

Example 2: *A Wrinkle in Time*

Excerpt

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

“Hi,” he said cheerfully. “I’ve been waiting for you.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“I don’t want him to grow up to be dumb like me,” Meg had said.

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

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

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

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

“Yes, some of them.”

"Is my IQ okay?"

"More than okay."

"What is it?"

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

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

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

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

Charles Wallace nodded serenely. "I thought Mother might like some."

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

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

"That would be lovely," Mrs. Murry said, "but I can make it myself if you're busy."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mrs. Murry stroked Meg's shaggy head. "Do you know why?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

"No, thanks."

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

"Who's Mrs. Whatsit?" Meg asked.

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