Christianity are a powerful force for good in the fight against evil; however, she doesn't go much deeper than that, and uses those Scriptural quotations as a launch point for elaborating on broader themes.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



THE BLACK THING

The antagonist of *A Wrinkle in Time* is **the Black Thing** (otherwise called the Darkness or the shadow or, in its incarnation on Camazotz, IT). The Black Thing represents Evil at work in the universe: it has taken over Camazotz entirely, which is referred to as a dark planet, and Earth is currently half taken over and looks like it is covered in a "smoky haze" from afar. Tessering through the Black Thing is also extremely painful. Through the Black Thing the novel shows how evil is hard to pin down or describe (the Black Thing is rather a vague description, after all), but one knows it when one sees it, as when the children see it partly blanketing their own world.



TESSERACT

In geometry, a **tesseract** means the fifth dimension. In the world of *A Wrinkle in Time*, a tesseract is that as well, but also an exciting and dangerous way to travel through space and time, as the Mrs. W's and the children do. Mrs. Whatsit attempts to explain it exactly to Meg, Charles, and Calvin in Chapter 5, but a tesseract is essentially a shortcut between two points in space and time: a "wrinkle" in time. Mr. Murry and the U.S. government were experimenting around with tesseracts, and he was accidentally whisked off to the dark planet Camazotz; it is by tessering that the more skilled Mrs. W's take the children around the universe. When Mrs. Whatsit casually mentions a tesseract at the beginning of the story to Mrs. Murry, who turns white, she marks the beginning of the adventure to save Mr. Murry.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Square Fish edition of *A Wrinkle in Time* published in 2007.

Chapter 1 Quotes

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

Related Characters: Meg Murry (speaker), Charles Wallace Murry, Sandy and Dennys Murry

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 13

Explanation and Analysis

One of the major concerns of *A Wrinkle in Time* is with powers beyond rational knowledge. This quote establishes Meg's character as someone who is perturbed when confronted with phenomena that she doesn't understand. Meg's preference for the comprehensible (as opposed to mystery) tempts her to jump to easy conclusions based on appearances, which is something Charles Wallace is less prone to. As shown in this quote, this is part of Charles Wallace's gift: understanding things about people that they aren't explicitly communicating, or knowing essential truths about other people that aren't readily apparent. Charles Wallace's gift is also important because it is not rationally explained. He has powers that nobody can exactly account for or duplicate. This is one of many nods in this book to the importance of forces beyond rationality.

It is significant that Charles Wallace focuses his gift on characters who are the least "normal" (i.e. those who don't conform to the "rules" or expectations of society). Sandy and Dennys represent people who fit in socially, and Charles Wallace prefers to spend his energy on those who don't. As the book ultimately shows, this is because those who are able to express their individuality are those who have power. The only people who can fight evil are those who understand and respect themselves enough to not automatically conform to their surroundings.

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

Related Characters: Mrs. Murry (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 27

Explanation and Analysis

This is yet another instance of communication that goes beyond reason. Nobody in Meg's family can explain who this woman is or why she knows anything about the tesseract, which clearly has extreme significance for Mrs. Murry. This scene is another indication that the book will concern itself with the power of knowledge that is not easily explained. It's important to note, too, that Meg is skeptical of Mrs. Whatsit because of her appearance. Meg's concern with what Mrs. Whatsit looks like – her concern about how Mrs. Whatsit doesn't conform – blinds her to the importance of Mrs. Whatsit's presence or knowledge.

This quote is also important because it introduces the tesseract, which is a potent symbol in the book, as well as an engine of its sci-fi plot. While the reader does not yet know what the tesseract is, it is later revealed that the tesseract is a technology that scientists (believing too much in their own ability to reason through any problem) accidentally misused. This has placed the earth (and Mr. Murry) in grave danger, which thematizes the danger of placing too much faith in reason and giving too little respect to the unknown and unknowable.

Chapter 2 Quotes

☞ "...I'm a sport."

At that Charles Wallace grinned widely. "So 'm I."

"I don't mean like in baseball," Calvin said.

"Neither do I."

"I mean like in biology," Calvin said suspiciously.

"*A change in gene*," Charles Wallace quoted, "*resulting in the appearance in the offspring of a character which is not present in the parents but which is potentially transmissible to the its offspring.*"

Related Characters: Calvin O'Keefe, Charles Wallace Murry (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 38

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, we see the effects of the kind of appearance-based stereotyping that the book is committed to debunking. Calvin, who knows that everyone just sees him as an athletic popular kid who lacks anything interesting beyond those qualities, does not believe that Charles Wallace truly understands who he is. For this reason, Calvin is suspicious and over-explains what he means when he says he's a sport (he's actually using a technical term from biology). This shows how restrictive Calvin's popularity and public image has been to his inner life and individuality. Charles Wallace, on the other hand, is displaying his mysterious gift for understanding people – he seems to see straight past Calvin's appearance and reputation to his essence. He never seems to doubt that Calvin is the person he is claiming to be.

This passage also directly addresses the question of difference. All three of these characters are seen as eccentric or different in some way, and here Charles Wallace and Calvin are acknowledging it for the first time in a way that seems positive (as opposed to the way Meg thinks about her differences as negative).

☝ "Lead on, moron," Calvin cried gaily. "I've never even seen your house, and I have the funniest feeling that for the first time in my life I'm going home!"

Related Characters: Calvin O'Keefe (speaker), Meg Murry

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 44

Explanation and Analysis

Nobody can explain why Calvin has so suddenly and completely hit it off with Charles Wallace and Meg, but the warmth between the three of them seems genuine. This is a theme throughout the book, that genuine love cannot be explained or accounted for, and its power is beyond that of reason. Calvin, having found others who are different in the way that he is (even though he has been hiding his differences in public) makes him suddenly feel a kind of familial connection that makes him feel that going to the Murry home is like going to his own home. That's a remarkable statement that shows how powerful the love between these characters is.

It's worth noting that Calvin, unlike Meg, seems not at all perturbed by what he can't understand. He is not suspicious or dismissive of his feelings of love and joy that come from a mysterious place – he embraces them and allows them to

make him happy.

Chapter 3 Quotes

☝ "But you're good at basketball and things," Meg protested. "You're good in school. Everybody likes you." "For all the most unimportant reasons," Calvin said. "There hasn't been anybody, anybody in the world I could talk to. Sure, I can function on the same level as everybody else, I can hold myself down, but it isn't me."

Related Characters: Meg Murry, Calvin O'Keefe (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 52

Explanation and Analysis

Of all the characters, it is perhaps Calvin who is most articulate about the ways in which conformity and difference affect people. Meg, for much of the book, is entrapped by the idea that she is somehow inferior because of her superficial differences from others, and Charles Wallace seems so above the notion of superficial difference that it wouldn't occur to him to talk about it this way.

Calvin, however, is a complicated character who respects and likes his own differences, but still hides them in order to fit in. Here, Meg is incredulous that Calvin could be someone other than the person he appears to be (a theme that will repeat throughout the book). Calvin lets her know that the popularity that he has attained (which she seems to crave) has come at a cost. It is significant that this cost, for Calvin, is communication--he hasn't had anyone he could talk to about the things he cares about. Something the book wants us to understand is that genuine individuality is what allows for communication and communication is what allows for love.

☝ "But Charles Wallace doesn't *look* different from anybody else."

"No, Meg, but people are more than just the way they look. Charles Wallace's difference isn't physical. It's in essence."

Related Characters: Meg Murry, Mrs. Murry (speaker), Charles Wallace Murry

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 54

Explanation and Analysis

This is another example of Meg's tendency to place too much importance on superficial appearance. Even her own brother, whom she loves deeply, is in some way unseen by her because of it – Meg doesn't understand his "essence" because she can't look past his appearance. Meg's mother, on the other hand, does understand that Charles Wallace is different, and she is able to love him for it. She recognizes that his individuality is a gift and that it has given him powers of understanding that cannot be explained.

This chapter has made it clear that Meg is uniquely adept at math. She wants the world to behave like a math problem in which you follow rules to solve a puzzle and arrive at a single right answer. That Meg's mother, a brilliant scientist, is here suggesting that things might not be that simple is important. Meg needs to hear this from many credible sources throughout the book before she can truly embrace this way of thinking.

Chapter 4 Quotes

☞ "Should I change, too?" Mrs. Who asked. "Oh, but I've had fun in these clothes. But I'll have to admit Mrs. Whatsit is the best at it. *Das Werk lobt den Meister*. German. *The work proves the craftsman*. Shall I transform now, too?"

Related Characters: Mrs. Who (speaker), Mrs. Whatsit

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 72

Explanation and Analysis

This is a very concrete instance in which the book is addressing the conflict between appearance and reality. While Meg had initially assumed that the three Mrs. W's were all vaguely distasteful because of their appearances, she is here being shown quite literally that their appearances have nothing to do with what they actually are. Furthermore, this changing of appearances comes off as a game. Meg takes appearances seriously enough to base character judgments on them, while these women engage in whimsical transformations of themselves at will. They clearly have no attachment to any one appearance except in the ways in which appearances can be put on for fun.

This is also a scene in which language, like appearance, is shown to be disconnected from reality. Mrs. Which is dressed up like a witch. This is a pun on her name, but it also suggests a deeper truth, which is that language – like

superficial appearance – sometimes only masks what is true. It also shows that language can be a game, like appearance, that can be tried on and cast aside.

☞ "Listen, then," Mrs. Whatsit said. The resonant voice rose and the words seemed to be all around them so that Meg felt that she could almost reach out and touch them: "Sing unto the Lord a new song, and his praise from the end of the earth, ye that go down to the sea, and all that is therein..."

Related Characters: Mrs. Whatsit (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 77

Explanation and Analysis

This is one of the few moments of truly sublime beauty in the whole book. To see creatures like Mrs. Whatsit shown as truly good and joy-bringing entities cements Meg's understanding that her initial impression based on Mrs. Whatsit's appearance was completely wrong.

While the story is not explicitly Christian, it has common themes with Christianity. For one, characters are rewarded for respecting and embracing things that cannot be known or understood. Meg has to learn to be humble before that which is greater and more powerful than she; this is a very Christian journey. In addition, the supreme power of love is, perhaps, the most important theme of the New Testament. Since the most beautiful and joyful moment of the book is one that becomes explicitly Biblical, it is safe to say that the author is embracing the ideas of Christianity, even if she is not creating an explicitly religious story.

☞ It was a shadow, nothing but a shadow. It was not even as tangible as a cloud. Was it cast by something? Or was it a Thing in itself?...What could there be about a shadow that was terrible that she knew that there had never been before or ever would be again, anything that would chill her with a fear that was beyond shuddering, beyond crying or screaming, beyond the possibility of comfort?

Related Characters: Meg Murry (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 81-82

Explanation and Analysis

Coming off the peace and joy of the experience with the singing creatures, the characters must also experience their first taste of true evil, which is The Black Thing. It is significant that a shadow is the embodiment of evil here, as a shadow is entirely immaterial. A shadow has no "essence," – it is only appearance, and the book asks readers over and over to distrust appearances.

This quote also shows that evil, like good, is difficult to confront or account for rationally. Meg does not understand what The Black Thing is or where it came from or how it works, but that does not negate its power over her and the danger it poses to society. The book instructs readers that it would be hubris to write The Black Thing off just because it is not comprehensible, just as it is hubris to try to defeat it with reason. The Black Thing is something beyond reason that must be confronted with forces that are also beyond reason.

Chapter 5 Quotes

☝☝ The Medium lost the delighted smile she had worn till then. "Oh, why must you make me look at unpleasant things when there are so many delightful ones to see?" Again Mrs. Which's voice reverberated through the cave. "There will nno llonggerr bee sso many pplleasantt thinggss too llookk att iff rressponsibile ppeople ddo nnott ddoosomethingg aboutt thee unnppleasantt oness."

Related Characters: The Happy Medium, Mrs. Which (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 97

Explanation and Analysis

This is an example, again, of how focusing on appearances can lead people astray. The Happy Medium does not want to look at unpleasant things because it feels better to look at pleasant ones. Mrs. Which has the wisdom to acknowledge that even though it might be nicer to look at good things, the essences of those things are threatened by the essence of evil. Because of that, it is important to think beyond what is superficially pleasing and consider how to

preserve the things we love and enjoy. As Mrs. Which suggests, this involves deep engagement with bad things.

This scene is another one in which language is treated as more superficial than essence. Puns (like Mrs. Which appearing as a witch) are jokes about language itself, rather than about the concepts language attempts to evoke. This is also the case with The Happy Medium – Meg's mother wondered aloud in the first chapter if Meg would ever find "a happy medium." Of course, her mother's statement referred to Meg's inability to control her thoughts and actions, and the "Happy Medium" that Meg has found is a person. Language, here, is not corresponding to concepts as we thought it would, which shows that language is itself independent of the essence of the thing it represents. Later this idea will tie into the characters' inability to defeat evil through language and rationality.

☝☝ "Who have our fighters been?" Calvin asked.
"Oh, you must know them, dear," Mrs. Whatsit said. Mrs. Who's spectacles shone out at them triumphantly, "*And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.*"
"Jesus!" Charles Wallace said. "Why of course, Jesus!"
"Of course!" Mrs. Whatsit said. "Go on, Charles, love. There were others. All your great artists. They've been lights for us to see by."

Related Characters: Calvin O'Keefe, Mrs. Whatsit, Mrs. Who, Charles Wallace Murry (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 100

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Mrs. Whatsit sheds some light on what the real forces for good in the world are. As expected, the people she names are all ones who have prioritized their individuality and brought their unique visions to the world. She names Jesus and a few artists/writers – these were all people who had the courage to have radical ideas. It's also important that each of these people grappled in their work with ideas that weren't quite comprehensible. This is what artists do, they try to make sense of the world through creating art rather than by trying to control the world or analyze it. In other words, artists tend not to have illusions of being in control of the world around them. As we've already seen, this book does not look favorably on those who are arrogant enough to believe that they understand everything and are therefore powerful.

This section also clarifies the author's thoughts on the relevance of Christianity. While she certainly believes that Jesus is an exemplary force for good, she puts him alongside secular heroes like Shakespeare and Euclid. This shows that Christianity is, for this author, an important force in the world, but one that operates in conjunction with all different kinds of ideas. It is one way of capturing a positive way to live in the world, but not the only way.

Chapter 6 Quotes

☞ From somewhere Mrs. Who's glasses glimmered and they heard her voice. "Calvin," she said, "a hint. For you a hint. Listen well:

*...For that he was a spirit too delicate
To act their earthy and abhorr'd commands,
Refusing their grand hests, they did confine him
By help of their most potent ministers,
And in their most unmitigable rage,
Into a cloven pine; within which rift
Imprisoned, he didst painfully remain....*
Shakespeare. [The Tempest](#)."

Related Characters: Mrs. Who (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 112

Explanation and Analysis

In this section, the Mrs. W's are about to leave Meg, Calvin, and Charles Wallace on Camazotz to try to save Mr. Murry by themselves. As parting gifts, the women provide mostly just words to aid the characters on their journey. This is further confirmation that, for Madeleine L'Engle, the power of words and ideas is equal to or better than the power of material objects. It's also important that these characters are given gifts that they do not know how to use; each of the gifts is fairly meaningless until its meaning is clarified by a situation they are in. This echoes the book's concern with the importance of trusting in mysteries and not dismissing that which you don't understand.

This specific passage, too, is relevant because it speaks beautifully to the nonconformity that the book espouses. The quote from *The Tempest* that is given to Calvin is one about the human ability to resist the pressure of others, despite the consequences. While this advice proves specifically helpful on Camazotz, it is also advice that is broadly applicable across all parts of the book.

☞ "We are the most oriented city on the planet. There has been no trouble of any kind for centuries. All Camazotz knows our record. That is why we are the capital city of Camazotz. That is why CENTRAL Central Intelligence is located here. That is why IT makes ITs home here." There was something about the way he said "IT" that made a shiver run up and down Meg's spine.

Related Characters: IT (speaker), Meg Murry

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 121

Explanation and Analysis

In this scene, the paper boy on Camazotz is explaining to Meg, Charles Wallace, and Calvin the nature of the city in which they have found themselves. His description is chilling to the characters because it is a dystopian vision of perfect conformity and efficiency that evokes sinister government bureaucracy and the all-consuming power of technology. The Mrs. W's have just finished explaining that the forces for good in the universe are love and individuality, but Camazotz is the opposite. Instead of valuing artists, it values people who conform strictly to norms and don't make trouble. Human relationships on Camazotz are governed by impersonal bureaucracy rather than love.

This scene also gives information about the specific enemies that the characters are up against. The boy's ominous mentions of IT and Central Intelligence imply the particular kind of trouble that Mr. Murry is in. Camazotz is the embodiment of evil, and this scene lets us know subtly that if these characters are going to save themselves and Mr. Murry they will have to do so by sticking with love and individuality instead of conforming to the relentless norms of Camazotz.

Chapter 7 Quotes

☞ "For why should you wish to fight someone who is here only to save you pain and trouble? For you, as well as for the rest of all the happy, useful people on this planet, I, in my own strength, am willing to assume all the pain, all the responsibility, all the burdens of thought and decision."

Related Characters: The Man with the Red Eyes (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 135

Explanation and Analysis

In this sinister scene, The Man with the Red Eyes is trying to convince the characters to stop resisting and conform to the norms of Camazotz. While he frames this as a way for them to find happiness, it is clear that the presence of these nonconforming people is a threat to The Man with the Red Eyes. L'Engle gives the man a soothing and delicate voice to stress, again, the disjunction between appearance and reality and the importance of looking to the essence of things rather than relying on their superficial appearance for judgment.

This scene is also symbolic of the general conflict of the book. Here, The Man with the Red Eyes is offering the characters easy happiness and freedom from pain in exchange for their cooperation. While what he promises sounds wonderful (much like erasing your individuality to become popular at school), the reality is obviously much more complicated. The characters have to learn the value of their individuality and the power of love in order to discern good from evil and defeat The Black Thing.

☝ Now the red eyes and the light above seemed to bore into Charles, and again the pupils of the little boy's eyes contracted. When the final point of black was lost in blue he turned away from the red eyes, looked at Meg, and smiled sweetly, but the smile was not Charles Wallace's smile.

Related Characters: The Man with the Red Eyes (speaker), Charles Wallace Murry

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 146

Explanation and Analysis

This is one of the most concrete examples in the book of the disconnection between appearance and reality. This scene, in which Charles Wallace's body is physically present but his personality is gone shows that Charles Wallace's essence is something that is entirely separate from how he appears. To confront this version of Charles Wallace is a challenge to these characters because it seems to them to be Charles Wallace, but they have to remember that this version of him is not who he truly is.

This scene also shows the unreliability of language. The possessed Charles Wallace tries to rationally convince Meg and Calvin that they need to conform to Camazotz. While

the argument seems reasonable and is coming from someone who looks like a trusted person (Charles Wallace), it is crucial that the characters remember that there is a truth that this version of Charles Wallace is obscuring. They cannot listen to his words no matter how compelling they seem.

Chapter 8 Quotes

☝ "I'm different, and I like being different." Calvin's voice was unnaturally loud.

"Maybe I don't like being different," Meg said, "but I don't want to be like everybody else, either."

Related Characters: Calvin O'Keefe, Meg Murry (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 155

Explanation and Analysis

Meg was introduced in Chapter 1 as someone suffering from her differences. She did not appreciate her unique talents and personality because they separated her from her peers and she thought she would be happier if she were more popular. Calvin, who knows the loneliness of popularity that comes from stifling his individuality, has a more nuanced perspective on difference – all he wants is to find people who are able to relate to him as he is rather than accept him for who he isn't.

This scene is a turning point for Meg in which she is beginning to see that it's better for her to be who she is than try to be someone else. She's not yet willing to embrace that she is different – she says that maybe she doesn't "like being different" – but she is able to articulate for the first time that she doesn't want to be like everyone else. Seeing the extreme conformity on Camazotz has given her perspective on the blessings that she has been given, which she had initially seen as a curse.

☝ "Nobody suffers here," Charles intoned. "Nobody is ever unhappy."

"But nobody's ever happy, either," Meg said earnestly. "Maybe if you aren't unhappy sometimes you don't know how to be happy."

Related Characters: Charles Wallace Murry, IT (speaker), Meg Murry

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 157

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Charles Wallace's body (though not him as a person, as his essence is different than his appearance) is trying to talk Meg and Calvin into submitting to the conformity of Camazotz. He does this by offering the kind of easy happiness that The Man with the Red Eyes offered. This is a moment in which Meg is beginning to realize that the kinds of easy solutions that she craves are not always the correct ones (in contrast to math, which she is so good at).

She begins to understand that happiness and unhappiness are linked – you can't have one without the other because they exist in relation to one another. In a way, this is another case of deceptive appearances. The Man with the Red Eyes promises that everyone is happy on Camazotz and there is no suffering or pain. However, even if people on Camazotz were always happy, that happiness would lose its meaning in the absence of all different kinds of emotions. In other words, just like it's important to have many different kinds of people in the world, it is also important to have many different emotions.

Chapter 9 Quotes

☝☝ 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."

Related Characters: Calvin O'Keefe (speaker), Charles Wallace Murry

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 163

Explanation and Analysis

In this scene, Calvin is trying to pull Charles Wallace back from the brink of submitting fully to IT. To do so, Calvin quotes from Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*, a passage that Mrs. Who gave him as her parting gift when she left them on Camazotz. The passage is directly relevant to the situation that the characters are in. It's about Ariel refusing to obey the commands of his master, and Calvin hopes that Ariel's courage will inspire Charles Wallace.

On a broader level, though, the Shakespeare passage almost

succeeds in bringing Charles Wallace back from IT not simply because of its literal content, but because it is a work of art. L'Engle has repeatedly emphasized that art strikes out against conformity, because in order to create art the artist has to fully embrace his or her individuality. Art is an enemy on Camazotz because it celebrates individuality and encourages critical thought.

☝☝ "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!"

Related Characters: Charles Wallace Murry, Meg Murry, IT (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 177

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Meg is reciting the Declaration of Independence in order to fight off IT. She believes that this document can be an effective weapon against IT because it is the foundational document of a society built on individuality and freedom of expression. When she says that "all men are created equal," though, IT tries to manipulate those words by twisting them to support IT's point of view.

However, when he tells Meg that everyone on Camazotz is equal because they are exactly alike, Meg recognizes that this is nonsense, and she tells him that "like and equal are not the same." This is important growth in Meg's character – at the beginning of the book, Meg would have liked to be like everyone else. However, now that she has seen the dystopian society on Camazotz, she understands that her values need to change to embrace nonconformity.

Chapter 10 Quotes

☝☝ "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!...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.

Related Characters: Meg Murry (speaker), Mr. Murry

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 190

Explanation and Analysis

At this point in the book, Meg, Calvin, and Mr. Murry have tessered away from Camazotz and materialized on another planet. When Meg realizes that Charles Wallace is not with them she loses her temper at her father, whom she blames for everything that has gone wrong. Though Meg has come very far in understanding the importance of nonconformity and accepting (even embracing) her own eccentricities, she is still failing at the most important thing, love.

In *A Wrinkle in Time*, love for the self (which means being true to individuality) and love for others are the two most important forces for good in the world. Meg is doing better at the former than the latter in this passage – she's still not able to empathize with her father, forgive his shortcomings, and love him for exactly who he is. This failure of love is described as being "in the power of the Black Thing," which shows that L'Engle equates evil not simply with bad intentions, but even with the failure to love fully.

☞ "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."

Related Characters: Mr. Murry (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 190

Explanation and Analysis

This is one of the most explicit appeals to Christianity in the book. At this point, Meg, Calvin, and Mr. Murry have tessered away from Camazotz. They were forced to leave Charles Wallace behind, and this passage is Mr. Murry's response to Meg's misdirected fury. Mr. Murry does not instruct Meg to love him more or forgive his shortcomings, but rather to love God in general. This is reminiscent of L'Engle's statement that Meg, when she was furious with her father, was in the grip of The Black Thing.

For L'Engle, good/evil and love/hate are abstract forces with concrete implications. Being filled with love for God is, in practice, the same as loving the individual people in your life. In the book, being filled with love for God is also how you fight The Black Thing, which manifests in everyday life as meanness and bitterness. This chapter, in particular,

illuminates L'Engle's idea of opposed cosmic forces for good and evil that individuals can choose between. Being loving to others, then, serves a higher purpose.

Chapter 11 Quotes

☞ It was a music more tangible than form or sight...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.

Related Characters: Meg Murry

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 204

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Aunt Beast has been trying to help Meg understand the importance of love. Finally, Aunt Beast ends up embodying love and singing Meg to sleep with an indescribable song. Meg's interactions with Aunt Beast are reminiscent of her first interactions with The Mrs. W's – Meg judged them negatively based on their appearances and then began to understand that, regardless of how they look, they are forces for good. This is one of many examples of L'Engle's insistence that appearance and essence are unrelated.

This passage is also a powerful example of L'Engle's insistence that love must transcend rational language and understanding. Here, Meg has tried and failed to explain sight to Aunt Beast, who is blind. Meg winds up understanding that sight is a sense that can conceal as much as it reveals, since it shackles a person to a particular conception of the universe. Meg learns that it is not important to teach Aunt Beast about sight. By accepting this, Meg shows a newfound humility in the face of the universe's mysteries, and she also opens herself up to receive love from Aunt Beast that comes in the form of a song she can't understand.

☞ "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!"

Related Characters: Calvin O'Keefe (speaker), Mrs. Whatsit, Mrs. Who, Mrs. Which

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 210

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Meg is trying to explain to the beasts who the Mrs. W's are. Again, Meg's dependence on rationally describing their appearance leads her astray. For one, the beasts lack sight so this description is meaningless to them. More important, as L'Engle has repeatedly emphasized, appearance has nothing to do with essence, so a description focused on appearance is a poor representation of who somebody actually is.

Calvin – somebody whose strength has always been communication, and whose personal experiences have led him to understand the gulf between appearance and essence – has more success by describing the Mrs. W's as embodiments of good, or angels. It's important that Calvin uses the word "angels" to describe them, since the reference is explicitly Christian. While Christianity has hovered around the edges of the book, L'Engle has generally been careful to frame the moral conflict of the book in more general terms ("The Black Thing" rather than "satan," for example). Here, she is explicitly using a Christian term to describe fighters for good. It's unclear whether she means this as a metaphor or whether the Mrs. W's are literally angels, but it certainly makes it clear that Christianity is the underlying idea in the cosmology of the book.

Chapter 12 Quotes

☝ "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."

Related Characters: Calvin O'Keefe, Mrs. Whatsit (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 219

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Meg has gone to Camazotz to try to save Charles Wallace. Calvin, scared about what will happen to them, is struggling with what he perceives to be the incompatibility between the ideas of fate and free will. If

something is fated in the universe, how can an individual still have free choice in the decisions he or she makes? Mrs. Whatsit, then, gives a lovely metaphor of sonnets – poems with a strict form and rhyme scheme. Despite the constraints of the form, individual sonnets have different words, ideas, and meanings within them. Human beings, Mrs. Whatsit seems to be saying, operate within a predetermined form, but we have choices about what to do within that form. This stands in opposition to the people of Camazotz, who live within a form, too, but who do not have choices within that form, since they must all be alike.

This is a lovely way to understand L'Engle's ideas of the relationship between the struggle of good vs. evil, and the importance of nonconformity. Sonnets would be neither interesting nor powerful if they were all alike – and people are the same. In order to further the good of the universe, a person must make individual choices, or else he or she gives up his or her innate power. Without this power, evil would reign like it does on Camazotz.

☝ 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.

Related Characters: Meg Murry (speaker), Charles Wallace Murry, IT

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 229

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Meg is alone on Camazotz fighting IT to save Charles Wallace. It is here that she finally realizes the power and importance of love. In previous attempts to save Charles Wallace, the characters focused on individuality, reciting the Declaration of Independence, for instance, in order to set him free. While these attempts nearly worked, none was powerful enough to combat IT. In this final attempt, Meg realizes that the only force powerful enough to combat IT is love, since love is something that IT lacks entirely. Meg realizes that she must abandon all commitment to rationality and focus simply on loving her brother, which she does successfully.

This is the ultimate vindication of the power of love, as L'Engle posits that love is literally the only force in the universe that can combat evil. The arc of the book suggests that the embrace of love comes in several forms – first is

love of the self, which includes accepting one's own nonconformity, and second is turning that love outward to others. As the book's characters demonstrate, this kind of

love is contagious, in that it teaches the recipients of love to love themselves and others in turn.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

On a dark and stormy night, teenager Meg Murry is lying in her bed. It's not only the stormy weather that's keeping her awake—she can't stop thinking about how much of a misfit she is at school, and she can barely think about her father (who's been missing for a year) without crying. There have also been tales of a tramp on the loose who stole the constable's wife's sheets—and this is just the kind of night for a tramp to be wandering around. The weather and her gloominess send her down to the kitchen in search of hot cocoa, where she finds her five-year-old brother, Charles Wallace, waiting for her.

Charles Wallace is another cause of Meg's concern. He's unusually intelligent (not surprising, as both their parents are brilliant), but he also has a strange sense of intuition with which he can tell how Meg and her mother are feeling. He's bullied because he's different and Meg, who loves him fiercely, will try to beat up anyone who makes snide comments about him. Just this afternoon she got into a fight with an older boy who did exactly that. She wishes she were more like her younger twin brothers, Sandy and Dennys, who are nice and normal and are never criticized by anyone at school.

Anticipating her thoughts, Charles has already put some hot milk on the stove for Meg. As they chat and make sandwiches for themselves, Mrs. Murry joins them. She's almost extravagantly beautiful—unlike Meg, who is plain with mousy brown hair—and loves her children tenderly. As she takes a look at a bruise that Meg got earlier that day from getting in a fight, she gently tells her daughter, "A happy medium is something I wonder if you'll ever learn."

Suddenly, their dog, Fortinbras, growls at the door (it's still storming furiously outside), and Mrs. Murry goes out to investigate, bringing back in an old woman covered in an absurd amount of brightly colored clothing. Charles seems to know her and calls her Mrs. Whatsit. Meg is very suspicious of her, considering her strange clothes and the time of night, but makes her a sandwich as well nonetheless.

While her missing father provides ample reason for Meg to be upset, she seems almost more unhappy about being a misfit at school because she doesn't accept that her differences are good and loveable and ought to be embraced.



Although Meg loves Charles and values his differences, she still wishes that they could both be normal like their twin brothers, Sandy and Dennys. She doesn't yet realize how good the differences are that she and Charles have been endowed with, or the importance of difference in general.



Meg also hasn't yet come to appreciate what a wonderful thing it is to have a mother who loves her the way she is and who tries to guide her towards a proper acceptance of herself.



Fortinbras is actually a character from Shakespeare's [Hamlet](#), the first of many classical allusions in this book. Also, judging Mrs. Whatsit from her weird looks, she's a crazy old woman, but she will prove to be something altogether more interesting and powerful.



As Mrs. Murry calmly helps Mrs. Whatsit to take her water-filled boots off, Mrs. Whatsit reveals out of the blue that she was the "tramp" that stole the constable's wife's sheets, and furthermore, that there is such a thing as a "tesseract". While Charles and Meg have no idea what this means, Mrs. Murry turns white and murmurs to herself, "How could she have known?" With that, Mrs. Whatsit disappears back out into the night.

Mrs. Whatsit continues to defy expectations of what she knows and is capable of doing, introduces a word into the lives of the Murry children that will change their lives, and which clearly betrays her own deeper knowledge of what has been going on with the Murry family.



CHAPTER 2

The next morning, Meg tries to understand what happened the night before, hoping it was a dream, but Mrs. Murry steadily tells her that "one thing I've learned is that you don't have to understand things for them to be." The twins roll their eyes at how worked up Meg gets about some things, and Sandy tells her that she should use a happy medium with her feelings more often.

This is the first of many lessons given to Meg by her mother, as well as other wise people in the novel, that show her that there are some things that we limited human beings simply can't understand, and also that there are some things that are so profound that they simply can't be understood the way a math problem can. As such, instead of reacting with impatience, Meg must learn to accept what she can't understand, to value it, rather than ignoring it or denying its existence.



At school, Meg gets sent to the principal's office because of being sulky and belligerent in class. Mr. Jenkins, the principal, tries to convince her to give up her bad attitude but also somewhat nosily asks if she knows where her father is, even suggesting that she ought to stop hoping he's going to return. Meg tells him that she'll believe her father isn't coming home when her mother says so.

Mr. Jenkins can't comprehend Meg's implicit trust in her parents and in the love between her father and mother. His is the voice of skepticism, doubting that such a thing as true love can exist and implying that Mr. Murry has really just abandoned his wife and children.



When she returns home, Meg finds Charles waiting for her with a snack, Fortinbras on a leash, and a plan to go visit Mrs. Whatsit (who is staying, it turns out, in the haunted house not far from their property). Meg reluctantly agrees to go with him, and as they walk through the forest towards Mrs. Whatsit's house, they discuss Meg's day at school. Charles somehow already knows what happened to her, and shows a lot of love and understanding. When Meg asks him how he always knows what she and her mother are thinking, Charles tells her it's not quite like mind-reading, but more like "being able to understand a sort of language."

Here's another thing Meg will never fully understand: her younger brother's strange ability to know her thoughts and her mother's thoughts. Charles' knowing is a higher form of communication between humans, greater than just normal language. It also enables him to better understand and offer sympathy to his older sister, and Charles' love for Meg is to her invaluable.



As they near Mrs. Whatsit's house, Meg and Charles are surprised to run into a boy from Meg's school: Calvin O'Keefe. Meg only knows him as a talented basketball player a few grades above her who "fits in", just as she doesn't. Calvin is skinny and tall, with orange hair and bright blue eyes. He's in the forest, he reveals, because he had this intuition that he ought to come out to the haunted house. Charles, after staring at Calvin very hard for a while, somehow senses that Calvin is also "different" like himself and Meg and invites him over for dinner afterwards.

The three of them approach the haunted house and don't find Mrs. Whatsit, but instead a friend of hers, Mrs. Who, inside. Mrs. Who is a plump, cheerful little woman with enormous glasses, sewing away at the stolen sheets to make them into ghosts for the haunted house. Mrs. Who often expresses herself by quoting great authors, frequently in different languages. When Charles asks Mrs. Who if she knows Calvin, she says, "He wasn't my idea, Charlise, but I think he's a good one." Mrs. Who then mentions that Mr. Murry needs their help, though it's not yet time, and tells them all to go home to dinner.

As the three of them return to the Murrays house, Meg is thoroughly confused. Charles doesn't know quite what's going on yet but says that he's sure Mrs. Whatsit and Mrs. Who can be trusted. Calvin is happy, feeling as if he's going home for the first time in his life.

CHAPTER 3

Meg and Calvin talk as they walk to the Murrays house, and it's clear that this is the beginning of a close friendship. When they arrive at the Murrays, Mrs. Murry warmly welcomes Calvin as she cooks a stew over a Bunsen burner in her lab, which is attached to the kitchen. Calvin can't believe how lucky Meg is have to a mother like her—his own mother is nowhere near as loving and beautiful. He calls home to tell his mother that he won't be home for dinner, but comments to Meg that he doesn't think his mother would have noticed he was missing dinner even if he hadn't called.

Calvin is another character who defies his appearance: though he is one of the cool, well-liked kids at school, he fits in by hiding his differences so well that Meg would never have known that he too has a special gift for communication and intuition like Charles.



Mrs. Who can't express herself well in the human language, and so she speaks mostly in quotes from great, classical authors, who have already said things so truly and wisely. Though she also looks innocent and maybe a little crazy, she too is nothing like her external appearance.



Like the others, Calvin doesn't understand what's going on, but he does know that his friendship with Meg and Charles is a good thing, so he is happy in that.



Calvin's incredulous reaction upon meeting Mrs. Murry is the first wake-up call to Meg that she is incredibly lucky to have a mother who loves her as Mrs. Murry does. That she is cooking dinner over a Bunsen burner highlights Ms. Murry's own endearing peculiarities. Seeing her mother through Calvin's eyes Meg can appreciate her mother's love for her in a new way.



As they wait for dinner to be ready, Meg explains to Calvin a little bit about her father, and then astounds Calvin by helping him out with his math homework (he's several grades above her). Mrs. Murry explains that Mr. Murry used to play math games with Meg, hence her advanced understanding. Calvin feels absolutely at home with the Murrays, because he's found people who are different the way he is (he too is unusually smart). When he says something about not feeling alone anymore, Meg is surprised, because to her he seemed one of the most popular and well-liked kids at her school. "For all the most unimportant reasons," Calvin replies.

After dinner, Calvin goes upstairs to read Charles a book before goes to bed (Charles requests the Book of Genesis), and Meg tentatively asks her mother if she's upset. Mrs. Murry says yes, because she misses their father so much, and Mrs. Whatsit's mention of the **tesseract** has aggravated it. When Meg presses for a further explanation, her mother tells her that with human limitations, there are just some things that can't be understood. They talk about how Charles can understand more than most people and is very different. When Meg protests that he doesn't look any different, Mrs. Murry gently reminds her that people are more than their appearance: "Charles Wallace's difference isn't physical. It's in essence."

Calvin comes downstairs and takes Meg for a walk outside. He asks her more about her father, and she tells him that he's a brilliant physicist who was working for the government on a top secret project when suddenly, a year ago, they stopped hearing from him, and the government told them he was on a secret and dangerous mission, and that they would let the Murrays know as soon as they heard anything. Calvin alludes to the rumors about her father abandoning their family, but when Meg gets defensive he assures her he never believed the rumors. As tactful as Calvin is trying to be, Meg begins to cry. When she takes her glasses off to wipe her eyes, Calvin quietly tells her to go on wearing her glasses in front of everybody else, because he doesn't want anyone else to know what beautiful eyes she has.

At that moment, Charles Wallace steps out of the shadows and apologizes for interrupting, but tells them that the time has come for them to find Mr. Murry. Mrs. Whatsit and Mrs. Who suddenly appear out of nowhere, and the children then meet their third companion, Mrs. Which, whose voice and appearance are strangely distorted (for her to fully materialize would be too tiring).

Meg begins to realize that fitting in at school isn't the key to happiness; Calvin suppressed his own differences to become one of the cool, accepted kids, and he's miserable. With the Murrays, he's overjoyed to be himself and feels liberated.



Meg, the math whiz, as always wants a clear and final answer, but must learn to curb her impatience and realize that there are limits to what she can understand. The fact that her brilliant scientist mother tells her this as something that she must accept shows how true this must be—science can't explain everything; there aren't always clear answers. Mrs. Murry also needs to remind Meg how unimportant physical appearances are in judging people, as in the case of Charles Wallace.



Friendships like the one between Meg and Calvin (which may blossom into a romance) make the world go 'round: where would these two misfit kids be if they didn't love one another. Receiving love and affirmation from another is so important to happiness in this novel. More importantly, there is an implication here—expressed more fully later in the novel—that love is only possible when people are different, that love is a kind of bridge that forms between and because of difference.



The children can't even fully see Mrs. Which, another barrier to understanding her, but she is the wisest of all the Mrs. W's. As with Charles, it is not her appearance but her essence that matters.



CHAPTER 4

A moment ago, Meg was standing with Calvin and Charles in the backyard of their house. Now, all of sudden, she is whipped into nothingness. All is dark, and she can't feel her body. Then feeling in her body slowly begins to return, and she hears but cannot see Calvin and Charles. They all seem to be trying to push through this barrier back into reality, and Meg is the last one to break through.

Senses returned to them, they find themselves standing in a beautiful field in springtime (it was very much autumn in the Murry's village) with a tall mountain in the background. Mrs. Whatsit and Mrs. Who materialize nearby, and Mrs. Which appears as a shimmery witch, which Mrs. Whatsit and Mrs. Who find hilarious. The children are rather cross as there has been no explanation about what is going on, so Mrs. Whatsit explains the situation a bit: the life of Mr. Murry, and of much more, is at stake. They're currently standing on a planet outside Earth's galaxy, and they got there by a **tesseract**, which is a way to travel instantaneously through space and time.

At this point, at Mrs. Which's command, Mrs. Whatsit shape-shifts into her real form. She is not a funny old woman, but a magnificent winged horse more beautiful and noble than can be imagined. Calvin falls to his knees, but Mrs. Whatsit sternly commands him to rise. The three children clamber onto her back, and they take flight.

As they fly over a group of creatures just like Mrs. Whatsit, they hear them making a beautiful music whose song Mrs. Whatsit roughly translates into their human language as a passage from Isaiah: "Sing unto the Lord a new song..." The children feel a great peace and joy.

As they fly higher, the children are given oxygen-omitting flowers so they can breathe in the thinning atmosphere. Mrs. Whatsit reaches the top of the mountain, and the children disembark to gaze at the stars above, whose light seems to be dimmed by a dark, terrifying shadow. When they return to the ground, Meg asks Mrs. Which if that **Black Thing** is what her father is fighting.

Meg is plunged into the bizarre feeling of a tesseract, something beyond her mental comprehension but which is nonetheless a physical reality for her. It is interesting that it is hardest for Meg to break through, as she is the one who always wants easy answers.



Mrs. Which appearing as a "witch" was obviously her idea of a joke and a play on words, a sign of how human language is just a plaything to the Mrs. W's. Her appearance as a witch is not representative of the being she actually is.



Here, the deceiving nature of outward appearances really hits home with the children: Mrs. Whatsit, the clumsy and ridiculously-dressed old woman, is actually the most beautiful creature one could possibly imagine.



Though they are no longer on Earth and though neither the children nor the Mrs. W's have made any mention of being the Christian, the indescribably beautiful song of the creatures on this planet translates best into a Biblical verse from Isaiah. While this does not suggest that the Mrs. W's are Christian, it does suggest that the Bible expresses truths in ways that are universal.



Although in the case of Meg, Calvin, Charles, and Mrs. Whatsit, appearances are deceiving, the children are shown the Black Thing in a very visual way in order for them to understand it. Still, since it is only a shadow, it is difficult to see, and in that sense is immaterial.



CHAPTER 5

Mrs. Which reveals that Mr. Murry has been captured and is behind the dark shadow. And they are going to get to him by **tesseracting**. Mrs. Whatsit then explains to Meg what a tesseract is: it's like a wrinkle in time and space, where you simply bring two spots in space and time together and cross over from one to the other. When Charles and Calvin understand her explanation but Meg doesn't, Charles gives Meg a more mathematical explanation, likening the tesseract to the fifth dimension (with helpful diagrams included in the book). She understands a little more.

Then the group once more **tesser**s. This time, it's an even more painful experience, since the Mrs. W's accidentally take them to a two-dimensional planet (on which the children can't survive, as they're three-dimensional creatures), but a few seconds later they're whooshed off to another planet in Orion's belt. As they cross a nondescript plain and enter a dark stone cavern, Mrs. Whatsit explains that they're there to visit the Happy Medium. The Medium looks rather like a fortune-teller with a crystal ball, but she shows the children the planet Earth, which seems to have a "smoky haze" over it. This, as the children can guess, is the same **Black Thing** they saw covering the stars earlier.

When Calvin demands to know exactly what that dark shadow is, Mrs. Which tells him that it is Evil, the powers of darkness—and that they are going to continue to fight it. The battle against evil is being fought all over the universe, and some of the best fighters for the good have come from Earth. When Charles asks who, Mrs. Who smilingly quotes from the Gospel of John, "And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not." "Jesus!" Charles Wallace exclaims. And not only Christ, they realize, but also all the great artists, composers, writers, saints, and scientists that have ever existed on earth: Michelangelo, Beethoven, Shakespeare, St. Francis, and Euclid, to name a few.

CHAPTER 6

Next, the children watch the battle between a star and the darkness in the ball of the Happy Medium. The star, in a great burst of light, gives its life to destroy the Darkness in a part of the galaxy. Mrs. Which reveals that that is what Mrs. Whatsit did: she was once a star, and gave her life in the battle against **the Black Thing**, and is a star no longer. All the children look at Mrs. Whatsit with a new sense of respect and love.

The author makes use of diagrams and drawings in the book to visually explain to the reader what a tesseract is. So visualizations are sometimes the best way to understand concepts...just not people.



How ironic that Meg meets the Happy Medium as a character, since both her mother and her brother have told her that she needs to find a happy medium to sort out her own feelings. The Happy Medium shows the children both bad things (Earth covered in the Darkness) and good things (a star fighting the Darkness), balancing out their perspective and ultimately making it a hopeful one.



Evil is directly personified as the Black Thing. And similarly, there are concrete people who are the top fighters for the good: first and foremost, Jesus Christ. The author's Christian beliefs clearly come to the forefront here. But then other great non-Christian writers and thinkers of mankind are mentioned as fighters for the good, so the author is not limited to an only-Christian view of good in the world, and Jesus is equated with others who have been called geniuses but never gods.



Similar to Christ's sacrifice, Mrs. Whatsit gave her own life as a star to destroy the Darkness.



As a parting gift, the Medium shows the children their mothers; this turns out to be not as happy a thing as she had thought, for when they see Calvin's mother, she is unkempt and beating one of Calvin's younger siblings, and Mrs. Murry is sitting in her lab, writing to Mr. Murry like she does every night, and eventually puts her face in her hands, showing the unhappiness that she doesn't allow to show in front of her children. As sad as this sight is, Meg is only inspired even more to fight **the Black Thing** and rescue her father.

The three Mrs. W's and the three children then leave the Happy Medium, and **tesseract** to Camazotz, the dark planet on which Mr. Murry is held captive. This time, the **tesseract** is painfully cold and dark as they must pass through the Darkness to get to the planet. On Camazotz, the children find themselves standing on a hill outside a town, which looks like any normal town on Earth.

Mrs. Whatsit tells the children that she cannot come with them in search of Mr. Murry; they are on their own here. However, she gives them three "gifts": to Calvin, his unusual ability to communicate, to Meg, her faults, and to Charles, his childhood. Mrs. Who, who, like Mrs. Which, wasn't able to materialize fully on Camazotz, gives Calvin a quote from Shakespeare's [The Tempest](#) which begins, "For that he was a spirit too delicate / To act their earthy and abhorr'd commands..." To Charles, Mrs. Who gives a quote from Goethe, a reminder that he does not know everything. To Meg, she gives her glasses, to be used only in grave danger. Mrs. Which gives all three of them her command: to go down into the town and to stay together, no matter what. Then the Mrs. W's disappear, and the three children go down into the town.

As Meg, Charles, and Calvin walk through the neighborhood on the outskirts, they notice that every house is exactly the same. The children outside the houses play ball and jump rope in rhythm with the actions of all the others. Then all the mothers come out of their houses at the same time, clap their hands, and the children proceed inside. It's strangely robotic. There is one boy who remains, however, who wasn't bouncing his ball in rhythm with all the rest, and his mother upon seeing him rushes outside and brings him in. Picking up the ball that the boy has just dropped, Charles Wallace goes to knock on that family's door. The mother opens the door and seems very frightened, and tells him that all her papers are in order and that nothing should be wrong. The three children leave her and keep walking towards the center of town.

Meg's deep love for her mother inspires her all the more to go forth on this quest to save her father from the Black Thing. She also appreciates her own mother all the more after seeing Calvin's dirty, not-so-kind mother (though one ought not to judge off appearances).



Meg knows that they are passing through Evil to get to Camazotz because of how much more awful the tesseract feels: the painful feelings she describes are another way of knowing evil. Also, Camazotz literally sounds like a perverted Camelot, the legendary city of the King Arthur myth, as in Camazotz is the perfect city gone wrong.



*Except for Mrs. Who's glasses, the gifts of the Mrs. W's to the children consist mostly of words and quotes, a testament to the power of words and especially great words written by great artists. The specific gifts themselves are also meaningful. The quote from *The Tempest* is about how the spirit Ariel refuses to follow the vicious commands of Caliban and his mother Sycorax, a quote that shows how an individual can resist the control of those attempting to wield power over him. The quote for Charles is a reminder that despite his special gifts he is not all powerful and should be careful—a quote he fails to heed when confronting the man with the red eyes. And Meg's gift is the gift of sight, of seeing clearly, something that Meg in her desire for quick easy answers doesn't always do.*



Everyone looks like normal human beings on Camazotz, but they sure don't act like normal beings. There is total conformity: everyone looks the same and acts the same. At first this seems odd, then a bit unnerving. But the mother's nervousness about the boy who doesn't conform shows that the conformity is enforced, and a failure to conform carries some kind of significant punishment. The woman seems afraid of any human interaction, as shown in her response to Charles Wallace. There is no actual humanity or connection here—conformity destroys it.



A paper boy on his bike passes them, throwing every newspaper exactly the same way, and he suspiciously stops them and asks them what they're doing out. When Charles asks him about this city, the boy tells him that it has the highest production levels on the planet, that there has been no trouble there for centuries, and that is the location of CENTRAL Central Intelligence, where IT makes ITs home. The children have no idea what any of that means, but the boy directs the children towards the CENTRAL Central Intelligence center, and they head toward it.

Eventually they come to an enormous building which must be the CENTRAL Central Intelligence. Adults are going in and out in a mechanical manner, paying no attention to the children. As Charles tries to mentally probe them a bit, he becomes sure that they're not robots because they have minds, but their minds are all pulsing in the same way. He becomes frightened once he realizes he can't get through to them at all. After an argument about whether or not they ought to go in, especially if this is the place of danger where Mr. Murry is being kept, the three decide to go in together. Charles is worried that he won't recognize his father after not seeing him for a year, but Meg reassures him. Calvin says he's having another one of his intuitions, another compulsion (like the one he had when he first met them), that if they go inside the building they'll be in terrible danger. But they realize they have no choice.

CHAPTER 7

Meg, Charles, and Calvin enter the building. Inside, they ask a man how to see whoever's in charge, and when he finds out they don't have the right papers, he regretfully tells them that he'll have to report them for reprocessing (which, from his words, sounds like a painful experience). He mutters something about how he doesn't want to get in trouble and have to see IT. He feeds some papers into a wall, and the wall suddenly disappears to give way to a huge machine room. The children begin walking through that, and find themselves after a long while in front of a man with red eyes in a chair on a platform.

As soon as they are near him, Charles begins to feel something trying to take over his mind, but he is able to resist. The man with red eyes is able to communicate with them without opening his mouth: the children simply hear a kind and gentle voice in their brains, though Meg senses with fear the presence of **the Black Thing** in him. The man's eyes have a strange red glow, and there's a light above his head that glows and pulses in a hypnotizing rhythm.

Total conformity on Camazotz means total efficiency— it's worth noting that all of this sounds a bit like Communism, where everyone is the same and production (a word Karl Marx, founder of communism, like to use) is at optimum levels. This is also the introduction of IT, which is a menacing name for anything in its body-less non-human generality but also is a common acronym for "Information Technology," suggesting the novel may also see conformity as arising from technology, especially as its great "fighters against the dark" are artists and writers.



It's just like Mrs. Murry said about Charles: the difference of these people is not physical, but in essence. The normal human means of understanding people doesn't work here, and neither does Charles' mental gift of understanding people. When everyone is the same, there is nothing to understand.



Camazotz, in all its efficiency, treats people not as unique individuals but as machine parts which must be made all the same. Its use of words like "reprocessing" in terms of handling people again hints at the novel's discomfort with anything—technology or political philosophy, that treats humans as anything other than humans.



Yet another form of communication is introduced to the children on this new planet: a way to talk directly to people's minds. The seeming gentleness of the man's voice in their minds is another kind of deception, and shows that evil does not have to be violent. The glow of the man's eyes and the light pulsing behind him to the general hypnotizing rhythm suggests that the man is himself a kind of avatar, a body that is controlled by another.



The man with red eyes seems to have been expecting Meg and Charles, but not Calvin (who is apparently an unpleasant surprise). Still, he doesn't seem too bothered, and is set on convincing them that they must submit to him. Charles closes his eyes and warns Meg and Calvin that if they look into the man's eyes, he'll hypnotize them. The man is amused and pleasantly tells them that everything will be a lot easier if they don't try to fight him. They will be happy, he goes on, like everyone else on the planet, and will never have to make any decisions for themselves again if they just give in. Charles, at whom most of the man's speech seems to be directed, sharply rejects everything he says. But the man begins reciting the multiplication table in a way that seems to be invading the children's skulls, and to stop it from getting to them, Charles shouts nursery rhymes, Calvin yells the Gettysburg Address, and finally Meg screams, "Father!" It is this that jolts her out the darkness her mind had been falling into. Laughing, the man stops reciting the multiplication tables and tells them that they passed the preliminary test, which apparently was preventing him gaining control of their minds that way.

The man with red eyes seems to be most focused on Charles Wallace, and he invites Charles to mentally probe him to find out who he is. Charles looks into the man's pulsing eyes, and after a while, slowly begins walking towards him. At the last minute, Meg screams as she sees the irises of her brother's eyes disappearing and tackles Charles to the ground, breaking the trance he was in. The man with red eyes is not pleased.

To prove that Charles must be permitted to complete this in order to advance to the next level, the man with red eyes has a synthetic turkey dinner brought out, which tastes delicious to Meg and Calvin but like sand to Charles, because he's blocking the man entirely from accessing his mind. The man can just get through the chinks in Meg's and Calvin's minds to change their idea of taste.

Finally, at the man's insistence that there's no other way for the children to advance to the "next level" except for Charles to mentally probe him, Charles agrees to try to go into the man's mind again, which Meg is not happy about. This time, the irises of Charles' eyes entirely disappear, and his eyes begin to twirl and glow like the man's. Turning to Meg, he speaks to her, but Meg and Calvin instantly realize from his weird smile and the way he talks that this is not Charles.

The man with red eyes offers total conformity to the children, and Meg sees for the first time what that means: not thinking for yourself and not making decisions for yourself, which is clearly a horrific reality on Camazotz. The children must reach back to the culture and traditions of a free country, America, to fight against the conformity the man with red eyes tries to push on them. The freedom of expression in nursery rhymes and in Lincoln's Gettysburg address is an antidote to the poison of the man's language of sameness, as is Meg's invocation of her love for her father.



Charles seems to think he can stand up to the man with red eyes, but the outcome of their interaction shows this isn't true. Charles is overconfident, not heeding the quote from Goethe given to him by Mrs. Who in Chapter 6. Meg's love for her brother causes her to save him from the dangerous hypnotism of the man with the red eyes, even though she had to physically tackle him in the process.



What looks and tastes like a real turkey dinner is actually totally fake, just as the people of Camazotz have the semblance of happiness in uniformity but in fact are just acting out a kind of fake, enforced happiness.



Charles is overconfident in his mental abilities and plunges into IT, foolishly and proudly thinking that he is strong enough to take IT on, understand IT, and emerge unscathed. Based on the Goethe quote from Mrs. Who Charles ought to have recognized that there are limits even to what he can know and understand, that what and how much you know is not enough to fight back against and overcome conformity.



CHAPTER 8

When Meg demands of the man with the red eyes what has happened to the real Charles Wallace, the man innocently protests that he's right there before her. This new Charles speaks in a voice that is his own yet not his own. As he sits down and eats turkey dinner, he tells Meg and Calvin that they were wrong, that the Mrs. W's were their real enemies the whole time. He is colder, crueler, and stronger, and tells them to give in as well, because it's the only way to be happy and to have order.

The man with red eyes asks Charles to bring Meg and Calvin to Mr. Murry, and strangely, Charles now knows his way around the building. The three leave the man with the red eyes, with Charles leading the way down a corridor. Calvin, with his gift of communication, tries to mentally get in to the real Charles (again through eye contact) and almost succeeds until Charles wrenches himself away at the last second.

Charles then lectures them that rather than search for Mr. Murry, Calvin and Meg should give in to IT. He notes how happy everyone is on Camazotz: how no one ever suffers because they kill anyone who is ill, and how everyone is happy because everyone is alike. They enter an elevator, and when Charles makes the point that Meg is unhappy in school because she's different, both Meg and Calvin protest that they'd rather be different than be like everyone else, even if that's hard. When Charles states that all suffering and unhappiness is eliminated on Camazotz, Meg replies, "Maybe if you aren't unhappy sometimes you don't know how to be happy." As they rise up many floors, Charles keeps mentioning IT, who he says is the boss and the one mind that thinks for all the individuals of Camazotz so that individuality no longer exists.

They exit the elevator, and Charles shows them the little boy they saw earlier (who dropped his ball) being tortured so as to know how to play ball in rhythm with everyone else. He's in a cell, whose walls are pulsing, and as he bounces his ball in rhythm with the pulsing of the walls, he screams in pain each time the ball bounces. It's a horrific sight. Finally Charles takes them to a cell, within which is a round, transparent column, within which is...Meg and Charles' father, Mr. Murry.

Though he looks like the real Charles Wallace, the Charles sitting before Meg and Calvin is as fake as the turkey dinner he's eating: his essence has changed. He sees order and sameness as the recipe for happiness, as if happiness comes from lack of surprise. In uniformity there is strength, but the enforcement of uniformity is something cruel and cold.



Calvin's unusual gift for communication nearly knocks IT out of Charles...and he does this simply by staring intently into Charles' eyes, communicating with the real Charles in a way we can't understand.



The uniformity enforced on Camazotz is ruthless. It solves the problem of illness by killing the sick person. It essentially strangles all difference as the way to create order. And it sees this order as happiness. But in the monstrousness of Camazotz both Calvin and Meg begin to learn that their differences and even their unhappiness aren't bad things. Though being different is hard, those differences are what make each of them who they are, and that happiness can only exist if its opposite, its diametrically different emotion of unhappiness didn't exist.



This is what conformity looks like: Torture. Torture can strip away the differences in an individual, make that individual not want to be different and give in to uniformity because difference results in pain. The "reprocessing" mentioned earlier is just a euphemism for this kind of torture.



CHAPTER 9

Meg rushes to her father, but smashes painfully into the cell wall, which she didn't realize was there because it was transparent. Mr. Murry can't seem to hear or see her through the barrier. Charles sniggers, as he isn't going to allow them in, and advises them to give into IT, as he did. Calvin tries one more time to get Charles back: staring into his eyes, he quotes the passage from *The Tempest* that Mrs. Who gave him about Ariel in the cloven pine, and nearly manages to get through to the real Charles. Although Calvin's attempt ultimately fails, Charles seems to be almost injured by this attack, and lies whimpering on the floor.

Suddenly, Meg has an intuition, and puts on Mrs. Who's glasses. With the glasses on, she's able to rearrange the atoms of the cell walls and of her father's column prison, and in a few seconds, she's in the arms of her father. Mr. Murry's hair has grown long and he doesn't seem able to see Meg, though he is overjoyed and surprised at her arrival. She gives him Mrs. Who's glasses, which allow him to see, and, carrying Meg in his arms, Mr. Murry exits the column.

Outside, the Charles Wallace under the control of IT awaits, displeased. Meg briefly introduces her father to Calvin. Mr. Murry then tries to talk Charles, but Charles behaves nastily towards him, and Mr. Murry can't fully grasp the extent to which this Charles isn't the real Charles since Charles changed a lot in the year he was gone. Meg assures her father that Charles is not really this way. Charles then announces that they all must be taken to IT, and commands them to go with him. Mr. Murry is fearful that Meg won't survive such an encounter with IT, but they have no choice, and go along so as not to leave Charles.

Charles leads Meg, his father, and Calvin out of the CENTRAL Central Intelligence building, through nighttime streets, and into a dome-shaped building which has a roof that pulses with a violet light. Inside the building, the pulse is overwhelming, and to Meg it feels like her heart and breathing are forced to match the pulse's rhythm. The building is empty other than a round central platform on which stands IT: a disgusting oversized brain. Its pulsing dictates the rhythm of the whole building, and slowly invades Meg's consciousness.

Calvin's second attempt to get the real Charles back is nearly successful because of a Shakespeare quote. The quote refers to Ariel's refusal to obey the commands of his master Sycorax, and Calvin is trying to get Charles to do the same, to resist the commands of IT who controls his mind. However, the ultimate failure of Calvin's effort that though it is through his mind that Charles was overcome by IT, it's not another mind that can save him...



Mrs. Who's glasses seem to symbolize clarity, the ability to see. They may also suggest the strength in difference, even in differences that are usually perceived as weaknesses, such as the need for glasses. Meg throwing herself in her father's arms and handing over the glasses indicates that she has imagined her father as a savior; she believes that if she could just free him that he would do the rest to "save the day." In this way she is still a child, with a romantic view of her father. But Mr. Murry's inability to see at all before she gives him the glasses suggests that her expectation is mistaken.



As brilliant as he is, Mr. Murry is faced with a problem his intellect can't solve: his own son, whom he can't understand because he has not been able to know and love Charles for the past year in the way that Meg has. From being away for so long Mr. Murry does not know Charles's essence, and cannot therefore the fakeness of this IT-controlled Charles.



A brain is usually seen as the epitome of knowledge and thought, of rationality. That IT is an evil entity suggests the dangers of total devotion to rationality, that pure rationality seeks to make everything rational, but in a world where everything isn't rational that desire to install rationality is in fact just a kind of tyranny, the elimination of anything non-rational or different. And the pulsing of the brain shows that effort to control others.



Mr. Murry shouts that they must not give into IT's efforts to control them with its pulses. To try and fight it off, Meg yells the opening lines of the Declaration of Independence. But when she says "that all men are created equal", IT, using Charles as mouthpiece, tells her that on Camazotz everyone is equal, everyone is alike. In a moment of clarity Meg is able to protest that "alike" and "equal" are not the same thing. She then tries reciting the periodic table of elements and reciting the square roots of irrational numbers with her father to keep out IT's rhythm, but IT is becoming too much for her. Calvin shouts for Mr. Murry to **tesser** them away, Mr. Murry grabs their wrists and does so. The tessering is so painful that Meg loses consciousness.

Meg and the others seek to ward off IT's control with quotes from great human documents that speak of liberty, but IT is able to meet such logical thoughts with logic of its own—though Meg realizes from IT's logic how awful it truly is for the people of Camazotz, who have been forced into sameness. The periodic table of the elements is too regular, too organized to offer a way to escape IT's control. Square roots of irrational numbers follow no natural order—they are seemingly random strings of digits, and so in shouting them Meg and Mr. Murry seek to combat order with disorder, rationality with irrationality. But it is still an effort to combat thought with thought, and in their failure the novel suggests that thought is not enough to defeat the pure, cold, overwhelming rationality of IT.



CHAPTER 10

As Meg slowly regains consciousness, she feels like her whole body is one huge chunk of ice. She can't see, she can't feel, and she can just barely hear her father explaining to Calvin, as the two of them try to revive her, how he ended up on Camazotz. It turns out it was never his intention to **tesser** to Camazotz—along with some other scientists he was trying to tesser to Mars, but he now sees that humans know barely anything about the **tesseract**. He adds that he was about to lose hope and give in to IT when the children rescued him.

Moving through the Black Thing eliminates sensation in Meg, her ability to interact with and feel the beauty of the world. Mr. Murry's comments about the tesseract again emphasize the limits of knowledge, and the dangers of trying to assert control over that which isn't known or can't be known.



Meg eventually regains her vision and her speech, and she sees that they are on a dull gray plain bordered by dull gray trees, and that Charles Wallace isn't with them. She instantly becomes very upset with her father for leaving her brother. She accuses him of not loving Charles and of being an incompetent father, even though Calvin and her father try to explain to her that if they'd tried to rip Charles from the clutches of IT by **tessering** with him, it might have destroyed his mind. Her main disappointment is in her father: she was so sure once they found him that everything would be all right, that he would save them all. He responds that he is only a fallible man, and that "all things work together for the good to them that love God". Meg is not consoled.

Meg's love for Charles Wallace is fierce and that they failed to save Charles fills her with rage. But she aims this anger at others, blaming them, and in the process revealing how simplistic her ideas still are. She wants to just save Charles; but her method for saving him would have killed him. It's not so simple. Meg's anger also reveals in full her childish conception of her father—a conception many children share—that he is some kind of savior or super-being who can just make things right. His failure to do so devastates her. His response admits the truth: that he is just a normal man. Yet at the same time his quote (from St. Paul's letter to the Romans) suggests the Christian idea at love of God—whatever God may be—can create a kind of greater-than-man force that works for goodness. Meg is not ready to hear it.



Suddenly, three creatures emerge from the trees and approach them. They are tall, walk upright, have four arms, and tentacles in the place of fingers, ears, and hair; Meg is utterly revolted by their appearance. Calvin begins to introduce themselves and explain their situation, when one of them touches Meg, which somehow eases her pain tremendously (though she still hurts very much and feels frozen). The creature then picks her up.

Meg's disgusted response to the beasts, which then reduce her terrible pain, against suggests that appearances are deceiving. Actions, caring, love are what define goodness.



CHAPTER 11

Though Mr. Murry is at first against it, he consents to allowing these beasts to take Meg to heal her, since they reveal that they are also fighters against **the Black Thing**. They reveal that it is, in fact, **tessering** through the Black Thing that has caused Meg's injuries. Despite herself, Meg feels calm and safe and healed simply by being in the arms of the beast, and she falls asleep.

When she wakes up, Meg finds herself in a room feeling far better than before, with the beast sitting by her bed. It's very dark in the room, so she asks the beast why there is no light. It turns out that these beasts have no sense of vision, nor do they need it. Meg fumblingly tries to describe what light is and why humans need to see, but the beast is utterly perplexed by her explanations.

Their discussion turns to Charles Wallace, and as soon as Meg begins blaming her father for abandoning him, the beast becomes stern, telling her: "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." The beast then talks of how Meg must first rest and get better before anything is done, and suggests that Meg give the beast—a her—a name that feels appropriate. After some thought, Meg gives the beast the name Aunt Beast, because she has treated her with almost as much love as Meg's own mother. Aunt Beast then sings Meg to sleep, and listening to the indescribable beauty of the music, Meg understands that she herself, not the beasts, is limited by her dependency on sight.

Mr. Murry's reluctance to allow the beasts to take Meg seems to emerge from his dislike of their physical appearance. But communication breaks through that initial sight-based distrust, revealing similarities, common goals, and basic goodness.



The exchange between Meg and the beast plays with ideas of knowing and communication—how does one "understand" or "explain" seeing to someone who doesn't need to see? In Meg's failure to communicate light and seeing comes the realization that these things can't be explained, that they are beyond the simple answers Meg always seeks. Yet there is also a different communication going on as well, which is simply the effort to know each other, the desire to know each other, that permeates Meg's conversation with the beast. There is growing friendship that comes not from the successful bridging of difference but from the mere effort to bridge it.



The beast's stern response to Meg criticizes Meg's desire for easy answers. Meg wants her father to have saved Charles easily, to have just known how to do it, and that he couldn't makes her so upset that she blames him in unfair ways. But the beast's response highlights that there was no easy answer, and that the desire for something doesn't mean you just get it. The beast is helping Meg to grow up. At the same time, the beast treats Meg with love, and that love creates a connection between them. Meg no longer feels revulsion at the beast, and the name she chooses places the beast as being part of her family. Love creates those bonds. Also, once again, the novel depicts Christian ideals extending beyond Earth when Aunt Beast quotes Scripture. The universe's fighters for the good seem to have Scripture as a common reference point.



The next morning, Meg awakens, feeling refreshed. She asks Aunt Beast about what planet they're on; it turns out they're on the planet Ixchel, which is in the same solar system as Camazotz, but which fights against **the Black Thing**. Aunt Beast then takes Meg to an open hall, where Calvin and Mr. Murry and many others of the beasts are eating and waiting for her. As soon as she sees her father, all of Meg's bitterness and disappointment towards him returns in a rush. She tells them all sulkily that their only hope is to call the Mrs. W's. When the beasts ask her to explain who the Mrs. W's are, Meg is so limited by her visual conception of the Mrs. W's that her descriptions only make the beasts confused. Calvin, the talented communicator, explains them somewhat better as angels or messengers of God, but the beasts still don't understand...when suddenly Mrs. Whatsit, Mrs. Who, and Mrs. Which appear!

In Meg's failure to explain the Mrs. W's the novel once again depicts the failings of knowing something by what it looks like, since to do so is not representative of the things' essence. In likening the Mrs. W's to angels, Calvin makes it clear that God is the ultimate representation of good in this universe, or that at minimum the idea of God is an allusion that all beings in the universe can understand.



CHAPTER 12

As in previous times when they've appeared, Mrs. Whatsit, Mrs. Who, and Mrs. Which cannot fully materialize on the beasts' planet. Meg begins complaining to them about her father, but they, who clearly have a lot of respect for Meg's father, will have none of it. Mr. Murry tells them that he is going to try to return to Camazotz to get Charles back, but Mrs. Which tells him that were he to go he would not be successful. Calvin then offers to go, since he almost got through to Charles those few times, but Mrs. Whatsit forbids it, saying that he would have to go so deep into IT to save Charles that Calvin himself would be lost. A silence follows.

In this scene, the respect and love that the Mrs. W's show to Mr. Murry and Calvin in not letting them go to Camazotz and that Mr. Murry and Calvin show for Charles by offering to go by themselves is admirable...only Meg hasn't show this spirit of self-sacrifice coming from love yet.



Meg realizes that she is the one who must rescue Charles. She feels terrified and overwhelmed, bursts into tears, and cries out, "All right, I'll go, I know you want me to go!" To which Mrs. Whatsit sternly replies, "We want nothing from you that you do without grace, or that you do without understanding." And with that sentence, Meg's resentment leaves her. She forgives her father in her heart, and then clearly explains to all of them that she understands it must be her, because she out of all of them knows and loves Charles best.

One of the most important points of the book is that acts of love must be freely given: Meg's going to Camazotz is worthless unless she chooses to do it of her own free will. She matures when she sees that only she can save Charles, and when she chooses to put herself in grave danger out of love for him, not out of a sense of coercion from the Mrs. W's. To act from coercion, without understanding, would be a kind of conformity.



Mr. Murry and Calvin immediately protest Meg going back to Camazotz alone. But they are persuaded when Mrs. Whatsit tells them that she and the Happy Medium have both seen that for Meg to go alone is the only way Charles may be saved, though they don't know what will happen...but they do believe she will succeed, because it is her fate. When Calvin asks if they know what's going to happen, Mrs. Whatsit tells him they don't, because that would be living like the people on Camazotz, with their lives all planned out for them. She explains to a confused Calvin that fate and freedom are compatible, just like a poet is constrained by a certain rhyme and meter in a sonnet but can say whatever he likes in the lines.

The time comes for Meg to leave for Camazotz. She thanks the beasts and Aunt Beast, embraces her father lovingly, and, to her surprise, receives a kiss from Calvin. Again, the Mrs. W's each give Meg a gift for her journey. Mrs. Whatsit simply gives Meg her love, Mrs. Whatsit's love for her. Mrs. Who gives her a quote from Scripture of which the first line is: "The foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men." Mrs. Which then **tessers** with Meg to Camazotz, leaving her on the same spot outside the town at which the children had first arrived, and gives Meg her gift, which is the knowledge that Meg has something that IT does not have...but Mrs. Which says that Meg must be the one to discover what that thing is.

Meg braces herself and sets out for the domed building where IT is waiting. All too soon she arrives, the building sucks her in, and she feels like the wind has been knocked out of her as the overpowering rhythm of IT begins to take over her lungs and heart...but she fights. Even more painful is the sight of Charles, whose blue eyes are still slowly twirling and who is crouching, slack-jawed by IT. When she appears, he begins to speak to her coldly and cruelly, telling her that Mrs. Whatsit is on IT's side and other lies. Meg begins to hate this Charles so much that she begins to be absorbed in IT (who is also all hatred). IT then makes the fatal mistake of telling Meg through Charles that Mrs. Whatsit hates her. Remembering Mrs. Whatsit's gift of her love, Meg immediately denies this, and then in a flash realizes what she has that IT doesn't: love.

There is a sense of Divine Providence in the events of this novel; Mrs. Whatsit and the Medium somehow know ahead of time what will happen, yet Meg must choose all the right things on her own for the events to take place. She is able to have total freedom within those foreseen events because she can always choose which path she goes down. This wrestling match between fate and freedom recalls writings of Boethius and Augustine on how God can know and have power over everything, yet people can still be free.



The gifts from the great Mrs. W's this time are entirely immaterial, emphasizing the power of words and, above all, love: Mrs. Whatsit's gift of her love will prove to be the most important. Mrs. Who's quote from Scripture is another reminder that man's best shot at omnipotence—a giant brain like IT that "knows" everything—is still not as powerful as the foolishness of God, and God is love.



Here, love comes out as the most powerful and redeeming idea and thing in the novel. IT, who is so strong and controlling and all-knowing, lacks one huge thing that a puny teenage girl has: love. IT can't know love because it has nothing to love. IT seeks control and domination, and therefore sees all others with contempt, with hate, as deserving to be controlled. And IT creates sameness and there can be no communication between sameness because there is nothing to share. It is difference that creates the foundation for love, weakness that allows for love, and love is then the respect for those that are different, that are weak in their own ways, and a willingness to trust those others, and to care for them, to want to communicate with them.



Meg stands there, gazing at Charles, and loving him. She focuses not on IT, but on her own brother who she loves more than anything else in the world. She directs her love so powerfully towards Charles that, slowly, IT is forced out of him. And suddenly Charles rushes into her arms, sobbing her name, and, after the abrupt and cold feeling of a **tesseract**, they find themselves back home in the Murry's backyard, along with Calvin and Mr. Murry! The twins and Mrs. Murry come out at once to investigate the ruckus, and they all share a joyful family reunion. Suddenly the Mrs. W's appear, deepening their joy. Mrs. Whatsit apologizes for failing to say goodbye earlier, and mentions that they are already involved in a new mission. But before Mrs. Whatsit can explain what the mission is, there is a gust of wind and all three of them vanish.

In the end it's not Meg's advanced intellect that saves her and Charles, but her tremendous love for Charles. The novel ends with an outpouring of familial love between all the Murrays and Calvin, showing that the triumph of good over evil is effected by family member's love for one another, which is shown to be a wonderful, joyful reality. The presence of the Mrs. W's even at the end is a fitting bookend to their journey together with the Murry children, but also emphasizes how much they are like traveling angels who move on from one mission to the next in the fight against the Black Thing.





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