**Postscript**

W. Somerset Maugham

With the exception of Singapore, a city too busy with its own concerns to bother itself with trifles, imaginary names have been chosen for the places in which the action of these stories is supposed to be conducted. Some of the smaller communities in the countries washed by the China Sea are very sensitive, and their members are much agitated if, in a work of fiction, a hint is given that the circumstances of their lives are not always such as would meet the approval of the suburban circles in which contentedly dwell their cousins and their aunts. It must indeed astonish the traveller to discover that the English who pass the best part of their lives in the spacious East attach so much importance to a Parish Pump, and he may even wonder at times that they are content to go so far afield as the Celebes only to find themselves in Bedford Park. Being practical people concerned for the most part with practical affairs they give the writer credit for little imagination, and blowing that he has been in this or that place and made the acquaintance of this or that person, jump to the conclusion that in the characters of his invention he has done no more than draw portraits of themselves. Living, with all the East about them, as narrowly as in a market-town, they have the market-town’s faults and foibles; and seem to take a malicious pleasure in looking for the originals of the characters, especially if they are mean, foolish or vicious, which the author has chosen for the persons of his stories. They have small acquaintance with arts and letters and do not understand that the disposition and appearance of a person in a short story are dictated by the exigencies of the intrigue. Nor has it occurred to them that actual persons are much too shadowy to serve as characters in a work of the imagination. We see real people only in the flat, but for the purposes of fiction they must be seen in the round; and to make a living personage it is necessary to combine suggestions drawn from a dozen sources. Because a reader, unprofitably employing a useless leisure, recognises in a character one trait, mental or physical, of someone he knows and is aware the author has met, it is silly to put the name of this person to the character described and say: here is a portrait. A work of fiction, and perhaps I should not go too far if I spoke more generally and said, a work of art, is an arrangement which the author makes of the facts of his experience with the idiosyncrasies of his own personality. It is an unlikely, and unimportant, accident if it happens to be a copy of life. So the Greek sculptor of a famous piece gave a woman six toes, because thus he thought doubtless to increase the slender elegance of her foot. Facts are but a canvas on which the artist draws a significant pattern. I venture therefore to claim that the persons of these stories arc imaginary, but since an incident in one of them. “The Yellow Streak,” was suggested by a misadventure of my own, I wish more particularly to state that no reference is intended to either of my companions on that hazardous occasion.