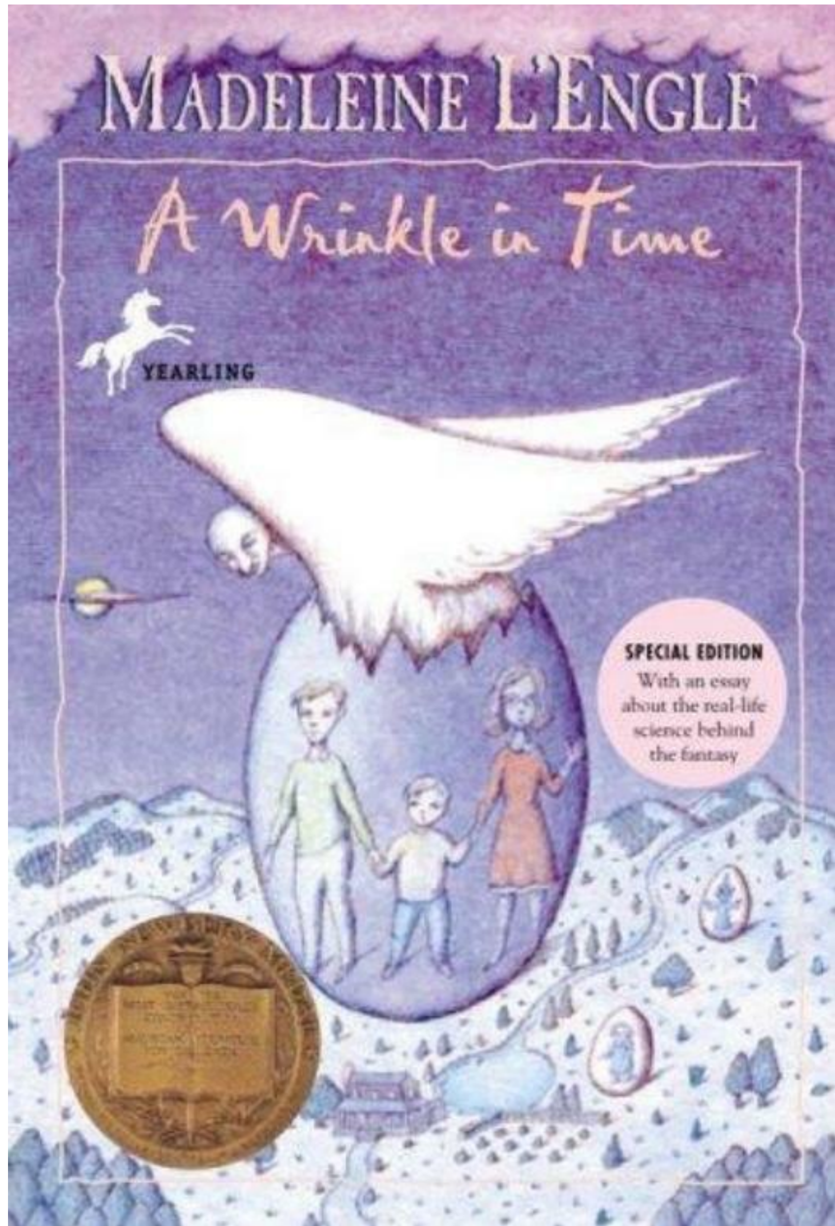


1 Mrs. Whatsit

It was a dark and stormy night.

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

The house shook.

Wrapped in her quilt, Meg shook.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

How could they sleep? All day on the radio there had been hurricane warnings. How could they leave her up in the attic in the rickety brass bed, knowing that the roof might be blown right off the house, and she tossed out into the wild night sky to land who knows where?

Her shivering grew uncontrollable.

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

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

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

The wide wooden floorboards were cold against her feet. Wind blew in the crevices about the window frame, in spite of the protection the storm sash was supposed to offer. She could hear wind howling in the chimneys. From all the way

subsided. The twins didn't have any problems. They weren't great students, but they weren't bad ones, either. They were perfectly content with a succession of B's and an occasional A or C. They were strong and fast runners and good at games, and when cracks were made about anybody in the Murry family, they weren't made about Sandy and Dennys.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Was it because people were a little afraid of him that they whispered about the 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 a skin on top."

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

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

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

"Cocoa," Charles Wallace said. "Would you like a liver-wurst-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?"

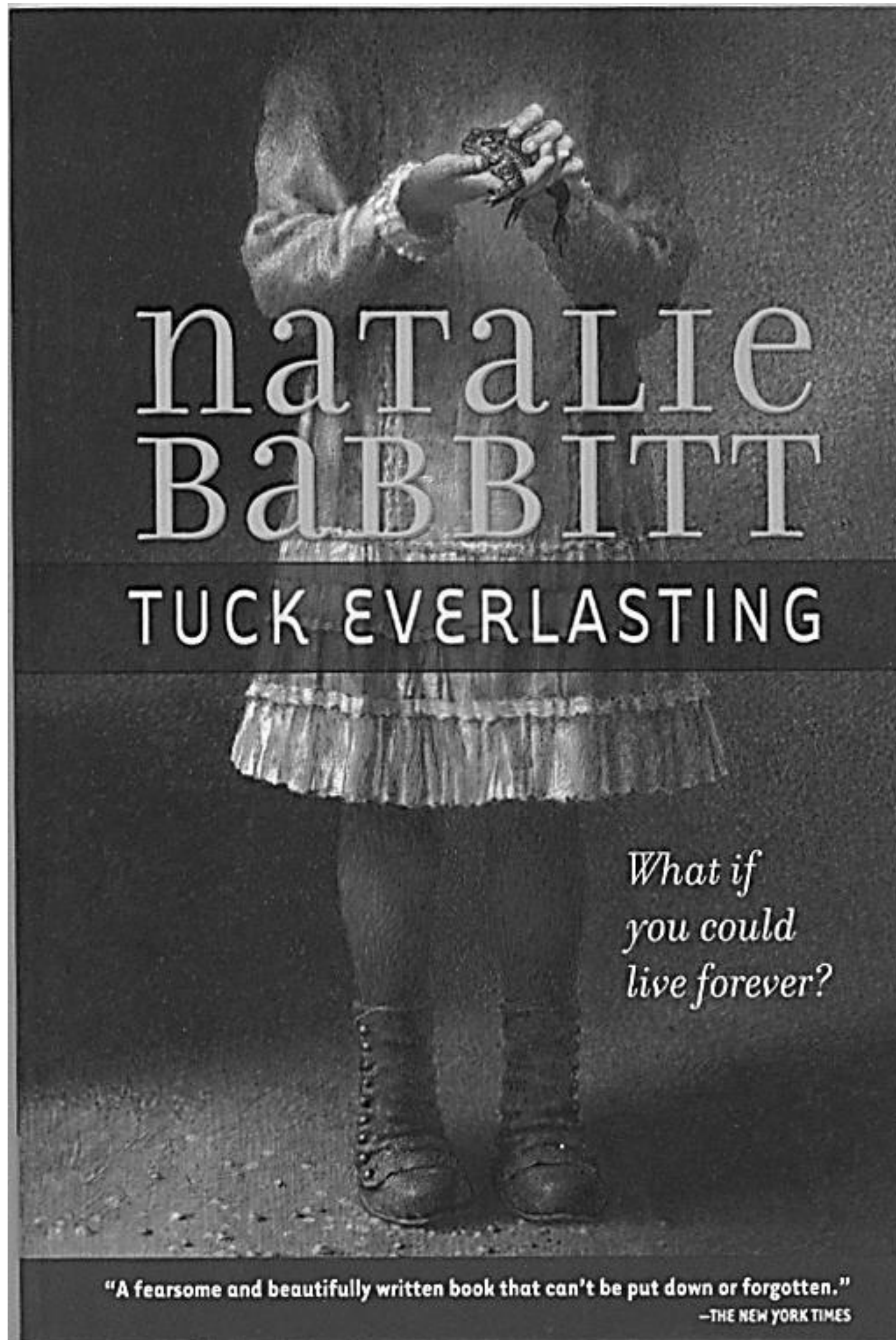
"I hate being an oddball," Meg said. "It's hard on Sandy and Dennys, too. I don't know if they're really like everybody else, or if they're just able to pretend they are. I try to pretend, but it isn't any help."

"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." ^



Prologue

The first week of August hangs at the very top of summer, the top of the live-long year, like the highest seat of a Ferris wheel when it pauses in its turning. The weeks that come before are only a climb from balmy spring, and those that follow a drop to the chill of autumn, but the first week of August is motionless, and hot. It is curiously silent, too, with blank white dawns and glaring noons, and sunsets smeared with too much color. Often at night there is lightning, but it quivers all alone. There is no thunder, no relieving rain. These are strange and breathless days, the dog days, when people are led to do things they are sure to be sorry for after.

One day at that time, not so very long ago, three things happened and at first there appeared to be no connection between them.

At dawn, Mae Tuck set out on her horse for the wood at the edge of the village of Treegap. She was going there, as she did once every ten years, to meet her two sons, Miles and Jesse.

At noontime, Winnie Foster, whose family owned the Treegap wood, lost her patience at last and decided to think about running away.

And at sunset a stranger appeared at the Fosters' gate. He was looking for someone, but he didn't say who.

No connection, you would agree. But things can come together in strange ways. The wood was at the center, the hub of the wheel. All wheels must have a hub. A Ferris wheel has one, as the sun is the hub of the wheeling calendar. Fixed points they are, and best left undisturbed, for without them, nothing holds together. But sometimes people find this out too late.

1

The road that led to Treegap had been trod out long before by a herd of cows who were, to say the least, relaxed. It wandered along in curves and easy angles, swayed off and up in a pleasant tangent to the top of a small hill, ambled down again between fringes of bee-hung clover, and then cut sidewise across a meadow. Here its edges blurred. It widened and seemed to pause, suggesting tranquil bovine picnics: slow chewing and thoughtful contemplation of the infinite. And then it went on again and came at last to the wood. But on reaching the shadows of the first trees, it veered sharply, swung out in a wide arc as if, for the first time, it had reason to think where it was going, and passed around.

On the other side of the wood, the sense of easiness dissolved. The road no longer belonged to the cows. It became, instead, and rather abruptly, the property of people. And all at once the sun was uncomfortably hot, the dust oppressive, and the meager grass along its edges somewhat ragged and forlorn. On the left stood the first house, a square and solid cottage with a touch-me-not appearance, surrounded by grass cut painfully to the quick and enclosed by a capable iron fence some four feet high which clearly said, "Move on—we don't want you here." So the road went humbly by and made its way, past cottages more and more frequent but less and less forbidding, into the village. But the village doesn't matter, except for the jailhouse and the gallows. The first house only is important; the first house, the road, and the wood.

There was something strange about the wood. If the look of the first house suggested that you'd better pass it by, so did the look of the wood, but for quite a different reason. The house was so proud of itself that you wanted to make a lot of noise as you passed, and maybe even throw a rock or two. But the wood had a sleeping, otherworld appearance that made you want to speak in whispers. This, at least, is what the cows must have thought: "Let it keep its peace; we won't disturb it."

Whether the people felt that way about the wood or not is difficult to say. There were some, perhaps, who did. But for the most part the people followed the road around the wood because that was the way it led.

There was no road through the wood. And anyway, for the people, there was another reason to leave the wood to itself: it belonged to the Fosters, the owners of the touch-me-not cottage, and was therefore private property in spite of the fact that it lay outside the fence and was perfectly accessible.

The ownership of land is an odd thing when you come to think of it. How deep, after all, can it go? If a person owns a piece of land, does he own it all the way down, in ever narrowing dimensions, till it meets all other pieces at the center of the earth? Or does ownership consist only of a thin

crust under which the friendly worms have never heard of trespassing?

In any case, the wood, being on top—except, of course, for its roots—was owned bud and bough by the Fosters in the touch-me-not cottage, and if they never went there, if they never wandered in among the trees, well, that was their affair. Winnie, the only child of the house, never went there, though she sometimes stood inside the fence, carelessly banging a stick against the iron bars, and looked at it. But she had never been curious about it. Nothing ever seems interesting when it belongs to you—only when it doesn't.

And what is interesting, anyway, about a slim few acres of trees? There will be a dimness shot through with bars of sunlight, a great many squirrels and birds, a deep, damp mattress of leaves on the ground, and all the other things just as familiar if not so pleasant—things like spiders, thorns, and grubs.

In the end, however, it was the cows who were responsible for the wood's isolation, and the cows, through some wisdom they were not wise enough to know that they possessed, were very wise indeed. If they had made their road through the wood instead of around it, then the people would have followed the road. The people would have noticed the giant ash tree at the center of the wood, and then, in time, they'd have noticed the little spring bubbling up among its roots in spite of the pebbles piled there to conceal it. And that would have been a disaster so immense that this weary old earth, owned or not to its fiery core, would have trembled on its axis like a beetle on a pin.

2

And so, at dawn, that day in the first week of August, Mae Tuck woke up and lay for a while beaming at the cobwebs on the ceiling. At last she said aloud, "The boys'll be home tomorrow!"

Mae's husband, on his back beside her, did not stir. He was still asleep, and the melancholy creases that folded his daytime face were smoothed and slack. He snored gently, and for a moment the corners of his mouth turned upward in a smile. Tuck almost never smiled except in sleep.

Mae sat up in bed and looked at him tolerantly. "The boys'll be home tomorrow," she said again, a little more loudly.

Tuck twitched and the smile vanished. He opened his eyes. "Why'd you have to wake me up?" he sighed. "I was having that dream again, the good one where we're all in heaven and never heard of Treegap."

Mae sat there frowning, a great potato of a woman with a round, sensible face and calm brown eyes. "It's no use having that dream," she said. "Nothing's going to change."

"You tell me that every day," said Tuck, turning away from her onto his side. "Anyways, I can't help what I dream."

"Maybe not," said Mae. "But, all the same, you should've

got used to things by now."

Tuck groaned. "I'm going back to sleep," he said.

"Not me," said Mae. "I'm going to take the horse and go down to the wood to meet them."

"Meet who?"

"The boys, Tuck! Our sons. I'm going to ride down to meet them."

"Better not do that," said Tuck.

"I know," said Mae, "but I just can't wait to see them. Anyways, it's ten years since I went to Treegap. No one'll remember me. I'll ride in at sunset, just to the wood. I won't go into the village. But, even if someone did see me, they won't remember. They never did before, now, did they?"

"Suit yourself, then," said Tuck into his pillow. "I'm going back to sleep."

Mae Tuck climbed out of bed and began to dress: three petticoats, a rusty brown skirt with one enormous pocket, an old cotton jacket, and a knitted shawl which she pinned across her bosom with a tarnished metal brooch. The sounds of her dressing were so familiar to Tuck that he could say, without opening his eyes,

"You don't need that shawl in the middle of the summer."

Mae ignored this observation. Instead, she said, "Will you be all right? We won't get back till late tomorrow."

Tuck rolled over and made a rueful face at her. "What in the world could possibly happen to me?"

"That's so," said Mae. "I keep forgetting."

"I don't," said Tuck. "Have a nice time." And in a moment he was asleep again.

Mae sat on the edge of the bed and pulled on a pair of short leather boots so thin and soft with age it was a wonder they held together. Then she stood and took from the washstand beside the bed a little square-shaped object, a music box painted with roses and lilies of the valley. It was the one pretty thing she owned and she never went anywhere without it. Her fingers strayed to the winding key on its bottom, but glancing at the sleeping Tuck, she shook her head, gave the little box a pat, and dropped it into her pocket. Then, last of all, she pulled down over her ears a blue straw hat with a drooping, exhausted brim.

But, before she put on the hat, she brushed her gray-brown hair and wound it into a bun at the back of her neck. She did this quickly and skillfully without a single glance in the mirror. Mae Tuck didn't need a mirror, though she had one propped up on the washstand. She knew very well what she would see in it; her reflection had long since ceased to interest her. For Mae Tuck, and her husband, and Miles and Jesse, too, had all looked exactly the same for eighty-seven years.

NANCY DREW MYSTERY STORIES®

The Secret of the Old Clock

BY CAROLYN KEENE

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CHAPTER I

The Rescue

NANCY DREW, an attractive girl of eighteen, was driving home along a country road in her new, dark-blue convertible. She had just delivered some legal papers for her father.

"It was sweet of Dad to give me this car for my birthday," she thought. "And it's fun to help him in his work."

Her father, Carson Drew, a well-known lawyer in their home town of River Heights, frequently discussed puzzling aspects of cases with his blond, blue-eyed daughter.

Smiling, Nancy said to herself, "Dad depends on my intuition."

An instant later she gasped in horror. From the lawn of a house just ahead of her a little girl about five years of age had darted into the roadway. A van, turning out of the driveway of the house, was barely fifty feet away *from* her. As the driver vigorously sounded the horn in warning, the child became confused and ran directly in front of the van. Miraculously, the little girl managed to cross the road safely and pull herself up onto a low wall, which formed one side of a bridge. But the next second, as the van sped away, the child lost her balance and toppled off the wall out of sight!

"Oh my goodness!" Nancy cried out, slamming on her brakes. She had visions of the child plunging into the water below, perhaps striking her head fatally on a rock!

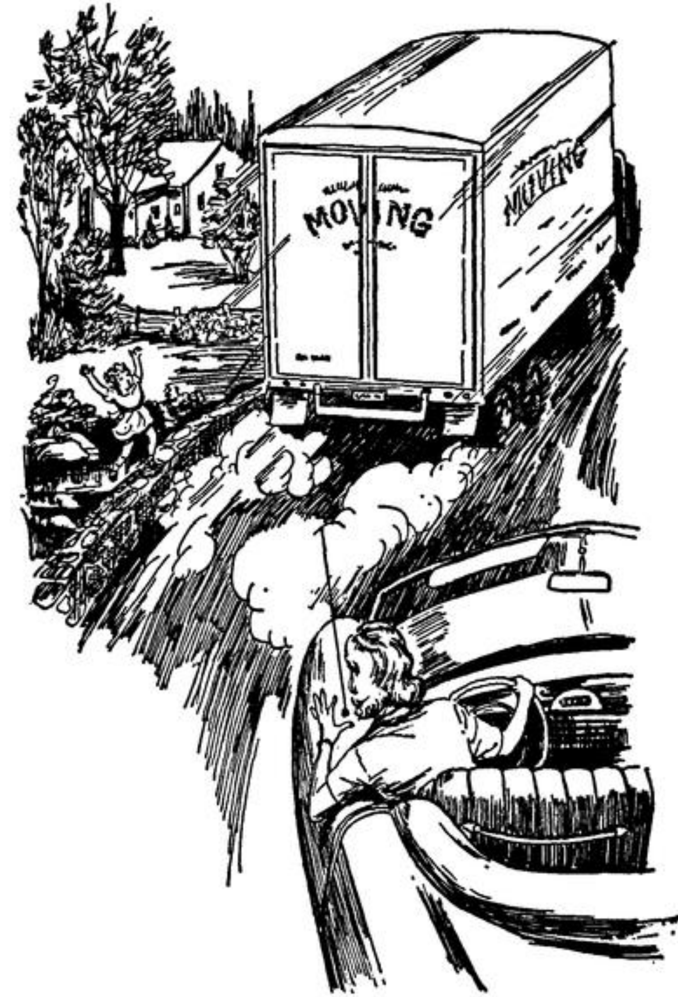
Nancy leaped out of her car and dashed across the road. At the foot of the embankment, she could see the curly-haired little girl lying motionless, the right side of her body in the water.

“I hope—” Nancy dared not complete the harrowing thought as she climbed down the steep slope.

When she reached the child, she saw to her great relief that the little girl was breathing normally and no water had entered her nose or mouth. A quick examination showed that she had suffered no broken bones.

Gently Nancy lifted the little girl, and holding her firmly in both arms, struggled to the top of the embankment. Then she hurried across the road and up the driveway to the child’s house.

At this moment the front door flew open and an elderly woman rushed out, crying, “Judy! Judy!”



The next second, the child lost her balance

“I’m sure she’ll be all right,” said Nancy quickly.

The woman, seeing Nancy's car, asked excitedly, "Did you run into her?"

"No, no. Judy fell off the bridge." Nancy quickly explained what had taken place.

By this time another woman, slightly younger, had hurried from the house. "Our baby! What has happened to her?"

As the woman reached out to take Judy, Nancy said soothingly, "Judy's going to be all right. I'll carry her into the house and lay her on a couch."

One of the women opened the screen door and the other directed, "This way."

Nancy carried her little burden through a hallway and into a small, old-fashioned living room. As soon as she laid the child on the couch, Judy began to murmur and turn her head from side to side.

"I believe she'll come to in a few minutes," said Nancy.

The two women watched Judy intently as they introduced themselves as Edna and Mary Turner, great-aunts of the little girl.

"Judy lives with us," explained Edna, the older sister. "We're bringing her up."

Nancy was somewhat surprised to hear that these elderly women were rearing such a small child. She gave her name and address, just as Judy opened her eyes and looked around. Seeing Nancy, she asked, "Who are you?"

"My name is Nancy. I'm glad to know you, Judy."

"Did you see me fall?"

Nancy nodded, as the child's Aunt Mary said, "She rescued you from the river after you fell in."

Judy began to cry. "I'll never, never run into the road again, really I won't!" she told her aunts.

Nancy said she was sure that Judy never would. She patted the child, who smiled up at her. Although Nancy felt that Judy would be all right, she decided to stay a few minutes longer to see if she could be of help. The child's wet clothes were removed and a robe put on her.

Mary Turner started for the kitchen door. "I'd better get some medication and wet compresses for Judy. She's getting a good-sized lump on her head. Nancy, will you come with me?"

She led the way to the kitchen and headed for a first-aid cabinet which hung on the wall.

"I want to apologize to you, Nancy, for thinking you hit Judy," the woman said. "I guess Edna and I lost our heads. You see, Judy is very precious to us. We brought up her mother, who had been an only child and was orphaned when she was a little girl. The same thing happened to Judy. Her parents were killed in a boat explosion three years ago. The poor little girl has no close relatives except Edna and me."

"Judy looks very healthy and happy," Nancy said quickly, "so I'm sure she must love it here."

Mary smiled. "We do the best we can on our small income. Sometimes it just doesn't suffice, though. We sold some old furniture to the two men in that van you saw. I don't know who they were, but I guess the price was all right."

Mary Turner's thoughts went back to little Judy. "She's so little now that Edna and I are able to manage with our small income.

But we worry about the future. We're dressmakers but our fingers aren't so nimble with the needle as they used to be.

"To tell you the truth, Nancy, at the time Judy's parents were killed, Edna and I wondered whether we would be able to take care of Judy properly. But we decided to try it and now we wouldn't part with her for anything in the world. She's won our hearts completely."

Nancy was touched by the story. She knew what was in the minds of the Turner sisters—living costs would become higher, and with their advancing years, their own income would become lower.

"Unfortunately," Mary went on, "Judy's parents left very little money. But they were extremely bright people and Judy is going to be like them. She ought to study music and dancing, and have a college education. But I'm afraid we'll never be able to give her those things."

Nancy said reassuringly, "Judy may be able to win a scholarship, or get other financial aid."

Mary, finding Nancy a sympathetic listener, continued, "A cousin of our father's named Josiah Crowley used to help us. But he passed away a couple of months ago. For years he used to pay us long visits and was very generous with his money." Miss Turner sighed. "He always promised to remember us in his will—he loved little Judy—and I am afraid Edna and I came to depend on that in our plans for her. But he did not carry out his promise."

Nancy smiled understandingly and made no comment. But she did wonder why Mr. Crowley had changed his mind.

"Josiah went to live with some other cousins. After that, things changed. He rarely came to see us. But he was here just last February and said the same thing—that Edna and I were to inherit money from him. He had always helped us and it seemed strange that he should stop so suddenly."

Mary Turner looked at Nancy. "Maybe you know our well-to-do cousins that he went to stay with. They live in River Heights. They're the Richard Tophams."

"Do they have two daughters named Ada and Isabel?" Nancy asked. "If so, I know them."

"That's the family all right," replied Mary.

Nancy detected a hint of coolness in the woman's voice. "Do you like those two girls?" Miss Turner asked.

Nancy did not answer at once. She had been taught never to gossip. But finally she said tactfully, "Ada and Isabel were in high school with me. They were never my close friends. We—uh — didn't see eye to eye on various things."

By this time Mary Turner had selected a few items from the first-aid chest. Now she went to the refrigerator for some ice cubes. As she arranged the various articles on a tray, she said, "Well, when Cousin Josiah passed away, to our amazement Richard Topham produced a will which made him executor of the Crowley estate and left all the money to him, his wife, and the two girls."

"Yes. I did read that in the newspaper," Nancy recalled. "Is the estate a large one?"

"I understand there's considerable money in it," Mary Turner replied. "Some of Josiah's other cousins say he told them the same thing he told us, and they are planning to go to court about the matter." The woman shrugged. "But I guess a fight to break the will would be hopeless. Nevertheless, Edna and I cannot help feeling there must be a later will, although as yet no one has presented it."

Nancy followed Miss Turner into the living room. The cold compresses helped to reduce the swelling where Judy had hit her head on a rock. Convinced now that the little girl was all right, Nancy said she must leave.

"Come to see me again soon," Judy spoke up. "I like you, Nancy. "You're my saving girl."

"You bet I'll come," Nancy answered. "I like you too. You're a good sport!"

The child's great-aunts profusely thanked Nancy again for rescuing Judy. The visitor had barely reached the door when Edna suddenly said, "Mary, where's our silver teapot?"

"Why, right there on the tea table—Oh, it's gone!"

Edna ran into the dining room. "The silver candlesticks! They're gone too!"

Nancy had paused in the doorway, startled. "Do you mean the pieces have been stolen?" she asked.

"They must have been," replied Mary Turner, who was white with apprehension. "By those men who bought some furniture from us!"

Instantly Nancy thought of the men in the van. "Who were the men?" she asked.

"Oh, Mary, how could we have been so careless?" Edna Turner wailed. "We don't know who the men were. They just knocked on the door and asked if we had any old furniture that we wanted to sell. We'll never get the silver back!"

"Maybe you will!" said Nancy. "I'll call the police."

"Oh dear!" Mary said woefully. "Our phone is out of order."

"Then I'll try to catch up to the van!" Nancy declared. "What did the men look like?"

"They were short and heavy-set. One had dark hair, the other light. They had kind of large noses. That's about all I noticed."

"Me too," said Edna.

With a hasty good-by Nancy dashed from the house and ran to her car.

THE PHANTOM TOLLBOOTH

NORTON JUSTER

Illustrated by JULES FEIFFER

With an appreciation by Maurice Sendak

1.Milo

There was once a boy named Milo who didn't know what to do with himself—not just sometimes, but always.

When he was in school he longed to be out, and when he was out he longed to be in. On the way he thought about coming home, and coming home he thought about going. Wherever he was he wished he were somewhere else, and when he got there he wondered why he'd bothered. Nothing really interested him—least of all the things that should have.

"It seems to me that almost everything is a waste of time," he remarked one day as he walked dejectedly home from school. "I can't see the point in learning to solve useless problems, or subtracting turnips from turnips, or knowing where Ethiopia is or how to spell February." And, since no one bothered to explain otherwise, he regarded the process of seeking knowledge as the greatest waste of time of all.

As he and his unhappy thoughts hurried along (for while he was never anxious to be where he was going, he liked to get there as quickly as possible) it seemed a great wonder that the world, which was so large, could sometimes feel so small and empty.

"And worst of all," he continued sadly, "there's nothing for me to do, nowhere I'd care to go, and hardly anything worth seeing." He punctuated this last thought with such a deep sigh that a house sparrow singing nearby stopped and rushed home to be with his family.

Without stopping or looking up, Milo dashed past the buildings and busy shops that lined the street and in a few minutes reached home—dashed through the lobby—hopped onto the elevator—two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, and off again—opened the apartment door—rushed into his room—flopped dejectedly into a chair, and grumbled softly, "Another long afternoon."

He looked glumly at all the things he owned. The books that were too much trouble to read, the tools he'd never learned to use, the small electric automobile he hadn't driven in months—or was it years?—and the hundreds of other games and toys, and bats and balls, and bits and pieces scattered around him. And then, to one side of the room, just next to the phonograph, he noticed something he had certainly never seen before.

Who could possibly have left such an enormous package and such a strange one? For, while it was not quite square, it was definitely not round, and for its size it was larger than almost any other big package of smaller dimension that he'd ever seen.

Attached to one side was a bright-blue envelope which said simply: "FOR MILO, WHO HAS PLENTY OF TIME."

Of course, if you've ever gotten a surprise package, you can imagine how puzzled and excited Milo was; and if you've never gotten one, pay close attention, because someday you might.

"I don't think it's my birthday," he puzzled, "and Christmas must be months away, and I haven't been outstandingly good, or even good at all." (He had to admit this even to himself.) "Most probably I won't like it anyway, but since I don't know where it came from, I can't possibly send it back." He thought about it for quite a while and then opened the envelope, but just to be polite.

"ONE GENUINE TURNPIKE TOLLBOOTH," it stated—and then it went on:

"EASILY ASSEMBLED AT HOME, AND FOR USE BY THOSE WHO HAVE NEVER TRAVELED IN LANDS BEYOND."

"Beyond what?" thought Milo as he continued to read.

"THIS PACKAGE CONTAINS THE FOLLOWING ITEMS:

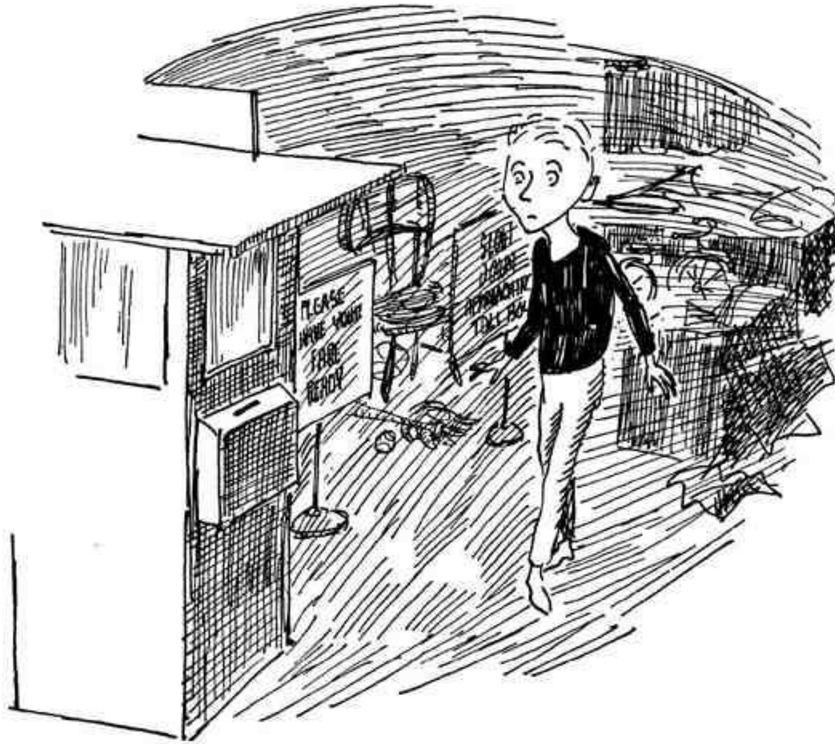
"One (1) genuine turnpike tollbooth to be erected according to directions.

"Three (3) precautionary signs to be used in a precautionary fashion.

"Assorted coins for use in paying tolls.

"One (1) map, up to date and carefully drawn by master cartographers, depicting natural and man-made features.

"One (1) book of rules and traffic regulations, which may not be bent or broken."



And in smaller letters at the bottom it concluded:

"RESULTS ARE NOT GUARANTEED, BUT IF NOT PERFECTLY SATISFIED, YOUR WASTED TIME WILL BE REFUNDED."

Following the instructions, which told him to cut here, lift there, and fold back all around, he soon had the tollbooth unpacked and set up on its stand. He fitted the windows in place and attached the roof, which extended out on both sides, and fastened on the coin box. It was very much like the tollbooths he'd seen many times on family trips, except of course it was much smaller and purple.

"What a strange present," he thought to himself. "The least they could have done was to send a highway with it, for it's terribly impractical without one." But since, at the time, there was nothing else he wanted to play with, he set up the three signs,

SLOW DOWN APPROACHING TOLLBOOTH
PLEASE HAVE YOUR FARE READY
HAVE YOUR DESTINATION IN MIND

and slowly unfolded the map. As the announcement stated, it was a beautiful map, in many colors, showing principal roads, rivers and seas, towns and cities, mountains and valleys, intersections and detours, and sites of outstanding interest both beautiful and historic.

The only trouble was that Milo had never heard of any of the places it indicated, and even the names sounded most peculiar.

“I don’t think there really is such a country,” he concluded after studying it carefully. “Well, it doesn’t matter anyway.” And he closed his eyes and poked a finger at the map.

“Dictionopolis,” read Milo slowly when he saw what his finger had chosen. “Oh, well, I might as well go there as anywhere.”

He walked across the room and dusted the car off carefully. Then, taking the map and rule book with him, he hopped in and, for lack of anything better to do, drove slowly up to the tollbooth. As he deposited his coin and rolled past he remarked wistfully, “I do hope this is an interesting game, otherwise the afternoon will be so terribly dull.”