

O: ARTHUR: On the way to the River Tigris, 1872

Arthur finds himself in Constantinople in 1872, facing the ever-looming uncertainty of his journey to Nineveh. As days drag on without news of the firman that will allow him to continue his mission, a growing sense of anxiety starts to permeate his every thought. Despite his initial desire to remain focused on his work, Arthur's isolation is interrupted when a dragoman and clerks suggest he take a break. They advise him to explore the city and seek diversion, and though hesitant at first, Arthur eventually agrees to this invitation, only to find himself swept into an unexpected and revelatory evening.

Upon entering the lavish house, Arthur is struck by the ornate decor and the aromatic spread of delicacies laid out before him. The dragoman explains that the establishment is intended to offer a glimpse of the authentic "Oriental" experience, tailored for those who have yet to explore the region. Despite the opulence surrounding him, Arthur can't help but feel uneasy, as memories of similar situations in the past resurface. These memories are laced with discomfort, reminding him of moments where the grandeur of such experiences failed to bring the peace he so desperately sought. Just as he contemplates leaving, the music from a qanun—a traditional Middle Eastern stringed instrument—fills the air, and Arthur is immediately drawn to its enchanting sound. The performance captivates him, providing a brief escape from his inner turmoil, and he becomes absorbed in the music, feeling an emotional release he had not anticipated.

As the evening progresses, the harmony of the music is shattered by an unexpected crisis. The sound of panicked voices fills the air as word spreads that a fire has broken out in the neighborhood. The guests, once caught in the tranquility of the evening,

now scramble to flee as flames engulf the surrounding buildings in Pera, an area of Constantinople rich with culture and history. Amidst the pandemonium, Arthur makes his way back into the establishment, determined to retrieve the qanun that had so captured his attention earlier. To him, the instrument symbolizes the beauty and fleeting peace he had experienced. As the fire rages on, Arthur's determination to preserve this moment is a stark reminder of how quickly life's most precious moments can be consumed by chaos. The tension of the fire against the serenity of the music underscores the fragile nature of life itself, leaving Arthur grappling with the impermanence of joy and sorrow alike.



After the fire's destruction has subsided, Arthur seeks refuge at the British embassy, hoping for solace from the tumult he's endured. However, his moment of reprieve is cut short when he is confronted with devastating news—the ambassador informs him that his mother has passed away. This revelation sends a wave of disbelief and despair through Arthur, who struggles to process the weight of his grief. Despite the ambassador's kind offer to help arrange his return to England, Arthur makes the difficult decision to continue his journey. He resolves to press on toward Nineveh, feeling that he must fulfill his mission despite the emotional toll that the loss of his mother has taken on him.

This chapter poignantly contrasts the duality of beauty and tragedy through the imagery of Constantinople, where Arthur finds himself caught between the allure of the city and the harsh realities of life. The music, fire, and loss all represent the fleeting nature of peace and the uncertainty that underpins the human experience. Arthur's internal conflict—torn between his mission and his grief—becomes a significant turning point in his journey. As he faces the loss of a loved one, Arthur is forced to reckon with deeper questions of life, purpose, and the meaning of personal sacrifice. The decision to continue his travels, despite the grief he feels, speaks to his resolve and the greater mission he feels called to fulfill.