

O: ARTHUR: By the River Thames/Tigris, 1876

In the chapter, Arthur prepares for his return to Nineveh, marked by a prevailing heaviness due to the absence of a sponsor and the emotional struggle of leaving his family, especially his twins, who feel his departure keenly. As he navigates their sorrow, their innocence is poignantly captured in his daughter's embrace and his son's drawing, which symbolizes the boy's understanding of their father's journey as both noble and dangerous.

Tensions also flare between Arthur and Mabel, his wife. She confronts him about his decision to travel so soon, revealing her deep-seated resentment over his apparent prioritization of work over family. Arthur defends his choice passionately, expressing a deep connection to the ancient tablets he studies, asserting that his scholarly pursuits are vital to him. Nevertheless, Mabel remains unswayed, her accusations of infidelity suggesting a fracture in their relationship. Despite this emotional turmoil, Arthur feels compelled to fulfill his responsibilities as an archaeologist.

On arrival in Constantinople, the atmosphere is fraught with unrest heightened by the recent death of the sultan. Arthur is cautioned about the perils he might encounter on his journey toward Nineveh, including uprisings and disease. Undeterred, Arthur embarks on his expedition, intent on sending letters home to his family, vividly recounting his experiences in hopes of bridging the physical and emotional distance.

As he nears a Yazidi village he remembers fondly, a sense of trepidation washes over him. Accompanied by his guide, Mahmoud, Arthur learns that the village has changed dramatically due to violence and devastation, a stark contrast to the memories he cherishes. Mahmoud's sorrowful demeanor reveals the extent of the tragedy that has befallen the community, which Arthur learns through shocking details of a massacre carried out by the local leaders, leaving him reeling as he contemplates the loss of friends and culture.

The massacre is an atrocious act that, while buried in the past, haunts Arthur's current existence. It forces him to confront not only the fragility of human life but also the implications of his endeavors in archaeology. The reality of sorrow and loss clashes with his previously held convictions about his work, invoking deep introspection regarding his role in the world. His attempts to connect with the living and the dead now invoke doubt and guilt, signifying a profound shift in his life's purpose. The chapter captures Arthur's emotional upheaval, the weight of history, and his struggle with identity amidst conflicting allegiances to family, past friendships, and professional duties.