



When You Reach Me

By Rebecca Stead

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This Newbery Medal winner that has a fantastic puzzle at its heart has been called “smart and mesmerizing,” (*The New York Times*), “superb” (*The Wall Street Journal*), and “incandescent” (*The Washington Post*).

When Miranda starts receiving mysterious notes, she doesn't know what to do.

The notes tell her that she must write a letter, a true story, and that she can't share her mission with anyone—not even her best friend, Sal.

It would be easy to ignore the strange messages, except that whoever is leaving them has an uncanny ability to predict the future. If that's the case, then Miranda has an even bigger problem—because the notes tell her that someone is going to die, and she might be too late to stop it.

“Lovely and almost impossibly clever.” —*The Philadelphia Inquirer*

Winner of the Boston Globe–Horn Book Award for Fiction
A New York Times Bestseller and Notable Book

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Amazon Best of the Month, July 2009: Shortly after sixth-grader Miranda and her best friend Sal part ways, for some inexplicable reason her once familiar world turns upside down. Maybe it's because she's caught up in reading *A Wrinkle in Time* and trying to understand time travel, or perhaps it's because she's been receiving mysterious notes which accurately predict the future. Rebecca Stead's poignant novel, *When You Reach Me*, captures the interior monologue and observations of kids who are starting to recognize and negotiate the complexities of friendship and family, class and identity. Set in New York City in 1979, the story takes its cue from beloved Manhattan tales for middle graders like E.L. Konigsburg's *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler*, Louise Fitzhugh's *Harriet the Spy*, and Norma Klein's *Mom the Wolfman and Me*. Like those earlier novels, *When You Reach Me* will stir the imaginations of young readers curious about day-to-day life in a big city. --Lauren Nemroff

Amazon Exclusive: A Q&A with Rebecca Stead

We had the opportunity to chat with Rebecca Stead over e-mail about her second novel, *When You Reach Me*. Here's what Rebecca had to say about growing up in New York City, meeting Madeleine L'Engle, and how writing a novel is a lot like solving a puzzle.

Amazon.com: *When You Reach Me* captures Manhattan in the late 70s perfectly. Why did you choose to set a book for young readers today in the not-too-distant (but very different) past?



Rebecca Stead: I grew up in New York in the seventies and eighties. When I was in elementary school, I became acquainted with a mysterious sort of character, who I wanted to use for this story. When I began to write about him, I was suddenly remembering all kinds of details and moments and places from my own childhood and happily writing them into the book. And in this way the book's setting sort of rose up around the plot.

There's another reason I set the story in the past, which is that I wanted to show a world of kids with a great deal of autonomy, and I wasn't sure that it would ring true in a modern New York setting. For better or for worse, life is different now.

Amazon.com: Madeleine L'Engle's classic *A Wrinkle in Time* plays an important role in *When You Reach Me*. Why did you choose pay homage to this particular classic in your own book?

Rebecca Stead: I loved *A Wrinkle in Time* as a child. I didn't know why I loved it, and I didn't want to know why. I remember meeting Madeleine L'Engle once at a bookstore and just staring at her as if she were a magical person. What I love about L'Engle's book now is how it deals with so much fragile inner-human stuff at the same time that it takes on life's big questions. There's something fearless about this book.

It started out as a small detail in Miranda's story, a sort of talisman, and one I thought I would eventually jettison, because you can't just toss *A Wrinkle in Time* in there casually. But as my story went deeper, I saw that I didn't want to let the book go. I talked about it with my editor, Wendy Lamb, and to others close to the story. And what we decided was that if we were going to bring L'Engle's story in, we needed to make the book's relationship to Miranda's story stronger. So I went back to *A Wrinkle in Time* and read it again and again, trying to see it as different characters in my own story might (sounds crazy, but it's possible!). And those readings led to new connections.

Amazon.com: I love the way you incorporate hints of science fiction into the ordinary events of Miranda's life. What scientific possibilities (or realities) did you find most interesting growing up?

Rebecca Stead: I thought about time a lot when I was a kid. Not in a mystical way--it was just the passing of time, the idea of time stretching out forever, that interested me. I used to wonder, "What will my room look like on my thirtieth birthday? What will be the first words I say in the year 2000? When I'm forty, will I remember the 'me' I am now? Will I remember this moment?" I guess part of it was thinking about how we leave ourselves behind in a way, which I think we do, throughout our lives.

I was also really interested in what is "knowable." There's a certain number of people alive on this planet right now, and it's a simple number that anyone could write down or say aloud, and so in some sense that number exists as a truth, yet we can't know it. That's the kind of thing I thought about when I was Miranda's age.

Amazon.com: Each of the book's chapters is just a few pages in length, but each scene is fully drawn. Why did you decide to write the story in this way? And why do most of the chapters begin with the words "Things That..." or "Things On..."?

Rebecca Stead: A lot of my writing is fragmented for some reason. It must be something about the way my brain works. I used to write short stories, and this was the form they frequently took. When I started writing my first novel, *First Light*, a lot of the raw material was also fragmented, and I had to sort of develop them into traditional chapters, which was what worked best for that story. But *When You Reach Me* is a little like a puzzle, and I loved the challenge of smoothing these small pieces until the whole thing fit together just right.

The chapter names are (mostly) the names of categories inspired by a game show called *The \$20,000 Pyramid*. As she tells her story, Miranda is helping her mother get ready to be a contestant on the show. They practice every night, and the game sort of seeps into her general thinking. The book is about all sorts of assumptions and categories we carry in our heads, so it felt right on that level, too.

Amazon.com: At the very beginning of the novel, we learn that Miranda's mom is going to be a contestant on the 1970's TV game show *The \$20,000 Pyramid*. Without giving away the ending, why is this opportunity so important for them as a family?

Rebecca Stead: They need the money! Part of what's happening for Miranda during this year is that she gets pushed outside of her formerly tiny world. Not far, but enough for her to start thinking about class, and the way other people live. She starts to see the way she lives in a new way, and has to deal with that. It's the beginning of that kind of awareness for her, and so the money they hope to win has a lot of meaning for her, but it's a meaning that changes.

Amazon.com: Is there some significance to the way that Miranda, her mom, and her mom's boyfriend Richard all prepare for the big event?

Rebecca Stead: They have a pretty nice system, which starts with their neighbor, Louisa, who scribbles down each day's Pyramid clues at her nursing job because she's the only one with access to a television at lunchtime. After her shift, she leaves the clues with Miranda, who copies them down on cards. Miranda and Richard take turns feeding clues to Miranda's mom while the other one keeps time. They operate as one kind of New York City family, which is probably the important thing.

Amazon.com: Why do Miranda and her friends Annemarie and Colin like working in Jimmy's sandwich shop during lunch hour? Especially since he doesn't pay them. Why don't they hang out at school instead?

Rebecca Stead: It doesn't feel like work to them. They are twelve, and all they want to do is see what it's like to be out in the world together. It's the most exciting thing ever, except when it's boring. Hanging out at school means sitting in the lunchroom, which is not fun. They couldn't even sit together there, because Colin would always be sitting with the boys.

Amazon.com: Do you think latch-key kids like Miranda are any different today than they were back in the 70s? How about city kids versus suburban kids?

Rebecca Stead: I'm now raising two kids of my own in New York City, and I think a lot about the differences between today's "preteen experience" and the one I had. Kids are generally less independent now, I think. My friends and I had a lot more freedom than I let my own kids have. The community just doesn't support it anymore. Now we have 24-hour-a-day news and twenty-two different police dramas that make constant fear seem kind of reasonable. And the internet has changed everything, obviously. Kids socialize in cyberspace now. I've heard that the suburban experience has also changed a lot. My husband grew up in the suburbs and his parents hardly ever knew where he was at age twelve. Those days are gone, I think.

From School Library Journal

Starred Review. Grade 5-8—Sixth-grader Miranda lives in 1978 New York City with her mother, and her life compass is Madeleine L'Engle's *A Wrinkle in Time*. When she receives a series of enigmatic notes that claim to want to save her life, she comes to believe that they are from someone who knows the future. Miranda spends considerable time observing a raving vagrant who her mother calls the laughing man and trying to find the connection between the notes and her everyday life. Discerning readers will realize the ties between Miranda's mystery and L'Engle's plot, but will enjoy hints of fantasy and descriptions of middle school dynamics. Stead's novel is as much about character as story. Miranda's voice rings true with its faltering attempts at maturity and observation. The story builds slowly, emerging naturally from a sturdy premise. As Miranda reminisces, the time sequencing is somewhat challenging, but in an intriguing way. The setting is consistently strong. The stores and even the streets—in Miranda's neighborhood act as physical entities and impact the plot in tangible ways. This unusual, thought-provoking mystery will appeal to several types of readers.—Caitlin Augusta, *The Darien Library, CT*

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Review

Winner of the Newbery Medal

A Junior Library Guild Selection

An ALA-ALSC Notable Children's Book

An ALA-YALSA Top Ten Best Book for Young Adults

A best book of the year:

Publishers Weekly, Kirkus Reviews, School Library Journal, Booklist, Indies Choice
Named to Multiple State Award Lists
Five starred reviews

"[W]hen all the sidewalk characters from Miranda's Manhattan world converge amid mind-blowing revelations and cunning details, teen readers will circle back to the beginning and say, 'Wow ... cool.'" —*Kirkus Reviews*, Starred review

"[T]he mental gymnastics required of readers are invigorating; and the characters, children, and adults are honest bits of humanity no matter in what place or time their souls rest." —*Booklist*, Starred review

"Closing revelations are startling and satisfying but quietly made, their reverberations giving plenty of impetus for the reader to go back to the beginning and catch what was missed." —*The Horn Book Magazine*, Starred review

"This unusual, thought-provoking mystery will appeal to several types of readers." —*School Library Journal*, Starred review

"It's easy to imagine readers studying Miranda's story as many times as she's read L'Engle's, and spending hours pondering the provocative questions it raises." —*Publishers Weekly*, Starred review

"Absorbing." —*People*

"Readers ... are likely to find themselves chewing over the details of this superb and intricate tale long afterward." —*The Wall Street Journal*

"Incandescent." —*The Washington Post*

"Smart and mesmerizing." —*The New York Times*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Peggy Nunes:

Nowadays reading books become more and more than want or need but also become a life style. This reading practice give you lot of advantages. The benefits you got of course the knowledge your information inside the book that improve your knowledge and information. The data you get based on what kind of reserve you read, if you want get more knowledge just go with training books but if you want really feel happy read one using theme for entertaining for instance comic or novel. Often the When You Reach Me is kind of publication which is giving the reader capricious experience.

Effie Phillips:

Reading a guide tends to be new life style in this particular era globalization. With reading you can get a lot of information that can give you benefit in your life. Together with book everyone in this world could share

their idea. Guides can also inspire a lot of people. Lots of author can inspire all their reader with their story or even their experience. Not only the story that share in the ebooks. But also they write about the data about something that you need example. How to get the good score toefl, or how to teach your young ones, there are many kinds of book that you can get now. The authors these days always try to improve their skill in writing, they also doing some study before they write with their book. One of them is this When You Reach Me.

Jerry Lyon:

Playing with family in a park, coming to see the marine world or hanging out with buddies is thing that usually you will have done when you have spare time, subsequently why you don't try thing that really opposite from that. 1 activity that make you not sense tired but still relaxing, trilling like on roller coaster you already been ride on and with addition associated with. Even you love When You Reach Me, you are able to enjoy both. It is great combination right, you still want to miss it? What kind of hang-out type is it? Oh seriously its mind hangout people. What? Still don't obtain it, oh come on its known as reading friends.

Lillian Thornton:

As a pupil exactly feel bored to reading. If their teacher inquired them to go to the library or even make summary for some reserve, they are complained. Just minor students that has reading's heart or real their leisure activity. They just do what the instructor want, like asked to the library. They go to at this time there but nothing reading seriously. Any students feel that looking at is not important, boring as well as can't see colorful images on there. Yeah, it is to become complicated. Book is very important in your case. As we know that on this age, many ways to get whatever we want. Likewise word says, many ways to reach Chinese's country. Therefore this When You Reach Me can make you feel more interested to read.

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