

# **O: ARTHUR: By the River Thames,**

## **1856**

Arthur begins his life in the year before his sixteenth birthday, when his family is hit hard by financial struggles. This difficult situation pushes him to work extra hours at a young age to help pay the rent and contribute to the household. Each morning, he rises before dawn, enduring a daily routine that involves using the little resources available to him. He uses cold water mixed with diluted vinegar to wash his face, as the soap he receives from charity is of poor quality. As he walks through the streets of London during these early hours, he is confronted by the harsh realities of the city, where beggars and the broken-hearted can be seen at every corner. One day, Arthur stumbles upon a tragic scene: a man who has frozen to death on the sidewalk, an event that adds to the crushing weight of his struggles and reinforces the dismal reality around him.

Hunger becomes an ever-present issue for Arthur, who starts his day with nothing more than a simple bread roll. Occasionally, he finds a small indulgence in butter or a warm drink from a nearby stall, trying to momentarily lift his spirits. These fleeting joys come when he brings treats home for his mother and younger brother, offering them small tokens of happiness amid the gloom. The overwhelming fatigue from his long hours of work by night leaves him devoid of energy to read or entertain any hope for a better future. Instead, he is haunted by the memory of his late brother, whose absence weighs heavily on his heart. Even though life seems relentlessly harsh, there are moments of beauty—like the songs of gulls or the inviting aroma of roasting chestnuts—that briefly offer him a sense of peace, reminding him that even small things in life can bring comfort.

One day, while at the office, Arthur gets engrossed in examining illustrations for an upcoming English reprint of *The Works of Rabelais*. His admiration for the power of visual storytelling contrasts sharply with his self-doubt about his artistic talents. But then, the door to the office bursts open, and a man rushes in, later revealed to be the famous Charles Dickens. Dickens, seeking Mr. Evans, is told of Mr. Bradbury's passing, and Arthur, as Bradbury's apprentice, seizes the opportunity to introduce himself. Dickens immediately notices Arthur's potential and acknowledges his skill, inspiring Arthur to continue striving in his career.

Their conversation turns to the difficulties authors face, especially those bound by oppressive publishing contracts. Dickens, who shares his frustrations with the publishing world, expresses a desire to break free from these constraints and proposes a partnership with Mr. Evans. This collaboration results in the successful publication of four novels, though their attempt to launch the *Daily News* falls into financial ruin. Months later, Arthur runs into a disheveled Dickens who brings with him a special gift—a rare treat from the Ottoman lands, offering a glimpse into Dickens' personal life and struggles amid rumors of infidelity. As they talk, Arthur opens up about his dreams of traveling to Nineveh, and Dickens, recognizing his potential, gifts Arthur with tailored clothing to help him experience the world beyond the limits of his working-class upbringing.

Dickens' thoughtful gesture is accompanied by a letter that encourages Arthur to explore new horizons, marking a significant turning point in his journey. The letter hints at the transformation that lies ahead for Arthur, urging him to break free from the limitations of his current life. Despite Dickens soon disappearing back into his personal struggles, Arthur is left with a renewed sense of hope and purpose. This moment sparks a fire within him, fueling his desire to escape the confines of London and embrace a future full of opportunities. Dickens, even in his absence, leaves Arthur with the belief that a brighter and more adventurous future is within reach, far beyond the narrow world he once knew.