

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

## **1857**

Arthur stands before the British Museum in 1857, feeling small beneath the grandeur of its towering columns and impressive architecture. This iconic structure, with its colossal presence, seems almost to mock his modest background and humble beginnings. However, despite the rising tide of self-doubt and anxiety, Arthur is determined to press forward, stepping into the museum with a sense of purpose. As he enters, disguised as a student, his heart races with excitement and nervousness, eager to explore the exhibits that lie within. The opportunity to learn from such esteemed artifacts fuels his desire for knowledge, even though he is unsure whether he truly belongs in this world of privilege and prestige. His thoughts wander back to his previous interactions with the Keeper of Oriental Antiquities, but the fear of making such a bold approach holds him back from connecting with this important figure.

After a brief time spent with the group of visitors, Arthur's curiosity leads him to wander away, seeking out the famous lamassus from Nineveh, ancient statues that have long captured his imagination. These powerful sculptures, which represent both mystery and history, are a beacon for Arthur, urging him to connect with the ancient past. However, just as he is lost in awe, a museum staff member, with a teasing tone, questions his expectations about the ancient artifacts. The staff member jokingly wonders whether the lamassus might have flown away, and the comment brings Arthur's insecurities to the surface. The teasing highlights the class differences that Arthur feels, and he quickly retreats, overwhelmed by his perceived inadequacy. Yet, this hasty escape only leads him further into the museum, where he accidentally stumbles upon a hidden storage room filled with ancient clay tablets inscribed with mysterious cuneiform writing. This discovery becomes the spark for his growing

fascination with the history contained in these tablets.

Arthur's immersion in the world of cuneiform tablets fuels an insatiable curiosity, drawing him deeper into the study of Mesopotamian history. As he examines the symbols and inscriptions, he feels a sense of connection to the ancient creators of these texts, but his personal doubts continue to linger. When he is discovered by another museum staff member, Arthur's discomfort only grows, as his appearance and his humble background are a constant reminder of the class divisions that separate him from those around him. His desire for knowledge is clouded by a deep sense of inadequacy, and he is constantly reminded of how different he is from the other scholars and staff in the museum. Despite these feelings, the allure of the tablets remains too strong to ignore. Arthur's deep-seated longing to uncover the mysteries of these ancient texts represents both his intellectual curiosity and his desire to escape from his own realities. His struggles with self-acceptance and societal barriers continue to shape his journey, but he pushes on, determined to make his mark.

Determined not to let his self-doubt get in the way of his goals, Arthur makes it a point to return to the museum every day during his lunch break, eager to spend as much time as possible studying the ancient tablets. His work schedule leaves little room for leisure, but the time he spends immersed in history gives him purpose. Despite the exhaustion that comes with managing his job and his newfound obsession with the tablets, Arthur finds solace in the pursuit of knowledge. He is keenly aware of the museum staff's growing interest in his presence, and their initial curiosity gradually shifts toward respect. At first, they view him as an outsider, but his dedication and passion for the artifacts begin to shine through. The staff's changing perception of him gives Arthur a small sense of validation, though the weight of his financial and social struggles never fully disappears.

Arthur's persistence eventually catches the attention of Dr. Samuel Birch, the Keeper of Oriental Antiquities, who is intrigued by Arthur's knowledge of the cuneiform tablets. Dr. Birch, recognizing the boy's potential, offers him an opportunity to assist with organizing the ancient artifacts, a proposition that represents both a life-changing

opportunity and a risk. Arthur is astonished by the offer, as it seems to open doors to a future he had only dreamed of. However, the opportunity also presents a new set of challenges. Arthur knows that balancing this new responsibility with his existing job will require dedication and perseverance, but he is eager to prove himself. This moment represents a turning point for Arthur, one that brings hope for a brighter future. The knowledge he uncovers in the museum will not only change his life but also allow him to contribute to the preservation of history.

