by Philip Pullman

The Subtle Knife

Book II of His Dark Materials (a summary by Pat Evert)



The Cat and the Hornbeam Trees

"What is it, William?" the old lady said. "What's the matter?" "My mother needs somewhere to stay for a few days," he said. "It's too difficult to look after her at home just now. I don't mean she's ill. She's just kind of confused and muddled, and she gets a bit worried. I've got things to do. But I'll be back soon, and I'll take her home again, I promise. You won't have to do it for long." "I'm going to be staying with a friend," he said. "I'll phone up as often as I can. I've got your number. It'll be all right." "Don't worry," he said. "Mrs. Cooper will look after you better than me, honest. And I'll phone up and talk to you tomorrow." The house was silent. How long before the men came back? There was no way of telling, so he'd better move quickly. He was looking for a battered green leather writing case. He woke up knowing two things simultaneously. First, he knew where the case was. And second, he knew that the men were downstairs, opening the kitchen door. Clutching the writing case, he swung himself down the banister, leaping over the man's body that lay twitching and crumpled at the foot of the flight, seized the tattered tote bag from the table, and was out of the front door and away before the other man could do more than come out of the living room and stare. The only thing to do was run. He couldn't get out of his mind the crack as the man's head struck the table, and the way his neck was bent so far and in such a wrong way, and the dreadful twitching of his limbs. The man was dead. He'd killed him. The tote bag: his mother's purse and the green leather writing case. Everything was there. Everything was going according to plan, really. Except that he'd killed someone.

Will had first realized his mother was different from other people, and that he had to look after her, when he was seven. From the moment in the supermarket when he had realized he must pretend in order not to worry his mother, part of Will's mind was always alert to her anxieties. He loved her so much he would have died to protect her. As for Will's father, he had vanished long before Will was able to remember him. John Parry had been a handsome man, a brave and clever officer in the Royal Marines, who had left the army to become an explorer. His father was alive, lost somewhere in the wild, and he was going to rescue him and take up his mantle…. So he kept his mother's trouble secret. But then the men returned. The green leather case was his mother's most precious possession; he would never dream of looking through it. So Will supposed that this was what the men were after, and knew he had to do something about it. Once his mother was safely there, he was going to look at what was in it. But the men came too soon.

Later that day, toward midnight in fact, Will was walking out of the city of Oxford, forty miles away. A cat reached out a paw to pat something in the air in front of her, something quite invisible to Will. Again the cat leaped back, but less far and with less alarm this time. After another few seconds of sniffing, touching, and whisker twitching, curiosity overcame wariness. The cat stepped forward and vanished. Will crossed the road, keeping his eyes on the spot where the cat had been investigating. It looked as if someone had cut a patch out of the air, about two yards from the edge of the road, a patch roughly square in shape and less than a yard across. If you were level with the patch so that it was edge-on, it was nearly invisible. But he didn't hesitate: he pushed his tote bag through, and then scrambled through himself, through the hole in the fabric of this world and into another. Behind him the full moon shone down over a distant prospect of great green hills, and on the slopes at the foot of the hills there were houses with rich gardens, and an open parkland with groves of trees and the white gleam of a classical temple. **He was now wide awake and possessed by wonder**. The only sound he could hear came from the regular, quiet breaking of delicate waves from the beach beyond the palm trees at the edge of the garden. For the first time since he'd run out of his front door that morning, Will began to feel secure. Something made his skin prickle before he opened the last door. Something told him that the room wasn't empty. The door burst open and something came hurtling at him like a wild beast. A girl about his own age, ferocious, snarling, with ragged dirty clothes and thin bare limbs. Will stood up slowly. "Who are you?" "Lyra Silvertongue," she said. Where's your dæmon?" "I haven't got a *demon*," he said. "I don't know what you mean." "My name's Will Parry," he said. "In my world demon means…it means devil, something evil." "Yeah. They have Coke in this world, obviously. Look, I'll drink some to prove it isn't poison." He opened another can. Once she saw him drink, she followed his example. "Where is your world? How did you get here?" She shrugged. "I walked," she said. "It was all foggy." "But why do you want to find out about dust?" "Special Dust," she said shortly. "You have got a *dæmon*," she said decisively. "Inside you." Even if you don't know you've got a dæmon, you have." "I came here out of a place called Oxford. There's plenty of scholars there, if that's what you want." "Oxford?" she cried. "That's where I come from!" "Is there an Oxford in your world, then? You never came from my world." "No," she said decisively. "Different worlds. But in my world there's an Oxford too. We're both speaking English, en't we? He went inside and fell on the double bed, and was asleep in a moment.

She had asked: *What is he? A friend or an enemy?* The alethiometer answered: *He is a murderer*. She felt as safe with him as she'd felt with Iorek Byrnison, the armored bear.

Among the Witches

"It seems that there is a prophecy. It concerns the child, you see, Mrs. Coulter. All the signs have been fulfilled. The circumstances of her birth, to begin with. The gyptians know something about her too—they speak of her in terms of witch oil and marsh fire, uncanny, you see—hence her success in leading the gyptian men to Bolvangar. And then there's her astonishing feat of deposing the bear-king Iofur Raknison—this is no ordinary child." A question began to form more clearly in Serafina's mind. What was Lord Asriel doing? Because all the events that had overturned the world had their origin

in his mysterious activities. Dr. Lanselius said, “They say that the Magisterium is assembling the greatest army ever known, and this is an advance party. Do you know the word zombi? They fear nothing, because they’re mindless. There are some in this town now. The authorities keep them hidden, but word gets out, and the townspeople are terrified of them.”

Serafina’s journey to the north was made harder by the confusion in the world around her. All the Arctic peoples had been thrown into panic, and so had the animals, not only by the fog and the magnetic variations but by unseasonal crackings of ice and stirrings in the soil. It was as if the earth itself, the permafrost, were slowly awakening from a long dream of being frozen. “It’s death among our people, Serafina, to challenge the Church, but Lord Asriel’s been nursing a rebellion in his heart for as long as I’ve served him, that’s one thing I do know. It’s my belief he turned away from a rebellion against the Church not because the Church was too strong, but because it was too weak to be worth the fighting. He’s gone a-searching for the dwelling place of the Authority Himself, and he’s a-going to destroy Him. That’s what I think. On the face of it, Serafina Pekkala, yes, he’s stark mad. And look what he’s done already: he’s torn open the sky, he’s opened the way to another world.”

“I know whom we must fight. It is the Magisterium, the Church. For all its history—and that’s not long by our lives, but it’s many, many of theirs—**it’s tried to suppress and control every natural impulse**. And when it can’t control them, it cuts them out,” said Queen Ruta Skadi. “They cut their sexual organs, yes, both boys and girls; they cut them with knives so that they shan’t feel. That is what the Church does, **and every church is the same: control, destroy, obliterate every good feeling**. What I propose is that our clans join together and go north to explore this new world, and see what we can discover there. If the child is not to be found in our world, it’s because she will have gone after Lord Asriel already. And Lord Asriel is the key to this, believe me.” “It seems that Grumman knew the whereabouts of some kind of object that gives protection to whoever holds it,” said Mr. Scoresby. “I’m going to seek out Stanislaus Grumman and find out what he knows, and if I can find that object he knows of, I’ll take it to Lyra. That little girl has had bad luck with her true parents, and maybe I can make it up to her. Someone has to do it, and I’m willing.” “I shall search for Lord Asriel, and learn what he’s doing from his own lips. And it seems that the way he’s gone is northward too. May I come the first part of the journey with you, sister?” And Serafina Pekkala and her twenty-one companions and Queen Ruta Skadi of Latvia prepared to fly into the new world, where no witch had ever flown before.

A Children’s World

“If you don’t come from this world, where’s your world? How did you get here?” “Over a bridge. My father made this bridge, and…I followed him across. But he’s gone somewhere else, I don’t know where. I don’t care. But while I was walking across there was so much fog, and I got lost, I think. I walked around in the fog for days just eating berries and stuff I found.” “So there’s three worlds at least that are joined on,” Will said. “There’s millions and millions,” Lyra said. “A witch’s dæmon told me. No one can count how many worlds there are, all in the same space, but no one could get from one to another before my father made this bridge.” A couple of children came down the street.

"What is this city called?" "Ci'gazze," the girl said suspiciously. "What's your name?" "Lyra. And he's Will. What's yours?" "Angelica. My brother is Paolo." "Where've you come from?" "Up the hills. There was a big fog and storm and everyone was frightened, so we all run up in the hills. Then when the fog cleared, the grownups could see with telescopes that the city was full of Specters, so they couldn't come back. But the kids, we ain' afraid of Specters, all right. There's more kids coming down. They be here later, but we're first." Will and Lyra went in search of the window into Will's world. And then suddenly he had it. You could only see it at all from one side: when you moved behind it, it was invisible. "It's my alethiometer. It's a truth teller. A symbol reader. This is a different Oxford." "Well, we knew that," he said. And now it simply wasn't there, Jordan College, and she wasn't Lyra of Jordan anymore; she was a lost little girl in a strange world, belonging nowhere. "We need new names," said Will. "Call me Mark and you will be my sister Lizzie."

Trepanning

"There were several newspaper stories at the time. You know he was an explorer?" "My mother's told me some things, yes." "Well, he was leading an expedition, and **it just disappeared**. About ten years ago. Maybe more." "Where?" "The far north. Alaska, I think. You can look it up in the public library." Will sent his mom a postcard. He chose a view of the city, and wrote:

> *"Dear Mum, I am safe and well, and I will see you again soon. I hope everything is all right. I love you. Will."*

Then he addressed it and bought a stamp and held the card close to him for a minute before dropping it in the mailbox. Meanwhile, Lyra was looking for somewhere quiet to consult the alethiometer. In her own Oxford there would have been a dozen places within five minutes' walk, but this Oxford was so disconcertingly different, with patches of poignant familiarity right next to the downright outlandish: Why had they painted those yellow lines on the road? What could those red and green lights mean at the corner of the road? It was all much harder to read than the alethiometer. Perhaps there was a Lyra in this world. A chill ran down her back. She discovered a museum. Well, how strange. Those caribou-skin furs were *exactly* the same as hers, but they'd tied the traces on that sledge completely wrong. But here was a photogram showing some Samoyed hunters, the very doubles of the ones who'd caught Lyra and sold her to Bolvangar. Look! **They were the same men!** And even that rope had frayed and been reknotted in precisely the same spot, and she knew it intimately, having been tied up in that very sledge for several agonizing hours…. What were these mysteries? Was there only one world after all, which spent its time dreaming of others? She took out the alethiometer. She focused her mind on the central skull and asked: What sort of person did this skull belong to, and why did they have those holes made in it? The alethiometer, which never lied, said that the man whose skull it was had lived **33,254 years before the present day**, and that he had been a sorcerer, and that the hole had been made to let the gods into his head. The alethiometer had more to say: she was beginning to sense now that it had moods, like a person, and to know when it wanted to tell her more. And it did now. What it said was: *You must concern yourself with the boy. Your task is to help him find his father. Put your mind to that*. The idea that *she* had

come all this way in order to help him took her breath away. But the alethiometer still hadn't finished. The needle twitched again, and she read: *Do not lie to the Scholar*.

Sure enough, there were several references to John Parry, in connection with an archaeological expedition. His heart thudded, because there was a picture of his own mother. Holding a baby. Him. She soon found the door the alethiometer had told her about. The sign on it said DARK MATTER RESEARCH UNIT, and under it someone had scribbled R.I.P. Another hand had added in pencil DIRECTOR: LAZARUS. Lyra was a little surprised to find that the Scholar she sought was female. "What's dark matter?" said Lyra. "It's to make gravity work. Well, what *we* think it is—it's some kind of elementary particle. Something quite different from anything discovered so far. Well, we're trying **to detect this almost-undetectable thing** among the noise of all the other particles crashing about. Our particles are strange little devils, make no mistake. We call them shadow particles, Shadows. That's right. Shadows are **particles of consciousness**. They know we're here. They answer back. And here goes the crazy part: **you can't see them unless you expect to**. There's no doubt about it. The Shadows flock to your thinking like birds.… Anything that was associated with human workmanship and human thought was surrounded by Shadows.… There was a cutoff point about thirty, forty thousand years ago. Before that, no Shadows. So there must be lots of ways of talking to Shadows." "You're telling me that when people consult the I Ching, they're getting in touch with Shadow particles? With dark matter? The people in my world hate it? Dust, I mean, Shadows. Dark matter. They want to destroy it. They think it's evil." The tall man with the pale eyebrows was getting out of a car and go into the lawyer's office. As soon as he'd gone in, Will moved away, his heart thudding again. There wasn't anywhere safe.

Airmail Paper

"We can't risk anyone seeing. And now we've got to hang around for hours.…" "I'm hungry," Lyra said. Then he said, "I know! We can go to the cinema!" Lyra was entranced. She had seen projected photograms, but nothing in her world had prepared her for the cinema. She wolfed down the hot dog and the popcorn, gulped the Coca-Cola, and gasped and laughed with delight at the characters on the screen. Will closed his eyes at once and went to sleep. Afterwards Lyra was hungry again, so they bought hamburgers from a cart and ate them as they walked along, something else new to her.

Back in the children's world, Will read the letters from his father in the green leather case.

> *Fairbanks, Alaska Wednesday, 19 June 1985*
> *I tracked down a gold miner called Jake Petersen to a dingy bar. I asked him about* ***the anomaly****. With the help of a bottle of Jack Daniel's he talked for a long time—hadn't seen it himself, but he'd met an Eskimo who had, and this chap said* ***it was a doorway into the spirit world****.*

Umiat, Alaska Saturday, 22 June 1985
My darling—so much for what did I call him, a genial dimwit—the physicist Nelson is nothing of the sort, and if I'm not mistaken ***he's actually looking for the anomaly himself****. The holdup in Fairbanks was orchestrated by him, would you believe?*

Colville Bar, Alaska Monday, 24 June 1985
The physicist Nelson is my closest buddy now—kids me along, drops hints to imply that he knows that I know that he knows, etc. The Eskimo, Matt Kigalik described the thing to me. It's like a gap in the air, ***a sort of window****. You look* ***through it and you see another world****. But it's not easy to find because that part of the other world looks just like this—rocks and moss and so forth.*

There really was someone after Will's mother—after these letters, this information. **John Parry and his son Will had each, separately, discovered this extraordinary thing**.

Lighted Fliers

"The fishermen," said the seal hunter, "they say you can sail right up into that new world." "There's a new world?" said Lee. "As soon as this damn fog clears we'll see right into it," the seal hunter told them confidently. Lee, who carried his compass everywhere, had realized already that the earth's magnetic field was as disturbed as everything else. This happened before… "My people remember. All long time ago, many thousand generation. Sky fall open, and spirits move between this world and that world. All the lands move. The ice melt, then freeze again. The spirits close up the hole after a while. Seal it up. But witches say the sky is thin there, behind the northern lights."

Meanwhile, the witches were searching too. The Latvian queen, Ruta Skadi, flew with Serafina Pekkala's company for many days and nights, through fog and whirlwind, over regions devastated by flood or landslide. It was certain that they were in a world none of them had known before. The Specters seemed to be earthbound, without the power of flight. "Why have you come to this world?" "Because the times have changed. What are those creatures who attacked your party?" "Well, the Specters…" he said.

The stricken adults had to stay where they were, though it was painful to see the little children clinging to a mother who no longer responded to them, or tugging the sleeve of a father who said nothing and gazed into nothing and had nothing in his eyes.

Joachim Lorenz told Serafina and Ruta Skadi about the history of his world. "It had once been a happy one," he explained. "The cities were spacious and elegant, the fields well tilled and fertile. Merchant ships plied to and fro on the blue oceans, and fishermen hauled in brimming nets. But it went wrong," he said. "Three hundred years ago, it all went wrong. Out of nowhere there came the Specters, and we've been haunted ever since. How can we prosper, when we can't rely on anything continuing as it is? At any moment a father might be taken, or a mother, and the family fall apart; a merchant might be taken, and his enterprise fail. We create nothing, we have built nothing for hundreds of years, all we can do is steal from other worlds." "Why don't the Specters harm children?" asked Ruta Skadi. "That is the greatest mystery of all. In the

innocence of children there's some power that repels the Specters of Indifference. But it's more than that. Children simply don't see them. Recently there was a great storm. It sounded as if the whole world was breaking and cracking apart; there hadn't been a storm like that in memory. And then there came a fog that lasted for days and covered every part of the world that I know of, and no one could travel. And when the fog cleared, the cities were full of the Specters, hundreds and thousands of them." He pointed to the constellation of Ophiuchus. And sure enough, something was moving through it, a tiny cluster of lighted beings. And they didn't drift; they moved with the purposeful flight of geese or swans. Ruta Skadi stood up. "Sister, it's time I parted from you," she said to Serafina. "I'm going up to speak to these angels, whatever they may be. If they're going to Lord Asriel, I'll go with them. If not, I'll search on by myself. Thank you for your company, and go well." They kissed, and Ruta took her cloud-pine branch and sprang into the air. Ruta Skadi was four hundred and sixteen years old, with all the pride and knowledge of an adult witch queen. She was wiser by far than any short-lived human, but she had not the slightest idea of how like a child she seemed beside these ancient beings. If she were to perceive their true form, they would seem more like architecture than organism, like huge structures composed of intelligence and feeling. They came to a colossal fortress, fires glared and furnaces smoked in the darkness of early dawn. And from every direction, she could see more flights of angels winging toward it, and not only angels, but machines too: steel-winged craft gliding like albatrosses, glass cabins under flickering dragonfly wings, droning zeppelins like huge bumblebees—all making for the fortress that Lord Asriel was building on the mountains at the edge of the world. "And is Lord Asriel there?" she said. "Yes, he is there," the angels replied.

The Rolls-Royce

Lyra was impatient to see her Scholar again. So she wrote a note and left it on the floor by Will's bedside. She went straight across to the window and through into Will's Oxford. "That old man—he en't nothing but a low thief. He *stole* it, Will! He stole my alethiometer! That stinky old man with his rich clothes and his servant driving the car. Because the alethiometer **told me I had to stop looking for Dust**—at least I thought that's what it said—**and I had to help you. I had to help you find your father**. And I *could*, I could take you to wherever he is, if I had it. But I wouldn't listen. I just done what I wanted to do, and I shouldn't…. I know who he is! And where he lives! Look!" she said, and held up a little white card:

Sir Charles Latrom, CBE
Limefield House
Old Headington Oxford

"What we going to do then?" she said. He didn't answer. But **it was *we*, for certain. He was bound to her now, whether he liked it or not**. "We're going to get it back all right," she said. "I can feel it." He said nothing. They set off for the window.
"The instrument is in my possession and will stay there," said Sir Charles. I want it. I'm a collector. You can spit and stamp and scream all you like, but by the time you've persuaded anyone else to listen to you, I shall have plenty of documents to prove that I

bought it. I can do that very easily. And then you'll never get it back. You fetch the object I want, and I'll give you back the—what did you call it?" "Alethiometer," said Lyra hoarsely. "Alethiometer. How interesting. Alethia, truth—those emblems—yes, I see." "What's this thing you want?" said Will. "And where is it?" "It's somewhere I can't go, but you can. I'm perfectly well aware that you've found a doorway somewhere. I guess it's not too far from Summertown, where I dropped Lizzie, or Lyra, this morning. And that through the doorway is another world, one with no grownups in it. Right so far? Well, you see, the man who made that doorway has got a knife. He's hiding in that other world right now, and he's extremely afraid. He has reason to be. If he's where I think he is, he's in an old stone tower with angels carved around the doorway. The Torre degli Angeli. So that's where you have to go, and I don't care how you do it, but I want that knife. Bring it to me, and you can have the alethiometer. I shall be sorry to lose it, but I'm a man of my word. That's what you have to do: bring me the knife."

The Tower of the Angels

Lyra said quietly, "but I saw a man up there last night. Young, with curly hair. Not old at all. But I saw him for only a moment, at the very top, over those battlements. You remember Angelica and Paolo, and Paolo said they had an older brother. He's gone—we seen him run out the door. You beat him." Will lost two fingers in the skirmish. "Can you heal him?" said Lyra, her voice desperate. "Oh, yes, we have medicines for everything." It stung horribly. "This is precious ointment," the old man said. "Very difficult to obtain. Very good for wounds." The young man was being attacked by Specters. Angelica knew it, though she couldn't see them, and Tullio was lost. His movements became more and more lethargic, and presently they stopped altogether. Angelica clung to him, shaking and shaking his arm, but nothing woke him. Will kept his eyes averted while they did up a bandage, and drank the plum brandy sip by sip. "You haven't got the choice," said the old man. "You are the bearer now. My time is over. The knife knows when to leave one hand and settle in another, and I know how to tell. Look!" He held up his own left hand. The little finger and the finger next to it were missing, just like Will's. "Yes," he said, "me too. I fought and lost the same fingers, the badge of the bearer. I know that man. He is a liar, a cheat. He won't give you anything, make no mistake. He wants the knife, and once he has it, he will betray you. He will never be the bearer. The knife is yours by right." The rosewood was inlaid with golden wires, forming a design he didn't recognize till he turned the knife around and saw an angel, with wings folded. On the other side was a different angel, with wings upraised. A swirl of cloudy colors seemed to live just under the surface of the metal: bruise purples, sea blues, earth browns, cloud grays, the deep green under heavy-foliaged trees. One edge was clear bright steel, merging a little way back into those subtle shadow-colors, but steel of an incomparable sharpness. Lyra, who was looking at it over Will's shoulder, said: "I seen that color before! That's the same as the blade they was going to cut me and Pan apart with—that's just the same!" "This edge," said Giacomo Paradisi, touching the steel with the handle of a spoon, "will cut through any material in the world. The other edge," the old man went on, "is more subtle still. With it you can cut an opening out of this world altogether. Try it now. Do as I say—you are the bearer. This is a subtle knife, not a heavy sword. Let your mind wander to the very tip,

where the edge is sharpest of all. You become the tip of the knife. Just do that now. Go there and feel that." "I felt something there," he said to Giacomo Paradisi. "The knife was just slipping through the air at first, and then I felt it …" He touched, withdrew, touched again to make sure, and then did as the old man had said, and cut sideways with the silver edge. There in the middle of the dusty little room was a window just like the one under the hornbeam trees: a gap in midair through which they could see another world. Then he said, "So much for opening. Now you must learn to close. For this you need your fingers," he said. "One hand will do. Feel for the edge as you felt with the knife to begin with. You won't find it unless you put your soul into your fingertips. Touch very delicately; feel again and again till you find the edge. Then you pinch it together. That's all. Try." He felt for the edge, found it within a minute, and did as Giacomo had told him: pinched the edges together. It was the easiest thing in the world. He felt a brief, calm exhilaration, and then the window was gone. The other world was shut. "There is a man I am afraid of, and I thought to tempt him through and into the city, where he would fall victim to the Specters. But I think that he is too clever for a trick like that. He wants the knife. Please, never let him get it. You have the knife. You are the bearer." "What we going to do now?" said Lyra. "Well," Will said, "that's easy. We've got to get the alethiometer back, so we'll have to steal it. That's what we're going to do."

Theft

Much later that night, Will and Lyra crouched in the lane that ran along beside the tree-shaded shrubbery in Sir Charles's garden. On the Cittàgazze side, they were in a grassy park. All the time he was growing more familiar with the knife, more certain in his command of it. They came through to the quiet lane in Headington to work out exactly how to get to the study where Sir Charles had put the alethiometer. With the creeper-shaded window of the study facing them across the smooth lawn, Will said quietly, "I'm going to cut through into Ci'gazze here, and leave the window open, and move in Ci'gazze to where I think the study is, and then cut back through to this world. Would Will get inside without disturbing anyone in the house? Sir Charles stood waiting, smiling, offering his arm to the woman who was getting out, and as she came into view Lyra felt a blow at her heart, because Sir Charles's guest was her mother, Mrs. Coulter.

He cut a window at the right height. The glass of the cabinet door was only a hand's breadth in front of it. This was the right cabinet, and the alethiometer wasn't there. "No!" Lyra said, and she was nearly in a genuine panic. "Mrs. Coulter's with him—my mother! I remember where I seen him before! Will, he's called Lord Boreal! I seen him at Mrs. Coulter's cocktail party, when I ran away! And he must have known who I was, all the time.…" "What is Asriel up to?" Sir Charles said. There was a silence then, as if the woman were calculating what to say. Will looked back through the window at Lyra, and saw her face, moonlit and wide-eyed with fear, biting her lip to keep silent and straining to hear, as he was. Finally Mrs. Coulter said, "Very well, I'll tell you. Lord Asriel is gathering an army, with the purpose of completing the war that was fought in heaven eons ago." "He found a way of blasting open the barrier between our world and others. It caused profound disturbances to the earth's magnetic field, and that must resonate

in this world too…." "But how do you know about that? Carlo, I think you should answer some questions of mine. What is this world? And how did you bring me here?" "It is one of millions. There are openings between them, but they're not easily found. I know a dozen or so, but the places they open into have shifted, and that must be due to what Asriel's done. When I looked through one of the doorways earlier today, you can imagine how surprised I was to find it opening into our world, and what's more, to find you nearby. Providence, dear lady! The change meant that I could bring you here directly, without the risk of going through Cittàgazze." "Cittàgazze? What is that?" "Previously, all the doorways opened into one world, which was a sort of crossroads. That is the world of Cittàgazze. But it's too dangerous to go there at the moment. But tell me about your curious bodyguards, Marisa. I've never seen soldiers like that. Who are they?" "Men, that's all. But…they've undergone intercision. They have no dæmons, so they have no fear and no imagination and no free will, and they'll fight till they're torn apart." "No dæmons…Well, that's very interesting. I wonder if I might suggest a little experiment, if you can spare one of them? I'd like to see whether the Specters are interested in them. There was a man who disappeared ten or twelve years ago, in the north, and the security services think he was in possession of some knowledge they badly need—specifically, the location of a doorway between the worlds, such as the one you came through earlier today." Will sat frozen, with his heart thudding so hard he was afraid the adults would hear it. **Sir Charles was talking about his own father!** Will leaned forward and snatched the alethiometer from the little table, thrust it into his pocket, and darted back through the window. As soon as he was on the grass in Cittàgazze he felt in the air for those elusive edges, calming his mind, breathing slowly, conscious all the time that only feet away there was horrible danger. He needed to seize the edges of the window and press them shut. But where was Lyra? Will and Lyra were through the window, and Will felt once again for the almost intangible edges in the air and pressed them swiftly together, closing another window all along its length. "We'll be safe now we've got the alethiometer back, you'll see. I'll do nothing now except help you find your father, I promise…."

The Shaman

Lee Scoresby was heading for the village of Grumman's tribe. "You have come to take Dr. Grumman to the other world. You must speak to him with respect," the headman said quietly. "He is a shaman. And his heart is sick." "Something's drawn me here, Dr. Grumman, beyond simple curiosity. I'm concerned about the child. I think she's important, and so do the witches. If there's anything you know about her and about what's going on, I'd like you to tell me. As I said, something's given me the conviction that you can, which is why I'm here." Grumman smiled briefly, and said, "The name he used is my own true name, John Parry. Yes, you have come to take me to the other world. And as for what brought you here, I think you'll find it was this." And he opened his hand. He saw a ring of silver and turquoise, a Navajo design; he saw it clearly and he recognized it as his own mother's. "Very well," said Grumman, "I'll begin. My name, as I told you, is Parry, and I was not born in this world. I was looking for something I'd heard about from old legends: a rent in the fabric of the world, a hole that had appeared between our universe and another. I and two others walked through this hole,

this doorway, without even seeing it, and left our world altogether. I found their world an abominable place. The way back to my own world was barred forever. Yes, I hadn't known of Sayan Kötör here till I entered yours. People here cannot conceive of worlds where dæmons are a silent voice in the mind and no more. Can you imagine my astonishment, in turn, at learning that part of my own nature was female, and bird-formed, and beautiful? You see, **I was intrigued by that haunted world where the Specters fed on human consciousness**. I found that the philosophers there, centuries ago, **had created a tool for their own undoing: an instrument they called the subtle knife**. It had many powers—more than they'd guessed when they made it, far more than they know even now—and somehow, in using it, they had let the Specters into their world. So I have summoned you here, and you are to fly me northward, into the world Asriel has opened, where I expect to find the bearer of the subtle knife. That is a dangerous world, mind. **Those Specters are worse than anything in your world or mine**. We shall have to be careful and courageous. I shall not return." "I came here because I thought I'd be helping Lyra. So this is my price for taking you into the other world, Dr. Grumman: not gold, but that subtle knife. And I don't want it for myself; I want it for Lyra. You have to swear you'll get her under the protection of that object, and then I'll take you wherever you want to go."
They reached the port at the river's mouth to find every hotel, every lodging house, every private room commandeered by soldiers. Not just any soldiers, either: these were troops of the Imperial Guard of Muscovy, the most ferociously trained and lavishly equipped army in the world, and one sworn to uphold the power of the Magisterium. "So we'll have the balloon right now," said Lee, "and you can set some men to fill it. And I mean at once. And that includes food, and water, and ballast." The warehouseman looked at the sergeant, who shrugged, and then hurried away to see to the balloon. Lee paid the warehouseman with the last of his gold and helped Grumman into the basket. Then he turned to the men at the ropes to give the order to let go. Soaring upward, **with a fair wind behind and a new world in front—what could be better in this life?** "Thank you, Mr. Scoresby," said the shaman. "You managed that very well. Now we settle down and fly. I would be grateful for those furs; the air is still cold."

The Belvedere

She was badly worried about Will's hand; not only were the wounds bleeding freely still, but the rest of the hand was swollen and red. "If she's got this special bodyguard they were talking about, these soldiers who'd had their dæmons cut away, maybe Sir Charles is right and they'll be able to ignore the Specters. You know what I think? I think what they eat, the Specters, is people's dæmons. If these soldiers of hers haven't got dæmons at all, maybe the Specters won't attack them either, like Sir Charles said…." Will managed to make out Angelica's voice high over them all: "You killed my brother and you stole the knife! You murderers! You made the Specters get him! You killed him, and we'll kill you!" Serafina Pekkala and her group arrived to rescue them from the violent crowd of children. "The place is full of Specters—a hundred or more surrounding the building, and more drifting up over the grass. Can't you see them?" "No! We can't see 'em at all!" "Already we've lost one witch. We can't risk any more.

Can you get down from this building? Why are the Specters afraid of you?" "Because of the knife. When they reached the cave, they found a fire, a rabbit roasting, and Serafina Pekkala stirring something in a small iron pot. "Let me see your wound" was the first thing she said to Will, and he dumbly held out his hand. Her companions looked at it with wonder and suspicion, for they had never seen such a blade before, with such an edge on it. "This will need more than herbs to heal. It will need a spell," said Serafina. "Very well, we'll prepare one."

Screen Language

As the moon rose, the witches began their spell to heal Will's wound. Serafina crouched over the knife and sang in a high, fierce tone. The medicine was ready. He held out his hand, and as Serafina daubed the steaming mixture on the bleeding stumps of his fingers he looked away and breathed in sharply several times, but he didn't flinch. The spell was done. Serafina told the children that the witches had agreed that since they'd come into this world to find Lyra and be her guardians, they'd help Lyra do what she now knew her task to be: namely, to guide Will to his father. "**I think Lyra's braver than me. I think she's the best friend I ever had**," said Will. "She thinks that about you as well," whispered the dæmon.

Ruta Skadi told the other witches of her journey to Lord Asriel's fortress. "Sisters, it is the greatest castle you can imagine: ramparts of basalt, rearing to the skies, with wide roads coming from every direction, and on them cargoes of gunpowder, of food, of armor plate. How has he done this? I think he must have been preparing this for a long time, for eons. And coming to this fortress are warriors of every kind, from every world. Men and women, yes, and fighting spirits, too, and armed creatures such as I had never seen—lizards and apes, great birds with poison spurs, creatures too outlandish to have a name I could guess at." "Did you see Lord Asriel, Ruta Skadi? Did you find your way to him?" "Yes, I did, and it was not easy, because he lives at the center of so many circles of activity, and he directs them all. And he invited us to join him, sisters." The grandfather ghost said, "To join his army against the Authority. It would be a close fight, but Lord Asriel would win, because he is passionate and daring and he believes his cause is just. Except for one thing, children. He hasn't got Æsahættr. Without Æsahættr, he and all his forces will go down to defeat." "**I'm thinking now that Lyra might be what you heard those ghasts speak of—this Æsahættr**. Not the witches, not those angel-beings, but that sleeping child: the final weapon in the war against the Authority. She understood why these beings would wait for thousands of years and travel vast distances in order to be close to something important, and how they would feel differently for the rest of time, having been briefly in its presence. That was how these creatures looked now, **these beautiful pilgrims of rarefied light, standing around the girl with the dirty face and the tartan skirt and the boy with the wounded hand who was frowning in his sleep**. One of the creatures spread his wings wide. The others, as close as they were, did so too, and their wings interpenetrated with no resistance, sweeping through one another like light through light, until there was a circle of radiance around the sleepers on the grass. They have no flesh, did you see that? **All they are is light**.

Alamo Gulch

"What Asriel's done has shaken everything up, Mr. Scoresby, shaken it more profoundly than it's ever been shaken before. These doorways and windows that I spoke of—they open in unexpected places now. It was a world of children, but they weren't the only presences there." Lee had to rub his eyes when he saw them first, but there was no doubt about it: columns of mist—or something more tenuous than mist—a thickening of the air…. Whatever they were, the city was full of them; they drifted along the boulevards, they entered houses and courtyards. The children moved among them unseeing. They clustered around those who were on the verge of adolescence. They were like flies around meat. "The Specters' food is attention. A conscious and informed interest in the world. Both the Oblation Board and the Specters of Indifference are bewitched by this truth about human beings: that innocence is different from experience. The Oblation Board fears and hates Dust, and the Specters feast on it, but it's Dust both of them are obsessed by." "Seems to me the place you fight cruelty is where you find it, and the place you give help is where you see it needed. You're going to find the bearer of this subtle knife, and what then?" "Tell him what his task is." "And that's a task that includes protecting Lyra," the aeronaut reminded him. "It will protect all of us." The breeze that moved them more swiftly was working on the other balloon, too. It was no closer, but neither had they left it behind. And as Lee turned the telescope on it again, he saw darker, smaller shapes behind it in the shimmering distance. They were grouped purposefully, and becoming clearer and more solid every minute. "Zeppelins," he said. "Well, there's no hiding out here. I'm going to take us up into those hills and then land, because anything else is certain death. If I land when they're too close behind, they'll be able to see where we go, but if I take us down too early, we won't find the shelter of those trees. Either way, there's going to be some shooting before long." The zeppelins grew larger and firmer. They had already overtaken the other balloon and could now be easily seen with the naked eye: four of them in line abreast. And across the wide silence of the bay came the sound of their engines, tiny but clear, an insistent mosquito whine. The storm seemed to be chasing the zeppelins as they were chasing Lee's balloon, for the rain swept along toward them from the sea. Then came another flash of lightning, and this time the jagged fork struck down direct from the thunderhead at one of the zeppelins. In a moment the gas was alight. A bright flower of flame blossomed against the bruise-dark clouds, and the craft drifted down slowly, ablaze like a beacon, and floated, still blazing, on the water. "I'm going to take us down, Dr. Grumman," Lee shouted above the wind. "You should stand and be ready to jump clear. An oak trunk, with a great white scar where a branch had been torn away, but torn only partially, for the basket was resting on it near the point where it was still attached to the trunk. He threw the rest of the rope over and clambered down till he felt solid ground beneath his feet. I'm going back up the rope, and I'll lower some things down to you. One of them's a tent. You can git that set up while I see what I can do up there to hide the balloon." "We must leave the forest at once, Mr. Scoresby. They are going to burn it. They have an engine that throws out a kind of naphtha blended with potash, which ignites when it touches water. The Imperial Navy developed it to use in their war with Nippon. If the forest is saturated, it will catch all the more quickly." Lee saw the fireball and heard through the roar in his ears Hester

saying, “That’s all of ’em, Lee.” He said, or thought, “Those poor men didn’t have to come to this, nor did we. We held ’em off. We held out. **We’re a-helping Lyra**. We’re connected to that child, and I’m glad of it.” Then Mr. Scoresby died.

Bloodmoss

On, said the alethiometer. *Farther, higher*. So on they climbed. The witches flew above to spy out the best routes. “Will,” she said, “d’you know why you have to find your father?” “It’s what I’ve always known. My mother said I’d take up my father’s mantle. That’s all I know.” A witch flew back to spy. But her first glimpse of them told her more than she wanted to know; these soldiers had no dæmons. To see them without dæmons was a gross and sickening horror. They were with Mrs. Coulter. “I didn’t think it possible, but you have them following you like dogs…. Are they afraid of your bodyguard? What is it?” said Carlo. “Simple,” she said. “They know I can give them more nourishment if they let me live than if they consume me. I can lead them to all the victims their phantom hearts desire. As soon as you described them to me, I knew I could dominate them, and so it turns out. Just tell me what the boy has, and why you want it.” He gave a soft shudder. His eyes were closed. Then he said, “It’s a knife. The subtle knife of Cittàgazze. You haven’t heard of it, Marisa? **Some people call it teleutaia makhaira, the last knife of all. Others call it Æsahættr. Ah…It’s the knife that will cut anything.** Not even its makers knew what it could do. Nothing, no one, matter, spirit, angel, air—**nothing is invulnerable to the subtle knife**. Marisa, it’s mine, you understand?” The spy witch gasped, “She will be the mother—she will be life—mother—she will disobey— Eve! Mother of all! Eve, again! Mother Eve!” she stammered, sobbing. “What will you do to Lyra?” “Why, I shall have to destroy her,” said Mrs. Coulter, “to prevent another Fall…. Why didn’t I see this before? It was too large to see….” And Mrs. Coulter drew herself up, and snapped her fingers to the Specter feeding on the witch’s dæmon. So Mrs. Coulter called to the Specters. They came at her command, gliding like pillars of mist across the water. She raised her arms and made them forget they were earthbound, so that one by one they rose into the air and floated free like malignant thistledown, drifting up into the night and borne by the air currents toward Will and Lyra and the other witches.

“There is a war coming, boy. The greatest war there ever was. Something like it happened before, and this time the right side must win. We’ve had nothing but lies and propaganda and cruelty and deceit for all the thousands of years of human history. It’s time we started again, but properly this time….” They invented a device. They had no idea that they’d made the one weapon in all the universes that could defeat the tyrant. The Authority. God. The rebel angels fell because they didn’t have anything like the knife; but now… **Argue with anything else, but don’t argue with your own nature**. There are two great powers,” the man said, “and they’ve been fighting since time began. Every advance in human life, every scrap of knowledge and wisdom and decency we have has been torn by one side from the teeth of the other. **Every little increase in human freedom has been fought over ferociously** between those who want us to know more and be wiser and stronger, and those who want us to obey and be humble and submit.” “But what must I do?” said Will. And then Stanislaus

Grumman, Jopari, John Parry hesitated. “You must go to Lord Asriel,” he said, “and tell him that Stanislaus Grumman sent you, and that you have **the one weapon he needs above all others**. Like it or not, boy, you have a job to do.” The two looked at each other. But in that same moment, as the lantern light flared over John Parry’s face, something shot down from the turbid sky, and he fell back dead before he could say a word, an arrow in his failing heart. The osprey dæmon vanished in a moment. “You think things have to be *possible*? Things have to be *true*! He was my father, and neither of us knew it till the second you killed him! Witch, I wait all my life and come all this way and I find him at last, and you *kill* him.…” “Father,” he said, “Dad, Daddy… Father… whatever you wanted me to do, I promise, I swear I’ll do it. I’ll fight. I’ll be a warrior. I will. This knife, I’ll take it to Lord Asriel, wherever he is, and I’ll help him fight that enemy. I’ll do it. You can rest now. It’s all right. You can sleep now.” He swung the canvas pack over his shoulder before wrapping the cloak around himself.

Our task is simple: **We need you**,” said the Watchers. “We have been following the shaman every inch of his way, hoping he would lead us to you, and so he has. And now we have come to guide you in turn to Lord Asriel.” “Why didn’t you stop the witch, then? Why did you let her kill him?” “We would have done, earlier. But **his task was over once he’d led us to you**.” In the dimness, he could see the witches who had been guarding Lyra all sitting or standing still. They looked like statues, except that they were breathing, but they were scarcely alive. There were several black-silk-clad bodies on the ground, too, and as he gazed in horror from one to another of them, Will saw what must have happened: they had been attacked in midair by the Specters, and had fallen to their deaths, indifferently. Lyra’s little canvas rucksack, and from the weight of it he knew without looking that the alethiometer was still inside it. Lyra was gone, Lyra was captured, Lyra was lost.