

# O: ARTHUR: By the River Thames, 1872

In 1872, Arthur, feeling triumphant after discovering the Flood Tablet, faces an unexpected turn of events when his employers announce his return to England, despite his wishes to extend his stay by the River Tigris. Despite his attempts to convince them to allow him to remain in Nineveh, he must reluctantly prepare to return home. On the night before his departure, he shares a poignant moment with Leila, a local villager, who spills water for luck and encourages him to return freely. Arthur marks a pomegranate tree as a symbol of his promise to come back.

Upon arriving in London, Arthur is met with adulation and claims of heroism. The media casts him as a celebrated scholar, and he is bombarded with invitations, though the fame feels overwhelming. While he resumes his work at the British Museum, he feels a sense of alienation, struggling with hybrid emotions amidst newfound praise and disdain from critics, including accusations of falsifying artifacts.

Arthur's fiancée, Mabel, is eager to further their wedding plans, reflecting her desire for social elevation through his fame. Shopping sprees for attire reveal the tangible impacts of his elevated status, yet Arthur feels uneasy; the grandeur feels constricting. At a party hosted by an affluent countess, Arthur is confronted with the commodification of the artifacts he cherishes, displayed for the amusement of the elite instead of respected as cultural treasures.

The ensuing dinner conversation turns to accusations about the people of the places Arthur visited, leading him to defend the Yazidis and emphasize their dignity. This moment of disconnection from his dinner companions heightens his feelings of isolation. Arthur senses a profound change within himself, as he longs for Mesopotamia, a place where he felt authentic and connected.

After marrying Mabel, their struggles with financial constraints become apparent. While Arthur remains barred in his scholarly pursuits, Mabel pressures him to seek a promotion to support their growing family, reflecting their diverging perspectives on life. As Arthur immerses himself in his work, he remains haunted by memories of the land and woman he left behind, feeling a lingering sense of incompleteness and a yearning to reconnect with his past.