

NORTHERN LIGHTS

- 1 “Master,” said Lord Asriel. “Yes, I’m back. Do bring in your guests; I’ve got
2 something very interesting to show you.”
- 3 “Lord Asriel,” said the Master heavily, and came forward to shake his hand.
4 From her hiding place Lyra watched the Master’s eyes, and indeed, they
5 flicked toward the table for a second, where the Tokay had been.
- 6 “Master,” said Lord Asriel. “I came too late to disturb your dinner, so I made
7 myself at home in here. Hello, Sub-Rector. Glad to see you looking so well.
8 Excuse my rough appearance; I’ve only just landed. Yes, Master, the Tokay’s
9 gone. I think you’re standing in it. The Porter knocked it off the table, but it
10 was my fault. Hello, Chaplain. I read your latest paper with great interest.”
- 11 He moved away with the Chaplain, leaving Lyra with a clear view of the
12 Master’s face. It was impassive, but the daemon on his shoulder was shuffling
13 her feathers and moving restlessly from foot to foot. Lord Asriel was already
14 dominating the room, and although he was careful to be courteous to the
15 Master in the Master’s own territory, it was clear where the power lay.
- 16 The Scholars greeted the visitor and moved into the room, some sitting
17 around the table, some in the armchairs, and soon a buzz of conversation
18 filled the air. Lyra could see that they were powerfully intrigued by the
19 wooden case, the screen, and the lantern. She knew the Scholars well: the
20 Librarian, the Sub-Rector, the Enquirer, and the rest; they were men who had
21 been around her all her life, taught her, chastised her, consoled her, given her
22 little presents, chased her away from the fruit trees in the garden; they were
23 all she had for a family. They might even have felt like a family if she knew
24 what a family was, though if she did, she’d have been more likely to feel that
25 about the College servants. The Scholars had more important things to do
26 than attend to the affections of a half-wild, half-civilized girl, left among them
27 by chance.
- 28 The Master lit the spirit lamp under the little silver chafing dish and heated
29 some butter before cutting half a dozen poppy heads open and tossing them
30 in. Poppy was always served after a feast: it clarified the mind and stimulated
31 the tongue, and made for rich conversation. It was traditional for the Master
32 to cook it himself.

NORTHERN LIGHTS

33 Under the sizzle of the frying butter and the hum of talk, Lyra shifted around
34 to find a more comfortable position for herself. With enormous care she took
35 one of the robes—a full-length fur—off its hanger and laid it on the floor of the
36 wardrobe.

37 “You should have used a scratchy old one,” whispered Pantalaimon. “If you
38 get too comfortable, you’ll go to sleep.”

39 “If I do, it’s your job to wake me up,” she replied.

40 She sat and listened to the talk. Mighty dull talk it was, too; almost all of it
41 politics, and London politics at that, nothing exciting about Tartars. The smells
42 of frying poppy and smoke-leaf drifted pleasantly in through the wardrobe
43 door, and more than once Lyra found herself nodding. But finally she heard
44 someone rap on the table. The voices fell silent, and then the Master spoke.

45 “Gentlemen,” he said. “I feel sure I speak for all of us when I bid Lord Asriel
46 welcome. His visits are rare but always immensely valuable, and I understand
47 he has something of particular interest to show us tonight. This is a time of
48 high political tension, as we are all aware; Lord Asriel’s presence is required
49 early tomorrow morning in White Hall, and a train is waiting with steam up
50 ready to carry him to London as soon as we have finished our conversation
51 here; so we must use our time wisely. When he has finished speaking to us,
52 I imagine there will be some questions. Please keep them brief and to the
53 point. Lord Asriel, would you like to begin?”

54 “Thank you, Master,” said Lord Asriel. “To start with, I have a few slides to
55 show you. Sub-Rector, you can see best from here, I think. Perhaps the
56 Master would like to take the chair near the wardrobe?”

57 Lyra marvelled at her uncle’s skill. The old Sub-Rector was nearly blind, so it
58 was courteous to make room for him nearer the screen, and his moving
59 forward meant that the Master would be sitting next to the Librarian, only a
60 matter of a yard or so from where Lyra was crouched in the wardrobe. As the
61 Master settled in the armchair, Lyra heard him murmur:

62 “The devil! He knew about the wine, I’m sure of it.”

NORTHERN LIGHTS

63 The Librarian murmured back, “He’s going to ask for funds. If he forces a
64 vote—”

65 “If he does that, we must just argue against, with all the eloquence we have.”

66 The lantern began to hiss as Lord Asriel pumped it hard. Lyra moved slightly
67 so that she could see the screen, where a brilliant white circle had begun to
68 glow. Lord Asriel called, “Could someone turn the lamp down?”

69 One of the Scholars got up to do that, and the room darkened.

70 Lord Asriel began:

71 “As some of you know, I set out for the North twelve months ago on a dip-
72 lomatic mission to the King of Lapland. At least, that’s what I pretended to
73 be doing. In fact, my real aim was to go further north still, right on to the ice,
74 in fact, to try and discover what had happened to the Grumman expedition.
75 One of Grumman’s last messages to the academy in Berlin spoke of a certain
76 natural phenomenon only seen in the lands of the North. I was determined to
77 investigate that as well as find out what I could about Grumman. But the first
78 picture I’m going to show you isn’t directly about either of those things.”

79 And he put the first slide into the frame and slid it behind the lens. A circu-
80 lar photogram in sharp black and white appeared on the screen. It had been
81 taken at night under a full moon, and it showed a wooden hut in the middle
82 distance, its walls dark against the snow that surrounded it and lay thickly on
83 the roof.



COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

- 1** Which word best describes the way Lord Asriel speaks?
- A** Accusatory
 - B** Panicked
 - C** Genial
 - D** Flippant
-
- 2** When did Lord Asriel arrive?
- A** before their dinner
 - B** after their dinner
 - C** during their dinner
 - D** the day before
-
- 3** What does the phrase 'it was clear where the power lay' mean?
- A** Lord Asriel had more muscles than the Master
 - B** The Master had more influence than Lord Asriel
 - C** People respected the Lord Asriel more
 - D** Lord Asriel was more talkative
-
- 4** Who would Lyra feel was her family, if she knew what a family was?
- A** Lord Asriel
 - B** the College servants
 - C** the Scholars
 - D** the Master
-

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

- 5** What best describes the Scholars' attitudes towards Lyra?
- A** dismissive but affectionate
 - B** scornful and bewildered
 - C** loving and attentive
 - D** cold and distant
-
- 6** What is it traditional for the Master to do?
- A** cook up conversation
 - B** cook the butter and poppy heads for everyone
 - C** light the spirit lamp
 - D** cook butter and poppy heads for himself
-
- 7** Why does Lyra choose to find a more comfortable position 'under the sizzle of the frying butter and the hum of talk'?
- A** She is uncomfortable now
 - B** She wanted to see the cooking more clearly
 - C** So she isn't heard moving around
 - D** Because there is nothing else to do
-
- 8** What best describes the kind of robe Lyra decided to sit on?
- A** scratchy and old
 - B** comfortable and small
 - C** soft and old
 - D** cosy and large
-

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

- 9** What does Lyra think of Tartars?
- A** It's interesting
 - B** It's nothing exciting
 - C** It's mighty dull
 - D** It's unimportant
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- 10** What does Lyra think of the smell of frying poppies?
- A** It is too strong
 - B** It is not mentioned in the story
 - C** It is pleasant
 - D** It clarifies the mind
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- 11** Where will Asriel be going immediately after the conversation?
- A** White Hall
 - B** The North
 - C** He will be staying at the College
 - D** A train station
-
- 12** Why is it skilful of her uncle to move the Master closer to Lyra and next to the librarian?
- A** He is being polite to the Sub-Rector
 - B** So the Master is closer to Lyra
 - C** So the Master won't be able to see Lyra
 - D** So the Master will be able to speak to the Librarian
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COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

- 13** Why did Lord Asriel go to the North?
- A** A diplomatic mission to the King of Lapland
 - B** To visit Grumman
 - C** Grumman sent him a message
 - D** He wanted to know what had happened to Grumman
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- 14** What is meant by the word 'courteous' (line 14)?
- A** fair
 - B** respect
 - C** polite
 - D** curt
-

- 15** What is meant by the word 'rough' (line 8)?
- A** bumpy
 - B** scruffy
 - C** elegant
 - D** dirty
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