

Damp Evening

Beneath heavy trees in the street, faintly lit by the leaf-muffled streetlights, or by lights in the house-fronts, the rain that fell wildly is picking itself up, wearily as smoke. Steeply downhill, when I look back, a lighted ferry moves from the left, on mulberry-coloured water, below a crumbled, dark tree-line on the far side of the bay, heading towards the vast mauve harbour.

It slides transverse to the line of this street, that ends at a small park with three tall palm trees. Those very long, thin palms are like graduated, fan-shaped watercolour brushes, laid aside neatly by the painter's hand, that bleed apricot, vermilion, a residue of lime, and a mustard tone, onto a navy ground.

The ferry is slow and squarely-built, and is as tightly packed with light as a truck with bales of hay. Beneath it are blown, entangled and kinked, the loose straws of its load.

Then again, the ferry looks like a general store out in the countryside, sliding about with one's oblique approaches to it, and seen across shadowy wet paddocks, its puddles aglow.

Above the ferry, and the low bush above which it moves, is a view of the city, receding on black promontories, as though displayed on variously-extended screens. All of that is a flat jungle façade, filled with blazing eyes that have come down to the river bank.

Then further on there lies open the last of the wintry sunset, after the rain, in its extraordinary splendour: those strange uplands, with their purple mountains, red and green lakes, and gold-leaved pavilions.

The eye lowers from such vistas and finds the ferry, out on the open water. It is a homely trader's wagon, trudging toward the edge of the steppes.

The last of the wet sunset has become some marvellous voice, very high, and diminuendo, but firm, and fading away now in the throat of darkness.

Robert Gray