

O: ARTHUR: By the River Tigris, 1872

Arthur finds himself grappling with a deep sense of cultural dissonance in the chapter "By the River Tigris, 1872," as he navigates his time among the Yazidis during their annual festival, "Çarşema Sor," or 'Red Wednesday.' The festival marks the arrival of spring, a celebration of renewal and hope that contrasts sharply with Arthur's personal and external struggles. The Yazidi villagers of Zêrav spend their time painting eggs, cleaning homes, and making candles from sheep fat, all integral to their customs and traditions. For Arthur, an Englishman unfamiliar with these practices, his own cultural perspective feels distant. The idea of celebrating a new year during the dead of winter, a time when nature seems to be in hibernation, is foreign to him, and the curious children listen to his explanation with polite intrigue, unaware of the underlying differences between their lives and his.

As the festivities reach their peak on the seventh sunset, Arthur receives a rare honor: an invitation to the sheikh's house, a gesture that underscores his outsider status. The sheikh's home is filled with the scent of rosemary and sage, symbolic of warmth and healing, as the villagers prepare an array of food. During this gathering, Arthur's gaze falls upon Leila, a faqra, who begins performing a traditional divination ritual with her daf, a hand drum. As the evening continues, Leila falls into a deep trance, her haunting melody transcending time and space, capturing the attention of all who listen. Yet, as her voice intensifies, so does the tone of the prophecy she delivers, one filled with chilling forewarnings of death and destruction, predicting a massacre that will befall the Yazidis.

Leila's trance becomes more alarming as she calls out "Firman," a word that not only signifies permission but eerily suggests a license for violence against the Yazidi people. As the prophecy unfolds, the details become painfully specific, foretelling the destruction of sacred Yazidi sites and the imminent slaughter that will leave no

survivors unless they flee to the mountains for refuge. In that moment, the once festive atmosphere shifts into one of foreboding silence. The children, who had been gleefully playing, return to their activities, blissfully unaware of the grave words that have just been spoken. Arthur, however, is deeply shaken, the weight of what he has witnessed overwhelming him as he struggles to comprehend the full depth of the prophecy. His mind races as the night grows darker, burdened with the fear that the Yazidis' fate has already been sealed by forces beyond their control.

As Arthur lies awake later that night, the remnants of ancient Nineveh continue to haunt his thoughts. The city, rich with history and marked by countless tragedies, serves as a painful reminder of the cycle of violence that has plagued this region for centuries. Arthur's reflections turn inward, and he wonders whether the Yazidis, much like the ruins of Nineveh, are destined to be lost to time. The prophecy, though spoken in the present, carries the weight of history and seems to echo the suffering of those who came before. As he contemplates the inevitability of the destruction, Arthur is forced to grapple with his own sense of helplessness. He begins to question whether it would be better to remain ignorant, untouched by the horrors he now understands. As the chapter closes, the sense of impending change grows stronger, underscored by the natural world around him, which seems to reflect the looming catastrophe. The haunting presence of nature, the village, and the prophecy converge, signaling a profound shift in Arthur's understanding of both his own role and the fate of the Yazidis.