

Life Lessons



Wrinkles

by Susannah Eanes

In the youth novel, *A Wrinkle in Time*, Ms. Madeline L'Engle describes an efficient mode of travel, that by "wrinkle." The meaning of this is clear: when there is something that must be done, or someplace that one must get to, the way to make it bearable or even pleasant is by "skipping" parts of the process. A "wrinkle" is merely a way by which one skims the surface of time, passing unaware through the difficult parts, in order to reach a destination unscathed by time, gravity, or dusty clothes. *Well*. I am not sure what to make of this.

When I look into the mirror anymore I see wrinkles. At first, my face, unsmiling with dark eyes large and luminous, stares back at me. I look about thirteen years old. And then, with admitted effort (because I know what's coming), I curl my mouth upward into a smile and lo! *What* are those lines running back and forth under my eyes, stretching across the tops of my cheeks into the corners? Wrinkles! Ha! So much for skipping unscathed. I do not like them; they mar my complexion. While I have always been confused by the fact that my face does not seem to sketch the outlines of my inner thoughts and feelings, has never seemed in the least to be a reflection of my soul, these lines are even more disturbing. Wrinkles! What in the world are they doing there? Can I take them back to where they came from? Are they returnable?

No, says the wisest voice within me. The deep, resonant notes that tremor harp-like with the most basic of truths tell me that I am stuck with them. So must they become part of me. I decide to keep my annoyance with them beside the harp notes, perhaps they will pick up some clarity and meaning if I leave them in that box.

Still, daily they disturb me. I cannot reconcile them to who I am. Fun-loving, gentle, absorbed in my work. Wrinkles! they laugh out loud. Ok, I laugh back. Even more wrinkles. My fiance tells me not to worry: they add interest to my face. I want to slap him. A very wise older person I know quotes Agatha Christie, speaking of her husband: "It is good being married to an archaeologist. The older you get, the more interesting they find you." My archaeologist assures me this is so: "Because I love history. You will always be interesting to me."

Age gracefully, an old friend reassures me. Your face looks fine.

But you don't understand, I wail. I look like a child --with wrinkles! How can I go about serene and unaffected by outer appearances if my own is so ridiculous --a study in contrasts? It isn't fair. I should look like Meryl Streep, Joni Mitchell, Glenn Close, or even Annie Lennox. They look like who I think I am inside. Instead, I more closely resemble a cross between Annie Potts and Jane Seymour. A long-haired Annie Potts, or a short Jane Seymour. Do you see? Ridiculous!

And so I continue to try to find my way through this. I wrinkle my nose, I cross my eyes, I fret. I drink water. I exercise. I slather on pounds of heavy creams. All to no avail: the wrinkles etch themselves deeper into my skin. When I wear makeup they look even worse: it is like piling a thin layer of mud to dry and crack across my skin. Yuck.

Then one day I see something interesting: a face my own age, and she looks beautiful. Interesting. When the actress was younger she looked like a child, somewhat expressionless and spoiled. Now that she has a few lines her face has taken on something new: is it wisdom? character? What? All I know is, where before if I had met her on the street I would have passed her by, because I never thought she had more than a feather in her head where her brain should be. Now, I think, I bet she has a good recipe for soup. Or a story to tell. Laughter, that's what it is. She looks as if she has laughed alot.

Well, that is one thing I know I could use more of: giggles, guffaws, peals of uproarious, unrestrained hooting at life. I used to laugh all the time. What happened to that? And when I laughed, I was completely unaware of anything unpleasant: I would forget. Suddenly I could care less what I look like: my views on my appearance matter absolutely not a whit to anyone I know. As long as no one says, "You look tired today. Is something wrong?" or worse, "Are you sick? You don't look as if you feel very well," my course of action will be to assume that I look as well as I should, given the length of time I had to sleep, scrub my cheeks and tidy my hair, and eat a good breakfast. My mother used to say, "Never bore your audience," meaning, 'Put on a vibrant face before the world. Let your spirit shine through your eyes and actions. Greet the day with a happy and curious smile, wondering what's next.' Be excited. *Skip the angst.*

Wrinkles be damned. I think I just spied a bit of Meryl's smile in the mirror.