## X. The Glory Hole

W. Somerset Maugham

It is a sort of little cubicle in a corner of the chandler’s store just under the ceiling and you reach it by a stair which is like a ship’s companion. It is partitioned off from the shop by matchboarding, about four feet high, so that when you sit on the wooden benches that surround the table you can see into the shop with all its stores. Here are coils of rope, oilskins, heavy sea-boots, hurricane lamps, hams, tinned goods, liquor of all sorts, curios to take home to your wife and children, clothes, I know not what. There is everything that a foreign ship can want in an Eastern port. You can watch the Chinese, salesmen and customers, and they have a pleasantly mysterious air as though they were concerned in nefarious business. You can see who comes into the shop and since it is certainly a friend bid him join you in the Glory Hole. Through the wide doorway you see the sun beating down on the stone pavement of the roadway and the coolies scurrying past with their heavy loads. At about midday the company begins to assemble, two or three pilots, Captain Thompson and Captain Brown, old men who have sailed the China Seas  for thirty years and now have a comfortable billet ashore, the skipper of a tramp from Shanghai, and the taipans of one or two tea firms. The boy stands silently waiting for orders and he brings the drinks and the dice-box. Talk flows rather prosily at first. A boat was wrecked the other day going in to Foochow, that fellow Maclean, the engineer of the An-Chan has made a pot of money in rubber lately, the consul’s wife is coming out from home in the Empress; but by the time the dice-box has travelled round the table and the loser has signed the chit, the glasses are empty and the dice-box is reached for once more. The boy brings the second round of drinks. Then the tongues of these stolid, stubborn men are loosened a little and they begin to talk of the past. One of the pilots knew the port first hard on fifty years ago. Ah, those were the great days.

“That’s when you ought to have seen the Glory Hole,” he says, with a smile.

Those were the days of the tea clippers, when there would be thirty or forty ships in the harbour, waiting for their cargo. Everyone had plenty of money to spend then, and the Glory Hole was the centre of life in the port. If you wanted to find a man, why, you came to the Glory Hole, and if he wasn’t there he’d be sure to come along soon. The agents did their business with the skippers there, and the doctor didn’t have office hours; he went to the Glory Hole at noon and if anyone was sick he attended to him there  and then. Those were the days when men knew how to drink. They would come at midday and drink all through the afternoon, a boy bringing them a bite if they were hungry, and drink all through the night. Fortunes were lost and won in the Glory Hole, for they were gamblers then and a man would risk all the profits of his run in a game of cards. Those were the good old days. But now the trade was gone, the tea clippers no longer thronged the harbour, the port was dead, and the young men, the young men of the A.P.C. or of Jardine’s, turned up their noses at the Glory Hole. And as the old pilot talked that dingy little cubicle with its stained table seemed to be for a moment peopled with those old skippers, hardy, reckless, and adventurous, of a day that has gone for ever.