



## When you reach me (Jul 2009)

**Author:** [Stead, Rebecca](#)

**Ages 9-12** Fiction 

**Description:** As her mother prepares to be a contestant on the 1980s television game show, "The \$20,000 Pyramid," a twelve-year-old New York City girl tries to make sense of a series of mysterious notes received from an anonymous source that seems to defy the laws of time and space.

**Book Appeal Terms:** [Definition of Appeal Terms](#)

**Genre:** First person narratives; Science fiction

**Storyline:** Character-driven; Intricately plotted

**Tone:** Moving; Suspenseful

**Writing Style:** Attention-grabbing

**Min/Max Grade level:** 5 - 8

**Lexile:** 750 **Accelerated Reader:** IL: MG, BL: 4.5, AR Pts: 6

### School Library Journal:

*/\* Starred Review \*/* Gr 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 --Caitlin Augusta (Reviewed July 1, 2009) (*School Library Journal*, vol 55, issue 7, p93)

**Publishers Weekly:**

*/\* Starred Review \*/* Twelve-year-old Miranda, a latchkey kid whose single mother is a law school dropout, narrates this complex novel, a work of science fiction grounded in the nitty-gritty of Manhattan life in the late 1970s. Miranda’s story is set in motion by the appearance of cryptic notes that suggest that someone is watching her and that they know things about her life that have not yet happened. She’s especially freaked out by one that reads: “I’m coming to save your friend’s life, and my own.” Over the course of her sixth-grade year, Miranda details three distinct plot threads: her mother’s upcoming appearance on *The \$20,000 Pyramid*; the sudden rupture of Miranda’s lifelong friendship with neighbor Sal; and the unsettling appearance of a deranged homeless person dubbed “the laughing man.” Eventually and improbably, these strands converge to form a thought-provoking whole. Stead (*First Light*) accomplishes this by making every detail count, including Miranda’s name, her hobby of knot tying and her favorite book, Madeleine L’Engle’s *A Wrinkle in Time*. 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. Ages 9–14. (July) --Staff (Reviewed June 22, 2009) (*Publishers Weekly*, vol 256, issue 25, p45)

**Kirkus:**

*/\* Starred Review \*/* When Miranda's best friend Sal gets punched by a strange kid, he abruptly stops speaking to her; then oddly prescient letters start arriving. They ask for her help, saying, "I'm coming to save your friend's life, and my own." Readers will immediately connect with Miranda's fluid first-person narration, a mix of Manhattan street smarts and pre-teen innocence. She addresses the letter writer and recounts the weird events of her sixth-grade year, hoping to make sense of the crumpled notes. Miranda's crystalline picture of her urban landscape will resonate with city teens and

intrigue suburban kids. As the letters keep coming, Miranda clings to her favorite book, *A Wrinkle in Time*, and discusses time travel with Marcus, the nice, nerdy boy who punched Sal. Keen readers will notice Stead toying with time from the start, as Miranda writes in the present about past events that will determine her future. Some might guess at the baffling, heart-pounding conclusion, but when 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." (Fiction. 12 & up) (Kirkus Reviews, June 1, 2009)