## XLIII. Nightfall

W. Somerset Maugham

Towards evening perhaps, tired of walking, you get into your chair and on the crest of a hill you pass through a stone gateway. You cannot tell why there should be a gateway in that deserted spot, far from a village, but a fragment of massive wall suggests the ruin of fortifications against the foes of a forgotten dynasty. And when you come through the gateway you see below you the shining water in the rice fields, diapered, like the chess-board in some Chinese Alice in Wonderland, and then the rounded, tree-clad hills. But making your way down the stone steps of the narrow causeway which is the high road from city to city, in the gathering darkness you pass a coppice, and from it waft towards you chill woodland odours of the night. Then you hear no longer the measured tread of your bearers, your ears are on a sudden deaf to their sharp cries as they change the pole from shoulder to shoulder, and to the ceaseless chatter or the occasional snatch of song with which they enliven the monotonous way, for the woodland odours are the same as those which steal up from the fat Kentish soil when you pass  through the woods of Bleane; and nostalgia seizes you. Your thoughts travel through time and space, far from the Here and Now, and you remember your vanished youth with its high hopes, its passionate love, and its ambition. Then if you are a cynic, as they say, and therefore a sentimentalist, tears come to your unwilling eyes. And when you have regained your self-control the night has fallen.