## XXVI. Rain

W. Somerset Maugham

Yes, but the sun does not shine every day. Sometimes a cold rain beats down on you and a northeast wind chills you to the bone. Your shoes and your coat are wet still from the day before and you have three hours to go before breakfast. You tramp along in the cheerless light of that bitter dawn, with thirty miles before you and nothing to look forward to at the end but the squalid discomfort of a Chinese inn. There you will find bare walls, a clammy floor of trodden earth, and you will dry yourself as best you can over a dish of burning charcoal.

Then you think of your pleasant room in London. The rain driving in squalls against the windows only makes its warmth more grateful. You sit by the fire, your pipe in your mouth, and read the Times from cover to cover, not the leading articles of course but the agony column and the advertisements of country houses you will never be able to afford. (On the Chiltern Hills, standing in its own park of one hundred and fifty acres, with spacious garden, orchard, etc., a Georgian house in perfect condition, with original woodwork  and chimney pieces, six reception rooms, fourteen bedrooms and usual offices, modern sanitation, stabling with rooms over and excellent garage. Three miles from first rate golf course.) I know then that Messrs. Knight, Frank, and Rutley are my favourite authors. The matters that they treat of like the great commonplaces which are the material of all fine poetry never stale; and their manner like that of the best masters is characteristic but at the same time various. Their style, as is that of Confucius according to the sinologues, is glitteringly compact: succinct but suggestive it combines an admirable exactness with a breadth of image which gives the imagination an agreeable freedom. Their mastery of words such as rood and perch of which I suppose I once knew the meaning but which for many years have been a mystery to me, is amazing, and they will use them with ease and assurance. They can play with technical terms with the ingenuity of Mr. Rudyard Kipling and they can invest them with the Celtic glamour of Mr. W.B. Yeats. They have combined their individualities so completely that I defy the most discerning critic to discover traces of a divided authorship. Literary history is acquainted with the collaboration of two writers, and the names of Beaumont and Fletcher, Erckman Chatrian, Besant and Rice spring to the excited fancy; but now that the higher criticism has destroyed that belief in the triple authorship of the Bible which I was taught in my youth, I  conjecture that the case of Knight, Frank and Rutley is unique.

Then Elizabeth, very smart in the white squirrel I brought her from China, comes in to say good-bye to me, for she, poor child, must go out whatever the weather, and I play trains with her while her pram is being got ready. Then of course I should do a little work, but the weather is so bad that I feel lazy, and I take up instead Professor Giles’ book on Chuang-Tzu. The rigid Confucianists frown upon him because he is an individualist, and it is to the individualism of the age that they ascribe the lamentable decay of China, but he is very good reading; he has the advantage on a rainy day that he can be read without great application and not seldom you come across a thought that sets your own wandering. But presently ideas, insinuating themselves into your consciousness like the lapping waves of a rising tide, absorb you to the exclusion of those which old Chuang-Tzu suggested, and notwithstanding your desire to idle, you sit down at your table. Only the dilettante uses a desk. Your pen goes easily and you write without effort. It is very good to be alive. Then two amusing people come to luncheon and when they are gone you drop into Christie’s. You see some Ming figures there, but they are not so good as those you brought from China yourself, and then you watch being sold pictures you are only too glad not to possess. You look at your watch; there is pretty sure to be a rubber  going at the Garrick, and the shocking weather justifies you in wasting the rest of the afternoon. You cannot stay very late, for you have seats for a first night and you must get home and dress for an early dinner. You will be just in time to tell Elizabeth a little story before she goes to sleep. She looks really very nice in her pyjamas with her hair done up in two plaits. There is something about a first night which only the satiety of the critic can fail to be moved by. It is pleasant to see your friends and amusing to hear the pit’s applause when a favourite of the stage, acting, better than she ever does behind the footlights, a delightful embarrassment at being recognised, advances to take her seat. It may be a bad play that you are going to see, but it has at least the merit that no one has seen it before; and there is always the chance of a moment’s emotion or of a smile.

Towards you in their great straw hats, like the hat of love-sick Pierrot, but with a huge brim, come a string of coolies, lolloping along, bent forward a little under the weight of the great bales of cotton that they carry. The rain plasters their blue clothes, so thin and ragged, against their bodies. The broken stones of the causeway are slippery, and with toil you pick your muddy way.