

O: ARTHUR: By the River Thames, 1853

In London, enveloped by a dense fog in 1853, thirteen-year-old Arthur navigates the oppressive atmosphere with his father. The thick brume dulls the world, and Arthur hurries behind his father, who hastily insists he finds an apprenticeship after his prolonged absence. Once a source of warmth, his father's demeanor has soured, reflecting the family's financial struggles. Arthur, though only recently out of school, has been laboring tirelessly to support his family. He scavenges, collects manure, trades old clothes, and even dives into filthy waters to gather leeches, all while caring for his younger siblings as their mother works fewer hours.

Despite some nostalgic yearning for the structured life of school, Arthur recognizes his responsibility to provide for his family in a world where child labor prevails, with his peers existing in dire conditions across the city, often risking their lives in hazardous jobs. As they walk, Arthur's curiosity about the job opportunity sparks questions, all met with harsh rebuffs from his father. Tensions escalate when Arthur's inquiry about the nature of the work they are headed to earns him a violent rebuke.

Their journey leads them into St Giles, notorious for its squalor and vice, where Arthur feels a mix of shame and anger at his father's cruelty towards a desperate prostitute. This encounter leaves a mark on him as they venture onward to Bradbury & Evans, a prominent publishing house.

Upon their arrival, Arthur's father attempts to leverage a connection with a local chemist for a job. However, the publishers inform them that they are not hiring. Desperation takes hold of Arthur's father as he pleads for a chance for Arthur, claiming his son is a genius. After some hesitation, the publishers engage Arthur, challenging him to recall specific dates from the past, impressing them with his extraordinary memory but leaving him emotionally conflicted regarding the events he recalls.

Eventually, they agree to take Arthur on as an apprentice, provided they can assess his abilities over a week. Arthur is simultaneously excited and apprehensive as he steps into the world of printing and publishing, ignited by curiosity and a burgeoning love for literature and learning that he had long craved yet been denied

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