

O: ARTHUR: By the River Thames, 1871–2

In the aftermath of Arthur's successful lecture at the Society of Biblical Archaeology, his life transitions into a whirlwind of social engagements, including invitations to educational societies and gentlemen's clubs. Encountering refined gentlemen adorned in silk cravats and indulgent meals, including turtle soup, Arthur feels both awe and social pressure. He relishes in the luxurious environments filled with gilded mirrors and champagne flutes, yet beneath this facade, he grapples with an overpowering preoccupation with the missing Flood Tablet from Nineveh.

During a dinner at The Boltons, Arthur meets Mabel, a charming young woman from a respectable family. Their encounters seem coincidental, but Arthur senses a collective effort of his peers to draw them closer. Mabel, while not particularly well-read, expresses genuine interest in Arthur's work, and her simplicity and warm demeanor contrast sharply with his shyness. As Arthur navigates middle-class societal expectations surrounding love and marriage, he becomes acutely aware of their idealization of domestic life, which starkly contrasts with his priorities regarding the Mesopotamian tablets.

Amidst this societal backdrop, Arthur receives an unexpected opportunity from the Daily Telegraph to spearhead an archaeological excavation. With excitement brewing, he prepares for a journey to the land of Gilgamesh, but financial limitations weigh on him. Nevertheless, he feels empowered and optimistic, especially considering Mabel's father's support, who urges Arthur to propose to Mabel before departing, emphasizing the importance of companionship during his travels.

As Arthur packs for his adventure, he feels a sense of urgency to visit his mother, who has been in a sanatorium. Upon arriving at the Middlesex County Lunatic Asylum, he learns about her suffering from "restless melancholy." The grim reality of her condition becomes painfully clear as he witnesses her transformation into a shadow of her former self, struggling for recognition and connection. Reality dawns as Arthur recounts stories to her, trying to revive the warmth of their bond amidst her detachment. He yearns to make her proud and promises to fight for a better future for both of them, holding on to the hope that his endeavors in Nineveh will lead to her recovery and a brighter life filled with comfort and love.

As Arthur's journey draws near, he carries a guardian spirit carved for his mother, a tangible reminder of his affection and commitment to return for her—as he embarks on his path toward Nineveh .