

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

In the narrative set in 1872, Arthur is in Constantinople, anxiously awaiting a firman that will grant him passage to Nineveh. Days pass with little news, causing a sense of nervous tension that colors his every action. One evening, he's summoned by clerks and a dragoman who insists he should seek diversion after being largely cooped up. Despite his initial reluctance, he is swept into an unexpected night outing.

Soon, Arthur finds himself in a lavish house with ornate decor and trays full of delicacies. The dragoman reveals that it's an establishment meant to offer an authentic Oriental experience. However, Arthur feels uncomfortable and troubled by past memories associated with such places. Just as he contemplates leaving, a woman enters, understood to be the madam of the house. Despite Arthur's protests, the atmosphere shifts dramatically when music fills the room, played by three women, one of whom captivates him with her beauty and a qanun, a traditional musical instrument.

As the night unfolds, Arthur succumbs to the charm of the music, momentarily escaping his worries. The moment of calm is shattered by the alarming sound of a crowd outside — a fire has broken out in the neighborhood. Panic ensues as guests attempt to flee from the blazing inferno engulfing Pera, leading to the destruction of thousands of homes. Amid the chaos, Arthur rushes back to retrieve the qanun, which symbolizes a moment of beauty amidst turbulence.

Afterwards, Arthur seeks refuge and assistance at the embassy, only to learn of devastating news from the ambassador regarding his mother's passing. Unable to process the heavy loss and in despair, he questions the circumstances surrounding her death. Despite the ambassador's offer to arrange his return to England, Arthur resolves to continue his journey to Nineveh, determined to forge ahead despite the weight of personal tragedy.

The imagery throughout captures the vibrancy and danger of Constantinople, the transformative power of art and music, and the fleeting nature of life and home. The chapter ends with Arthur in deep introspection about his life's meaning and the loss he faces, signifying a turning point in his journey.