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At the Back of the North Wind

George MacDonald · *1871* · *English original*

Diamond's travels with North Wind return him to London life with a growing readiness to help.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

How can trust in goodness survive what a child cannot understand?

"I HAVE been asked to tell you about the back of the north wind."

Chapter I: The Hay-Loft

Diamond continues to question his guide while giving his hope a daily form through care for those within reach.

KEY CHARACTERS

Diamond
Coachman's son whose visionary trust accompanies practical kindness.

North Wind
Changes size and leads Diamond through frightening and beautiful experiences.

Joseph and Martha
Work to sustain the household through changes of fortune.

Nanny
Crossing-sweeper whose illness brings her to a children's hospital.

Mr. Raymond
Offers friendship, stories, and practical help.

Little Daylight
Lives under an enchantment that joins appearance to the phases of the moon.

Grades 6–8

Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01

A voice in the hay-loft

CHAPTER I: THE HAY-LOFT

The cold wind entering Diamond's small sleeping place becomes a companion whose presence opens a larger world.

- The narrator is asked to tell about the back of the north wind.
- Diamond first hears her in the hay-loft over the cab-horse stable.
- The opening is exact, including the mention of an old Greek writer and Herodotus.

> *"I HAVE been asked to tell you about the back of the north wind."*
> Chapter I: The Hay-Loft

02

Trust in the storm

CHAPTER V: THE SUMMER-HOUSE

North Wind's work frightens Diamond, especially when she describes a shipwreck and insists on purposes beyond his sight.

- North Wind is both a person and a power Diamond must learn to trust.
- The storm is not only weather; it is how she does her work.
- Keep MacDonald's gentle, serious tone; do not flatten her into a mere fairy.

> *"I have got to sink a ship to-night."*
> Chapter V: The Summer-House

03

Kindness in the cab yard

CHAPTER XVIII: THE DRUNKEN CABMAN

Diamond's family's difficulties bring opportunities to care for babies, help his father, and respond to a distressed neighbor.

- Diamond's family lives by the cab yard, and work and want are close at hand.
- Kindness in small rooms matters as much as the night journeys.
- The London setting is poor and particular, not a generic fairyland.

> *"as himself was the only somebody at hand,"*
> Chapter XVIII: The Drunken Cabman

04

Nanny and the hospital

CHAPTER XXVII: THE CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL

The friendship with Nanny reaches a place where poor children receive attentive care and Mr. Raymond tells stories.

- Nanny and the hospital scenes test Diamond's care for someone smaller than himself.
- Illness and recovery belong to the story's earthly half.
- The book moves between the yard and the journeys without dropping either.

> *"carefully tended for love's sake."*
> Chapter XXVII: The Children's Hospital

05

Little Daylight's release

CHAPTER XXVIII: LITTLE DAYLIGHT

An enchanted princess is restored when a prince tends an aged stranger without recognizing the beloved figure within her.

- The inset tale of Little Daylight is told inside the novel.
- It is a sleeping-beauty story with MacDonald's own turn of the curse and the release.
- Do not treat Little Daylight as a separate book; it is a tale told in this one.

> *""Mother, mother!" he said. "Poor mother!""*
> Chapter XXVIII: Little Daylight

06

The final country

CHAPTER XXXVIII: AT THE BACK OF THE NORTH WIND

Diamond's death returns the narrative to North Wind's promised destination and the narrator's interpretation of his journey.

- At the end, they think Diamond is dead; the narrator knows he has gone to the back of the north wind.
- The last sentence must be quoted as it stands, including the line break in the hosted text if you cite it.
- The close is a homecoming, not a puzzle to be explained away.

> *"I knew that he had gone to / the back of the north wind."*
> Chapter XXXVIII: At the Back of the North Wind

Trust and questions

Practical charity

Death and hope

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 6–8

1. The horse and the boy share the name Diamond.
2. Songs and inset tales alter the pace and mode of narration.
3. The narrator leaves room between explanation and the boy's experience.

Quotations are verbatim from the English original, Project Gutenberg #225: George MacDonald, At the Back of the North Wind, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/at-the-back-of-the-north-wind/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.