

O: ARTHUR: By the River

Thames/Tigris, 1876

Arthur prepares for his journey back to Nineveh, burdened by a deep sense of sadness. His return is complicated by the lack of a sponsor, which adds an extra layer of uncertainty to his mission. As he struggles with the emotional impact of leaving his family behind, particularly his young twins, he is reminded of their dependence on him. His daughter's heartfelt embrace and his son's poignant drawing serve as vivid symbols of their understanding of his departure. These innocent expressions show the mixed emotions that accompany his choice to pursue his work, knowing that the dangers of his expedition may keep him away for an extended time. This bittersweet moment marks a crucial turning point for Arthur, who faces the personal conflict of his academic ambitions versus his role as a father and husband.

Tensions arise as Arthur faces a confrontation with Mabel, his wife. She expresses frustration over his decision to leave so soon, revealing her feelings of abandonment. Arthur tries to explain that his work is essential, emphasizing his deep connection to the ancient tablets he is studying. However, Mabel's concerns go deeper, accusing him of prioritizing his scholarly pursuits over his family and even hinting at infidelity. Though Arthur defends himself passionately, the unresolved issues between them remain. Mabel's dissatisfaction with his decisions suggests a growing rift in their relationship, one that Arthur cannot easily dismiss. Despite these emotional challenges, Arthur feels compelled to continue his archaeological work, convinced that it is crucial to both his personal and professional identity.

Upon arriving in Constantinople, Arthur is confronted with the disquieting atmosphere that surrounds him. The recent death of the sultan has left the city in turmoil, with unrest and fear spreading throughout the population. Arthur is warned about the

potential dangers on his journey to Nineveh, including uprisings and the threat of disease. Despite these ominous cautions, Arthur remains undeterred, resolute in his decision to continue. He is determined to send letters back home to his family, intending to bridge the physical and emotional divide between them. These letters, filled with vivid descriptions of his journey, are meant to keep the connection with his loved ones alive, even as the distance between them grows. Arthur's commitment to his family and his work is clear, but it is tempered by the realization that his journey is fraught with risks that could alter his life in unexpected ways.

As Arthur approaches a Yazidi village he had once visited with fondness, a sense of unease overtakes him. He is accompanied by his guide, Mahmoud, and together they observe the once-thriving community, now deeply scarred by violence. The peaceful village Arthur remembers has been ravaged by conflict, leaving behind devastation and sorrow. Mahmoud, visibly distressed, explains that the village had been the site of a brutal massacre carried out by local leaders. The news shocks Arthur, who is deeply affected by the loss of life and culture that had once been so vibrant. The massacre forces Arthur to reflect on the fragility of human existence, and the implications of his archaeological pursuits suddenly feel insignificant in comparison to the human suffering around him. His connection to the past, once something that brought him joy and purpose, now feels burdened with guilt and confusion, as he grapples with the true cost of his work.

The massacre becomes a turning point for Arthur, one that shakes his beliefs about his role in the world. While he had once viewed archaeology as a noble pursuit, capable of preserving history and culture, the events in the village force him to reconsider. The realities of human suffering and loss bring a sobering perspective to his work, and he begins to question his motivations and his place in a world where history is often defined by violence and destruction. As Arthur contemplates the implications of his discoveries and the legacy he is helping to preserve, he is struck by the tension between his professional ambitions and his moral conscience. His once unwavering commitment to understanding the past now seems less clear-cut, and he struggles to reconcile his passions with the overwhelming weight of the human cost associated

with them. This chapter captures the internal conflict Arthur faces as he navigates his journey, not just through the physical landscape, but through the emotional and moral terrain that challenges his identity and purpose.

