

O: ARTHUR: By the River Tigris, 1876

Arthur lies in a run-down shepherd's hut by the River Tigris, his body weak and struggling to process the poverty that surrounds him. The cold tea and tattered rags offer little comfort, and yet, amidst the despair, he discovers his journal lying on the floor. With his breath shallow and labored, Arthur picks up his journal, determined to write a final reflection on the course of his life. His thoughts drift to the influences that have shaped his existence, specifically his long-held love for poetry and the written word. Over the years, Arthur has devoted himself to the art of collecting, interpreting, and translating literary works, especially an ancient epic that has provided him with endless joy. The poetry, woven into his heart and soul, becomes a source of solace, even as his life comes to a close in a humble setting.

Arthur has often been praised for his talents, his mother being the most ardent supporter, while his father's approval came intermittently. His colleagues have also recognized his skill, but the belief of his wife remains a mystery to him. As he reflects on his life, Arthur comes to the realization that while talent may have been a gift, it is his passion for literature that has defined him. His heart has been restless, forever searching to break boundaries and push limits, much like the ancient kings he admires—Gilgamesh and Ashurbanipal. These kings endured immense trials, and their stories echo in Arthur's mind as he compares himself to them. He now views himself as "King of the Sewers and Slums," a far cry from the grandeur of his historical counterparts. He recognizes that his own identity has been shaped not just by the words he loved but by the life he led far from royal palaces.

As tears begin to form in his eyes, Arthur mourns the lost opportunities in his life, particularly in his roles as a father and husband. He feels the weight of loneliness where companionship and intimacy should have been, as secrets remained unspoken and desires unfulfilled. His scholarly pursuit of ancient texts has always been a refuge,

but the complexities of love—something he has never fully understood—elude him. Arthur contemplates the epic narratives he has studied, acknowledging that they belong not to any one person but to the collective human experience. In his hands, he holds a blue tablet—an artifact from his travels—intended as a gift to Leila, a symbol of both connection and disconnection. It is through these narratives and his deep bond with Leila that Arthur finds some measure of peace, despite the heartache he carries.

As his life draws to an end, Arthur envisions the *Epic of Gilgamesh* living on across time, its allure reaching new generations of admirers who will find beauty in its imperfections. The epic, a testament to human emotion and mortality, will transcend borders, serving as a bridge between past and future. Arthur believes that art, in all its forms, is a legacy—a way for humanity to recognize and remember their ancestors' struggles, triumphs, and fragility. In his final moments, Arthur accepts his own mortality, seeing it as a necessary part of the cycle of life. He recalls the teachings about death not as an end, but as a new beginning, finding peace in the knowledge that his journey, like those of the heroes in the epics, is only part of a larger, never-ending narrative.

When Arthur breathes his last on August 1876, he leaves behind a legacy of intellectual pursuit, exploration, and emotional depth. Mahmoud arrives to bring news of his passing, and Leila, deeply affected by their shared connection, awaits his arrival in the afterlife. Arthur's body is to be laid to rest at the Castle of the Rock, and his memory will endure, not just as a scholar, but as King Arthur of the Sewers and Slums. His life—a blend of triumph and struggle—will remain etched in history, a reflection of the complexities of the human experience, where literature, love, and loss intersect in ways both profound and timeless.