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Stephanie Syjuco 2011

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of Heart of Darkness, by
Joseph Conrad

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HEART OF DARKNESS

By Joseph Conrad

I

The Nellie, a cruising yawl, swung to her anchor without a flutter of the sails, and was at rest. The flood had made, the wind was nearly calm, and being bound down the river, the only thing for it was to come to and wait for the turn of the tide.

The sea-reach of the Thames stretched before us like the beginning of an interminable waterway. In the offing the sea and the sky were welded together without a joint, and in the luminous space the tanned sails of the barges drifting up with the tide seemed to stand still in red

clusters of canvas sharply peaked, with gleams of varnished sprits. A haze rested on the low shores that ran out to sea in vanishing flatness. The air was dark above Gravesend, and farther back still seemed condensed into a mournful gloom, brooding motionless over the biggest, and the greatest, town on earth.

The Director of Companies was our captain and our host. We four affectionately watched his back as he stood in the bows looking to seaward. On the whole river there was nothing that looked half so nautical. He resembled a pilot, which to a seaman is

trustworthiness
personified. It was
difficult to realize his
work was not out there in
the luminous estuary, but
behind him, within the
brooding gloom.

Between us there was, as I
have already said
somewhere, the bond of
the sea. Besides holding
our hearts together through
long periods of
separation, it had the
effect of making us
tolerant of each other's
yarns--and even
convictions. The Lawyer--
the best of old fellows--
had,
because of his many years
and many virtues, the only
cushion on deck,
and was lying on the only
rug. The Accountant had

brought out already a box of dominoes, and was toying architecturally with the bones. Marlow sat cross-legged right aft, leaning against the mizzenmast. He had sunken cheeks, a yellow complexion, a straight back, an ascetic aspect, and, with his arms dropped, the palms of hands outwards, resembled an idol. The Director, satisfied the anchor had good hold, made his way aft and sat down amongst us. We exchanged a few words lazily. Afterwards there was silence on board the yacht. For some reason or other we did not begin that game of dominoes. We felt meditative, and fit for nothing

but placid staring. The day
was ending in a serenity of
still and
exquisite brilliance. The
water shone pacifically;
the sky, without a
speck, was a benign
immensity of unstained
light; the very mist on the
Essex marshes was like a
gauzy and radiant fabric,
hung from the wooded
rises inland, and draping
the low shores in
diaphanous folds. Only the
gloom to the west, brooding
over the upper reaches,
became more somber
every minute, as if angered
by the approach of the sun.

And at last, in its curved
and imperceptible fall, the
sun sank low, and
from glowing white changed
to a dull red without rays

and without heat,
as if about to go out
suddenly, stricken to death
by the touch of that
gloom brooding over a crowd
of men.

Forthwith a change came
over the waters, and the
serenity became less
brilliant but more
profound. The old river in
its broad reach rested
unruffled at the decline of
day, after ages of good
service done to the
race that peopled its
banks, spread out in the
tranquil dignity of a
waterway leading to the
uttermost ends of the
earth. We looked at the
venerable stream not in the
vivid flush of a short day
that comes and
departs for ever, but in

the august light of abiding
memories. And
indeed nothing is easier
for a man who has, as the
phrase goes,
"followed the sea" with
reverence and affection,
than to evoke the
great spirit of the past
upon the lower reaches of
the Thames. The tidal
current runs to and fro in
its unceasing service,
crowded with memories
of men and ships it had
borne to the rest of home
or to the battles
of the sea. It had known
and served all the men of
whom the nation is
proud, from Sir Francis
Drake to Sir John Franklin,
knights all, titled
and untitled--the great
knights-errant of the sea.
It had borne all the

ships whose names are like
jewels flashing in the
night of time, from
the Golden Hind returning
with her round flanks full
of treasure, to be
visited by the Queen's
Highness and thus pass out
of the gigantic tale,
to the Erebus and Terror,
bound on other conquests--
and that never
returned. It had known the
ships and the men. They had
sailed from
Deptford, from Greenwich,
from Erith--the adventurers
and the settlers;
kings' ships and the ships
of men on 'Change;
captains, admirals, the
dark "interlopers" of the
Eastern trade, and the
commissioned "generals"
of East India fleets.
Hunters for gold or

pursuers of fame, they all
had gone out on that
stream, bearing the sword,
and often the torch,
messengers of the might
within the land, bearers of
a spark from the
sacred fire. What greatness
had not floated on the ebb
of that river
into the mystery of an
unknown earth! . . . The
dreams of men, the seed
of commonwealths, the germs
of empires.

The sun set; the dusk fell
on the stream, and lights
began to appear
along the shore. The
Chapman lighthouse, a
three-legged thing erect on
a
mud-flat, shone strongly.
Lights of ships moved in
the fairway--a great

stir of lights going up and going down. And farther west on the upper reaches the place of the monstrous town was still marked ominously on the sky, a brooding gloom in sunshine, a lurid glare under the stars.

"And this also," said Marlow suddenly, "has been one of the dark places of the earth."

He was the only man of us who still "followed the sea." The worst that could be said of him was that he did not represent his class. He was a seaman, but he was a wanderer, too, while most seamen lead, if one may so express it, a sedentary life. Their minds are of

the stay-at-home
order, and their home is
always with them--the ship;
and so is their
country--the sea. One ship
is very much like another,
and the sea is
always the same. In the
immutability of their
surroundings the foreign
shores, the foreign faces,
the changing immensity of
life, glide past,
veiled not by a sense of
mystery but by a slightly
disdainful ignorance;
for there is nothing
mysterious to a seaman
unless it be the sea
itself,
which is the mistress of
his existence and as
inscrutable as Destiny.
For the rest, after his
hours of work, a casual
stroll or a casual spree

on shore suffices to unfold
for him the secret of a
whole continent,
and generally he finds the
secret not worth knowing.
The yarns of seamen
have a direct simplicity,
the whole meaning of which
lies within the
shell of a cracked nut. But
Marlow was not typical (if
his propensity
to spin yarns be excepted),
and to him the meaning of
an episode was not
inside like a kernel but
outside, enveloping the
tale which brought it
out only as a glow brings
out a haze, in the likeness
of one of these
misty halos that sometimes
are made visible by the
spectral illumination
of moonshine.

His remark did not seem at all surprising. It was just like Marlow.

It was accepted in silence. No one took the trouble to grunt even; and presently he said, very slow--

"I was thinking of very old times, when the Romans first came here, nineteen hundred years ago--the other day. . . . Light came out of this river since--you say Knights? Yes; but it is like a running blaze on a plain, like a flash of lightning in the clouds. We live in the flicker--may it last as long as the old earth keeps rolling! But darkness was here yesterday. Imagine the

feelings of a commander of
a fine--what d'ye call
'em?--trireme in the
Mediterranean, ordered
suddenly to the north; run
overland across the Gauls
in a hurry; put in
charge of one of these
craft the legionaries,--a
wonderful lot of handy
men they must have been
too--used to build,
apparently by the hundred,
in a month or two, if we
may believe what we read.
Imagine him here--the
very end of the world, a
sea the color of lead, a
sky the color of
smoke, a kind of ship about
as rigid as a concertina--
and going up this
river with stores, or
orders, or what you like.
Sandbanks, marshes,
forests, savages,--precious

little to eat fit for a
civilized man,
nothing but Thames water to
drink. No Falernian wine
here, no going
ashore. Here and there a
military camp lost in a
wilderness, like a
needle in a bundle of hay--
cold, fog, tempests,
disease, exile, and
death,--death skulking in
the air, in the water, in
the bush. They must
have been dying like flies
here. Oh yes--he did it.
Did it very well,
too, no doubt, and without
thinking much about it
either, except
afterwards to brag of what
he had gone through in his
time, perhaps.
They were men enough to
face the darkness. And
perhaps he was cheered

by keeping his eye on a
chance of promotion to the
fleet at Ravenna
by-and-by, if he had good
friends in Rome and
survived the awful
climate. Or think of a
decent young citizen in a
toga--perhaps too
much dice, you know--coming
out here in the train of
some prefect, or
tax-gatherer, or trader
even, to mend his fortunes.
Land in a swamp,
march through the woods,
and in some inland post
feel the savagery, the
utter savagery, had closed
round him,--all that
mysterious life of the
wilderness that stirs in
the forest, in the jungles,
in the hearts of
wild men. There's no
initiation either into such

mysteries. He has to live in the midst of the incomprehensible, which is also detestable. And it has a fascination, too, that goes to work upon him. The fascination of the abomination--you know. Imagine the growing regrets, the longing to escape, the powerless disgust, the surrender, the hate."

He paused.

"Mind," he began again, lifting one arm from the elbow, the palm of the hand outwards, so that, with his legs folded before him, he had the pose of a Buddha preaching in European clothes and without a lotus-flower--"Mind, none

of us would feel exactly like this. What saves us is efficiency--the devotion to efficiency. But these chaps were not much account, really. They were no colonists; their administration was merely a squeeze, and nothing more, I suspect. They were conquerors, and for that you want only brute force--nothing to boast of, when you have it, since your strength is just an accident arising from the weakness of others. They grabbed what they could get for the sake of what was to be got. It was just robbery with violence, aggravated murder on a great scale, and men going at it blind--as is very proper for those who tackle

a darkness. The conquest of
the earth, which mostly
means the taking
it away from those who have
a different complexion or
slightly flatter
noses than ourselves, is
not a pretty thing when you
look into it too
much. What redeems it is
the idea only. An idea at
the back of it; not
a sentimental pretense but
an idea; and an unselfish
belief in the
idea--something you can set
up, and bow down before,
and offer a
sacrifice to. . . ."

He broke off. Flames glided
in the river, small green
flames, red
flames, white flames,
pursuing, overtaking,
joining, crossing each

other--then separating slowly or hastily. The traffic of the great city went on in the deepening night upon the sleepless river. We looked on, waiting patiently--there was nothing else to do till the end of the flood; but it was only after a long silence, when he said, in a hesitating voice, "I suppose you fellows remember I did once turn fresh-water sailor for a bit," that we knew we were fated, before the ebb began to run, to hear about one of Marlow's inconclusive experiences.

"I don't want to bother you much with what happened to me personally,"

he began, showing in this remark the weakness of many tellers of tales who seem so often unaware of what their audience would best like to hear; "yet to understand the effect of it on me you ought to know how I got out there, what I saw, how I went up that river to the place where I first met the poor chap. It was the farthest point of navigation and the culminating point of my experience. It seemed somehow to throw a kind of light on everything about me--and into my thoughts. It was somber enough too--and pitiful--not extraordinary in any way--not very clear either. No, not very clear. And yet it seemed to throw a kind

of light.

"I had then, as you remember, just returned to London after a lot of Indian Ocean, Pacific, China Seas--a regular dose of the East--six years or so, and I was loafing about, hindering you fellows in your work and invading your homes, just as though I had got a heavenly mission to civilize you. It was very fine for a time, but after a bit I did get tired of resting. Then I began to look for a ship--I should think the hardest work on earth. But the ships wouldn't even look at me. And I got tired of that game too.

"Now when I was a little

chap I had a passion for maps. I would look for hours at South America, or Africa, or Australia, and lose myself in all the glories of exploration. At that time there were many blank spaces on the earth, and when I saw one that looked particularly inviting on a map (but they all look that) I would put my finger on it and say, 'When I grow up I will go there.' The North Pole was one of these places, I remember. Well, I haven't been there yet, and shall not try now. The glamour's off. Other places were scattered about the Equator, and in every sort of latitude all over the two hemispheres. I

have been in some
of them, and . . . well, we
won't talk about that. But
there was one
yet--the biggest, the most
blank, so to speak--that I
had a hankering
after.

"True, by this time it was
not a blank space any more.
It had got filled
since my boyhood with
rivers and lakes and names.
It had ceased to be
a blank space of delightful
mystery--a white patch for
a boy to dream
gloriously over. It had
become a place of darkness.
But there was in it
one river especially, a
mighty big river, that you
could see on the map,
resembling an immense snake
uncoiled, with its head in

the sea, its
body at rest curving afar
over a vast country, and
its tail lost in the
depths of the land. And as
I looked at the map of it
in a shop-window,
it fascinated me as a snake
would a bird--a silly
little bird. Then I
remembered there was a big
concern, a Company for
trade on that river.
Dash it all! I thought to
myself, they can't trade
without using some
kind of craft on that lot
of fresh water--steamboats!
Why shouldn't I
try to get charge of one? I
went on along Fleet Street,
but could not
shake off the idea. The
snake had charmed me.

"You understand it was a

Continental concern, that
Trading society; but
I have a lot of relations
living on the Continent,
because it's cheap
and not so nasty as it
looks, they say.

"I am sorry to own I began
to worry them. This was
already a fresh
departure for me. I was not
used to get things that
way, you know. I
always went my own road and
on my own legs where I had
a mind to go. I
wouldn't have believed it
of myself; but, then--you
see--I felt somehow
I must get there by hook or
by crook. So I worried
them. The men said
'My dear fellow,' and did
nothing. Then--would you
believe it?--I tried

the women. I, Charlie Marlow, set the women to work--to get a job. Heavens! Well, you see, the notion drove me. I had an aunt, a dear enthusiastic soul. She wrote: 'It will be delightful. I am ready to do anything, anything for you. It is a glorious idea. I know the wife of a very high personage in the Administration, and also a man who has lots of influence with,' &c., &c. She was determined to make no end of fuss to get me appointed skipper of a river steamboat, if such was my fancy.

"I got my appointment--of course; and I got it very quick. It appears

the Company had received news that one of their captains had been killed in a scuffle with the natives. This was my chance, and it made me the more anxious to go. It was only months and months afterwards, when I made the attempt to recover what was left of the body, that I heard the original quarrel arose from a misunderstanding about some hens. Yes, two black hens. Fresleven--that was the fellow's name, a Dane--thought himself wronged somehow in the bargain, so he went ashore and started to hammer the chief of the village with a stick. Oh, it didn't surprise me in the least to hear this, and at the same time

to be told that
Fresleven was the gentlest,
quietest creature that ever
walked on two
legs. No doubt he was; but
he had been a couple of
years already out
there engaged in the noble
cause, you know, and he
probably felt the
need at last of asserting
his self-respect in some
way. Therefore he
whacked the old nigger
mercilessly, while a big
crowd of his people
watched him, thunderstruck,
till some man,--I was told
the chief's
son,--in desperation at
hearing the old chap yell,
made a tentative jab
with a spear at the white
man--and of course it went
quite easy between
the shoulder-blades. Then

the whole population cleared into the forest, expecting all kinds of calamities to happen, while, on the other hand, the steamer Fresleven commanded left also in a bad panic, in charge of the engineer, I believe. Afterwards nobody seemed to trouble much about Fresleven's remains, till I got out and stepped into his shoes. I couldn't let it rest, though; but when an opportunity offered at last to meet my predecessor, the grass growing through his ribs was tall enough to hide his bones. They were all there. The supernatural being had not been touched after he fell. And the village was

deserted, the huts gaped black, rotting, all askew within the fallen enclosures. A calamity had come to it, sure enough. The people had vanished. Mad terror had scattered them, men, women, and children, through the bush, and they had never returned. What became of the hens I don't know either. I should think the cause of progress got them, anyhow. However, through this glorious affair I got my appointment, before I had fairly begun to hope for it.

"I flew around like mad to get ready, and before forty-eight hours I was crossing the Channel to show myself to my

employers, and sign the contract. In a very few hours I arrived in a city that always makes me think of a whited sepulcher. Prejudice no doubt. I had no difficulty in finding the Company's offices. It was the biggest thing in the town, and everybody I met was full of it. They were going to run an over-sea empire, and make no end of coin by trade.

"A narrow and deserted street in deep shadow, high houses, innumerable windows with venetian blinds, a dead silence, grass sprouting between the stones, imposing carriage archways right and left, immense double

doors standing ponderously ajar. I slipped through one of these cracks, went up a swept and ungarnished staircase, as arid as a desert, and opened the first door I came to. Two women, one fat and the other slim, sat on straw-bottomed chairs, knitting black wool. The slim one got up and walked straight at me--still knitting with downcast eyes--and only just as I began to think of getting out of her way, as you would for a somnambulist, stood still, and looked up. Her dress was as plain as an umbrella-cover, and she turned round without a word and preceded me into a waiting-room. I gave my name, and looked about.

Deal table in
the middle, plain chairs
all round the walls, on one
end a large shining
map, marked with all the
colors of a rainbow. There
was a vast amount of
red--good to see at any
time, because one knows
that some real work
is done in there, a deuce
of a lot of blue, a little
green, smears of
orange, and, on the East
Coast, a purple patch, to
show where the jolly
pioneers of progress drink
the jolly lager-beer.
However, I wasn't going
into any of these. I was
going into the yellow. Dead
in the center. And
the river was there--
fascinating--deadly--like a
snake. Ough! A door
opened, a white-haired

secretarial head, but wearing a compassionate expression, appeared, and a skinny forefinger beckoned me into the sanctuary. Its light was dim, and a heavy writing-desk squatted in the middle. From behind that structure came out an impression of pale plumpness in a frock-coat. The great man himself. He was five feet six, I should judge, and had his grip on the handle-end of ever so many millions. He shook hands, I fancy, murmured vaguely, was satisfied with my French. Bon voyage.

"In about forty-five seconds I found myself again in the waiting-room with the compassionate

secretary, who, full of desolation and sympathy, made me sign some document. I believe I undertook amongst other things not to disclose any trade secrets. Well, I am not going to.

"I began to feel slightly uneasy. You know I am not used to such ceremonies, and there was something ominous in the atmosphere. It was just as though I had been let into some conspiracy--I don't know--something not quite right; and I was glad to get out. In the outer room the two women knitted black wool feverishly. People were arriving, and the younger one was walking back and forth

introducing them. The old one sat on her chair. Her flat cloth slippers were propped up on a foot-warmer, and a cat reposed on her lap. She wore a starched white affair on her head, had a wart on one cheek, and silver-rimmed spectacles hung on the tip of her nose. She glanced at me above the glasses. The swift and indifferent placidity of that look troubled me. Two youths with foolish and cheery countenances were being piloted over, and she threw at them the same quick glance of unconcerned wisdom. She seemed to know all about them and about me too. An eerie feeling came over me. She seemed uncanny

and fateful. Often far away
there I thought
of these two, guarding the
door of Darkness, knitting
black wool as for
a warm pall, one
introducing, introducing
continuously to the
unknown,
the other scrutinizing the
cheery and foolish faces
with unconcerned old
eyes. Ave! Old knitter of
black wool. Morituri te
salutant. Not many of
those she looked at ever
saw her again--not half, by
a long way.

"There was yet a visit to
the doctor. 'A simple
formality,' assured me
the secretary, with an air
of taking an immense part
in all my sorrows.
Accordingly a young chap

wearing his hat over the left eyebrow, some clerk I suppose,--there must have been clerks in the business, though the house was as still as a house in a city of the dead,--came from somewhere up-stairs, and led me forth. He was shabby and careless, with ink-stains on the sleeves of his jacket, and his cravat was large and billowy, under a chin shaped like the toe of an old boot. It was a little too early for the doctor, so I proposed a drink, and thereupon he developed a vein of joviality. As we sat over our vermouths he glorified the Company's business, and by-and-by I expressed casually my surprise

at him not going out there. He became very cool and collected all at once. 'I am not such a fool as I look, quoth Plato to his disciples,' he said sententiously, emptied his glass with great resolution, and we rose.

"The old doctor felt my pulse, evidently thinking of something else the while. 'Good, good for there,' he mumbled, and then with a certain eagerness asked me whether I would let him measure my head. Rather surprised, I said Yes, when he produced a thing like calipers and got the dimensions back and front and every way, taking notes carefully. He

was an unshaven little man in a threadbare coat like a gaberdine, with his feet in slippers, and I thought him a harmless fool. 'I always ask leave, in the interests of science, to measure the crania of those going out there,' he said. 'And when they come back, too?' I asked. 'Oh, I never see them,' he remarked; 'and, moreover, the changes take place inside, you know.' He smiled, as if at some quiet joke. 'So you are going out there. Famous. Interesting too.' He gave me a searching glance, and made another note. 'Ever any madness in your family?' he asked, in a matter-of-fact tone. I felt very annoyed.

'Is that question in the interests of science too?' 'It would be,' he said, without taking notice of my irritation, 'interesting for science to watch the mental changes of individuals, on the spot, but . . .' 'Are you an alienist?' I interrupted. 'Every doctor should be--a little,' answered that original, imperturbably. 'I have a little theory which you Messieurs who go out there must help me to prove. This is my share in the advantages my country shall reap from the possession of such a magnificent dependency. The mere wealth I leave to others. Pardon my questions, but you are the first Englishman coming

under my observation. . .
. ' I hastened
to assure him I was not in
the least typical. 'If I
were,' said I,
'I wouldn't be talking like
this with you.' 'What you
say is rather
profound, and probably
erroneous,' he said, with a
laugh. 'Avoid
irritation more than
exposure to the sun. Adieu.
How do you English
say, eh? Good-by. Ah! Good-
by. Adieu. In the tropics
one must before
everything keep calm.' . .
. He lifted a warning
forefinger. . . . 'Du
calme, du calme. Adieu.'

"One thing more remained to
do--say good-by to my
excellent aunt. I
found her triumphant. I had

a cup of tea--the last
decent cup of tea for
many days--and in a room
that most soothingly looked
just as you would
expect a lady's drawing-
room to look, we had a long
quiet chat by the
fireside. In the course of
these confidences it became
quite plain to me
I had been represented to
the wife of the high
dignitary, and goodness
knows to how many more
people besides, as an
exceptional and gifted
creature--a piece of good
fortune for the Company--a
man you don't get
hold of every day. Good
heavens! and I was going to
take charge of a
two-penny-halfpenny river-
steamboat with a penny
whistle attached! It

appeared, however, I was also one of the Workers, with a capital--you know. Something like an emissary of light, something like a lower sort of apostle. There had been a lot of such rot let loose in print and talk just about that time, and the excellent woman, living right in the rush of all that humbug, got carried off her feet. She talked about 'weaning those ignorant millions from their horrid ways,' till, upon my word, she made me quite uncomfortable. I ventured to hint that the Company was run for profit.

"You forget, dear Charlie, that the laborer is worthy

of his hire,' she
said, brightly. It's queer
how out of touch with truth
women are. They
live in a world of their
own, and there had never
been anything like it,
and never can be. It is too
beautiful altogether, and
if they were to
set it up it would go to
pieces before the first
sunset. Some confounded
fact we men have been
living contentedly with
ever since the day of
creation would start up and
knock the whole thing over.

"After this I got embraced,
told to wear flannel, be
sure to write
often, and so on--and I
left. In the street--I
don't know why--a queer
feeling came to me that I

was an impostor. Odd thing that I, who used to clear out for any part of the world at twenty-four hours' notice, with less thought than most men give to the crossing of a street, had a moment--I won't say of hesitation, but of startled pause, before this commonplace affair. The best way I can explain it to you is by saying that, for a second or two, I felt as though, instead of going to the center of a continent, I were about to set off for the center of the earth.

"I left in a French steamer, and she called in every blamed port they have out there, for, as far

as I could see, the sole purpose of landing soldiers and custom-house officers. I watched the coast. Watching a coast as it slips by the ship is like thinking about an enigma. There it is before you--smiling, frowning, inviting, grand, mean, insipid, or savage, and always mute with an air of whispering, 'Come and find out.'

This one was almost featureless, as if still in the making, with an aspect of monotonous grimness. The edge of a colossal jungle, so dark-green as to be almost black, fringed with white surf, ran straight, like a ruled line, far, far away along a blue sea whose glitter was

blurred by a creeping mist.
The sun was fierce, the
land seemed to
glisten and drip with
steam. Here and there
grayish-whitish specks
showed up, clustered inside
the white surf, with a flag
flying above
them perhaps. Settlements
some centuries old, and
still no bigger than
pin-heads on the untouched
expanse of their
background. We pounded
along, stopped, landed
soldiers; went on, landed
custom-house clerks to
levy toll in what looked
like a God-forsaken
wilderness, with a tin shed
and a flag-pole lost in it;
landed more soldiers--to
take care of the
custom-house clerks,
presumably. Some, I heard,

got drowned in the surf;
but whether they did or
not, nobody seemed
particularly to care. They
were just flung out there,
and on we went. Every day
the coast
looked the same, as though
we had not moved; but we
passed various
places--trading places--
with names like Gran'
Bassam Little Popo, names
that seemed to belong to
some sordid farce acted in
front of a sinister
backcloth. The idleness of
a passenger, my isolation
amongst all these
men with whom I had no
point of contact, the oily
and languid sea, the
uniform somberness of the
coast, seemed to keep me
away from the truth
of things, within the toil

of a mournful and senseless delusion. The voice of the surf heard now and then was a positive pleasure, like the speech of a brother. It was something natural, that had its reason, that had a meaning. Now and then a boat from the shore gave one a momentary contact with reality. It was paddled by black fellows. You could see from afar the white of their eyeballs glistening. They shouted, sang; their bodies streamed with perspiration; they had faces like grotesque masks--these chaps; but they had bone, muscle, a wild vitality, an intense energy of movement, that was as natural and true as the surf

along their coast. They wanted no excuse for being there. They were a great comfort to look at. For a time I would feel I belonged still to a world of straightforward facts; but the feeling would not last long. Something would turn up to scare it away. Once, I remember, we came upon a man-of-war anchored off the coast. There wasn't even a shed there, and she was shelling the bush. It appears the French had one of their wars going on thereabouts. Her ensign dropped limp like a rag; the muzzles of the long eight-inch guns stuck out all over the low hull; the greasy, slimy swell swung her up lazily and let her down,

swaying her thin
masts. In the empty
immensity of earth, sky,
and water, there she was,
incomprehensible, firing
into a continent. Pop,
would go one of the
eight-inch guns; a small
flame would dart and
vanish, a little
white smoke would
disappear, a tiny
projectile would give a
feeble
screech--and nothing
happened. Nothing could
happen. There was a touch
of insanity in the
proceeding, a sense of
lugubrious drollery in the
sight; and it was not
dissipated by somebody on
board assuring me
earnestly there was a camp
of natives--he called them
enemies!--hidden

out of sight somewhere.

"We gave her her letters (I heard the men in that lonely ship were dying of fever at the rate of three a day) and went on. We called at some more places with farcical names, where the merry dance of death and trade goes on in a still and earthy atmosphere as of an overheated catacomb; all along the formless coast bordered by dangerous surf, as if Nature herself had tried to ward off intruders; in and out of rivers, streams of death in life, whose banks were rotting into mud, whose waters, thickened into slime, invaded the contorted mangroves, that seemed to

writhe at us in the extremity of an impotent despair. Nowhere did we stop long enough to get a particularized impression, but the general sense of vague and oppressive wonder grew upon me. It was like a weary pilgrimage amongst hints for nightmares.

"It was upward of thirty days before I saw the mouth of the big river. We anchored off the seat of the government. But my work would not begin till some two hundred miles farther on. So as soon as I could I made a start for a place thirty miles higher up.

"I had my passage on a little sea-going steamer.

Her captain was a Swede, and knowing me for a seaman, invited me on the bridge. He was a young man, lean, fair, and morose, with lanky hair and a shuffling gait.

As we left the miserable little wharf, he tossed his head contemptuously at the shore. 'Been living there?' he asked. I said, 'Yes.' 'Fine lot these government chaps--are they not?' he went on, speaking English with great precision and considerable bitterness. 'It is funny what some people will do for a few francs a month. I wonder what becomes of that kind when it goes up country?' I said to him I expected to see that soon. 'So-o-o!' he

exclaimed. He shuffled
athwart, keeping one eye
ahead
vigilantly. 'Don't be too
sure,' he continued. 'The
other day I took
up a man who hanged himself
on the road. He was a
Swede, too.'

'Hanged himself! Why, in
God's name?' I cried. He
kept on looking
out watchfully. 'Who knows?
The sun too much for him,
or the country
perhaps.'

"At last we opened a reach.
A rocky cliff appeared,
mounds of turned-up
earth by the shore, houses
on a hill, others, with
iron roofs, amongst a
waste of excavations, or
hanging to the declivity. A
continuous noise of

the rapids above hovered over this scene of inhabited devastation. A lot of people, mostly black and naked, moved about like ants. A jetty projected into the river. A blinding sunlight drowned all this at times in a sudden recrudescence of glare. 'There's your Company's station,' said the Swede, pointing to three wooden barrack-like structures on the rocky slope. 'I will send your things up. Four boxes did you say? So. Farewell.'

"I came upon a boiler wallowing in the grass, then found a path leading up the hill. It turned aside for the boulders, and also for an

undersized railway-truck
lying there on its back
with its wheels in
the air. One was off. The
thing looked as dead as the
carcass of some
animal. I came upon more
pieces of decaying
machinery, a stack of rusty
rails. To the left a clump
of trees made a shady spot,
where dark things
seemed to stir feebly. I
blinked, the path was
steep. A horn tooted to
the right, and I saw the
black people run. A heavy
and dull detonation
shook the ground, a puff of
smoke came out of the
cliff, and that was
all. No change appeared on
the face of the rock. They
were building a
railway. The cliff was not
in the way or anything; but

this objectless
blasting was all the work
going on.

"A slight clinking behind
me made me turn my head.
Six black men
advanced in a file, toiling
up the path. They walked
erect and slow,
balancing small baskets
full of earth on their
heads, and the clink kept
time with their footsteps.
Black rags were wound round
their loins, and
the short ends behind
wagged to and fro like
tails. I could see every
rib, the joints of their
limbs were like knots in a
rope; each had an
iron collar on his neck,
and all were connected
together with a chain
whose bights swung between

them, rhythmically
clinking. Another report
from the cliff made me
think suddenly of that ship
of war I had seen
firing into a continent. It
was the same kind of
ominous voice; but
these men could by no
stretch of imagination be
called enemies. They
were called criminals, and
the outraged law, like the
bursting shells,
had come to them, an
insoluble mystery from over
the sea. All their
meager breasts panted
together, the violently
dilated nostrils quivered,
the eyes stared stonily
uphill. They passed me
within six inches,
without a glance, with that
complete, deathlike
indifference of unhappy

savages. Behind this raw matter one of the reclaimed, the product of the new forces at work, strolled despondently, carrying a rifle by its middle. He had a uniform jacket with one button off, and seeing a white man on the path, hoisted his weapon to his shoulder with alacrity. This was simple prudence, white men being so much alike at a distance that he could not tell who I might be. He was speedily reassured, and with a large, white, rascally grin, and a glance at his charge, seemed to take me into partnership in his exalted trust. After all, I also was a part of the great cause of these high and just proceedings.

"Instead of going up, I turned and descended to the left. My idea was to let that chain-gang get out of sight before I climbed the hill. You know I am not particularly tender; I've had to strike and to fend off. I've had to resist and to attack sometimes--that's only one way of resisting--without counting the exact cost, according to the demands of such sort of life as I had blundered into. I've seen the devil of violence, and the devil of greed, and the devil of hot desire; but, by all the stars! these were strong, lusty, red-eyed devils, that swayed and drove men--men, I tell

you. But as I stood on this hillside, I foresaw that in the blinding sunshine of that land I would become acquainted with a flabby, pretending, weak-eyed devil of a rapacious and pitiless folly. How insidious he could be, too, I was only to find out several months later and a thousand miles farther. For a moment I stood appalled, as though by a warning. Finally I descended the hill, obliquely, towards the trees I had seen.

"I avoided a vast artificial hole somebody had been digging on the slope, the purpose of which I found it impossible to divine. It wasn't

a quarry or a sandpit,
anyhow. It was just a hole.
It might have
been connected with the
philanthropic desire of
giving the criminals
something to do. I don't
know. Then I nearly fell
into a very narrow
ravine, almost no more than
a scar in the hillside. I
discovered that
a lot of imported drainage-
pipes for the settlement
had been tumbled in
there. There wasn't one
that was not broken. It was
a wanton smash-up.
At last I got under the
trees. My purpose was to
stroll into the shade
for a moment; but no sooner
within than it seemed to me
I had stepped
into a gloomy circle of
some Inferno. The rapids

were near, and an
uninterrupted, uniform,
headlong, rushing noise
filled the mournful
stillness of the grove,
where not a breath stirred,
not a leaf moved,
with a mysterious sound--as
though the tearing pace of
the launched
earth had suddenly become
audible.

"Black shapes crouched,
lay, sat between the trees,
leaning against the
trunks, clinging to the
earth, half coming out,
half effaced within
the dim light, in all the
attitudes of pain,
abandonment, and despair.
Another mine on the cliff
went off, followed by a
slight shudder of the
soil under my feet. The

work was going on. The work! And this was the place where some of the helpers had withdrawn to die.

"They were dying slowly--it was very clear. They were not enemies, they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly now,--nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation, lying confusedly in the greenish gloom. Brought from all the recesses of the coast in all the legality of time contracts, lost in uncongenial surroundings, fed on unfamiliar food, they sickened, became inefficient, and were then allowed to crawl away and rest. These moribund shapes were free

as air--and nearly as thin. I began to distinguish the gleam of eyes under the trees. Then, glancing down, I saw a face near my hand. The black bones reclined at full length with one shoulder against the tree, and slowly the eyelids rose and the sunken eyes looked up at me, enormous and vacant, a kind of blind, white flicker in the depths of the orbs, which died out slowly.

The man seemed young--almost a boy--but you know with them it's hard to tell. I found nothing else to do but to offer him one of my good Swede's ship's biscuits I had in my pocket. The fingers closed slowly on it and held--there was no other

movement and no other glance. He had tied a bit of white worsted round his neck--Why? Where did he get it? Was it a badge--an ornament--a charm--a propitiatory act? Was there any idea at all connected with it? It looked startling round his black neck, this bit of white thread from beyond the seas.

"Near the same tree two more bundles of acute angles sat with their legs drawn up. One, with his chin propped on his knees, stared at nothing, in an intolerable and appalling manner: his brother phantom rested its forehead, as if overcome with a great weariness; and all about others

were scattered in every pose of contorted collapse, as in some picture of a massacre or a pestilence. While I stood horror-struck, one of these creatures rose to his hands and knees, and went off on all-fours towards the river to drink. He lapped out of his hand, then sat up in the sunlight, crossing his shins in front of him, and after a time let his woolly head fall on his breastbone.

"I didn't want any more loitering in the shade, and I made haste towards the station. When near the buildings I met a white man, in such an unexpected elegance of get-up that in the first moment

I took him for
a sort of vision. I saw a
high starched collar, white
cuffs, a light
alpaca jacket, snowy
trousers, a clear necktie,
and varnished boots. No
hat. Hair parted, brushed,
oiled, under a green-lined
parasol held in a
big white hand. He was
amazing, and had a
penholder behind his ear.

"I shook hands with this
miracle, and I learned he
was the Company's
chief accountant, and that
all the bookkeeping was
done at this station.
He had come out for a
moment, he said, 'to get a
breath of fresh air.'
The expression sounded
wonderfully odd, with its
suggestion of sedentary

desk-life. I wouldn't have mentioned the fellow to you at all, only it was from his lips that I first heard the name of the man who is so indissolubly connected with the memories of that time. Moreover, I respected the fellow. Yes; I respected his collars, his vast cuffs, his brushed hair. His appearance was certainly that of a hairdresser's dummy; but in the great demoralization of the land he kept up his appearance. That's backbone. His starched collars and got-up shirt-fronts were achievements of character. He had been out nearly three years; and, later on, I could not help asking him

how he managed
to sport such linen. He had
just the faintest blush,
and said modestly,
'I've been teaching one of
the native women about the
station. It
was difficult. She had a
distaste for the work.'
This man had verily
accomplished something. And
he was devoted to his
books, which were in
apple-pie order.

"Everything else in the
station was in a muddle,--
heads, things,
buildings. Strings of dusty
niggers with splay feet
arrived and
departed; a stream of
manufactured goods,
rubbishy cottons, beads,
and brass-wire set into the
depths of darkness, and in

return came a
precious trickle of ivory.

"I had to wait in the
station for ten days--an
eternity. I lived in a
hut in the yard, but to be
out of the chaos I would
sometimes get into
the accountant's office. It
was built of horizontal
planks, and so badly
put together that, as he
bent over his high desk, he
was barred from
neck to heels with narrow
strips of sunlight. There
was no need to
open the big shutter to
see. It was hot there too;
big flies buzzed
fiendishly, and did not
sting, but stabbed. I sat
generally on the
floor, while, of faultless
appearance (and even

slightly scented),
perching on a high stool,
he wrote, he wrote.
Sometimes he stood up for
exercise. When a truckle-
bed with a sick man (some
invalided agent from
up-country) was put in
there, he exhibited a
gentle annoyance. 'The
groans of this sick
person,' he said, distract
my attention. And without
that it is extremely
difficult to guard against
clerical errors in this
climate.'

"One day he remarked,
without lifting his head,
'In the interior you
will no doubt meet Mr.
Kurtz.' On my asking who
Mr. Kurtz was, he
said he was a first-class
agent; and seeing my

disappointment at this information, he added slowly, laying down his pen, 'He is a very remarkable person.' Further questions elicited from him that Mr. Kurtz was at present in charge of a trading post, a very important one, in the true ivory-country, at 'the very bottom of there. Sends in as much ivory as all the others put together. . . .' He began to write again. The sick man was too ill to groan. The flies buzzed in a great peace.

"Suddenly there was a growing murmur of voices and a great tramping of feet. A caravan had come in. A violent babble of uncouth sounds burst

out on the other side of the planks. All the carriers were speaking together, and in the midst of the uproar the lamentable voice of the chief agent was heard 'giving it up' tearfully for the twentieth time that day. . . . He rose slowly. 'What a frightful row,' he said. He crossed the room gently to look at the sick man, and returning, said to me, 'He does not hear.' 'What! Dead?' I asked, startled. 'No, not yet,' he answered, with great composure. Then, alluding with a toss of the head to the tumult in the station-yard, 'When one has got to make correct entries, one comes to hate those savages--hate

them to the death.' He remained thoughtful for a moment. 'When you see Mr. Kurtz,' he went on, 'tell him from me that everything here'-- he glanced at the desk--'is very satisfactory. I don't like to write to him--with those messengers of ours you never know who may get hold of your letter--at that Central Station.' He stared at me for a moment with his mild, bulging eyes. 'Oh, he will go far, very far,' he began again. 'He will be a somebody in the Administration before long. They, above--the Council in Europe, you know--mean him to be.'

"He turned to his work. The

noise outside had ceased,
and presently
in going out I stopped at
the door. In the steady
buzz of flies the
homeward-bound agent was
lying flushed and
insensible; the other,
bent over his books, was
making correct entries of
perfectly correct
transactions; and fifty
feet below the doorstep I
could see the still
tree-tops of the grove of
death.

"Next day I left that
station at last, with a
caravan of sixty men, for
a two-hundred-mile tramp.

"No use telling you much
about that. Paths, paths,
everywhere; a
stamped-in network of paths

spreading over the empty
land, through
long grass, through burnt
grass, through thickets,
down and up chilly
ravines, up and down stony
hills ablaze with heat; and
a solitude, a
solitude, nobody, not a
hut. The population had
cleared out a long
time ago. Well, if a lot of
mysterious niggers armed
with all kinds of
fearful weapons suddenly
took to traveling on the
road between Deal and
Gravesend, catching the
yokels right and left to
carry heavy loads for
them, I fancy every farm
and cottage thereabouts
would get empty very
soon. Only here the
dwellings were gone too.
Still I passed through

several abandoned villages.
There's something
pathetically childish in
the ruins of grass walls.
Day after day, with the
stamp and shuffle of
sixty pair of bare feet
behind me, each pair under
a 60-lb. load. Camp,
cook, sleep, strike camp,
march. Now and then a
carrier dead in harness,
at rest in the long grass
near the path, with an
empty water-gourd and
his long staff lying by his
side. A great silence
around and above.
Perhaps on some quiet night
the tremor of far-off
drums, sinking,
swelling, a tremor vast,
faint; a sound weird,
appealing, suggestive,
and wild--and perhaps with
as profound a meaning as

the sound of bells
in a Christian country.
Once a white man in an
unbuttoned uniform,
camping on the path with an
armed escort of lank
Zanzibaris, very
hospitable and festive--not
to say drunk. Was looking
after the upkeep
of the road, he declared.
Can't say I saw any road or
any upkeep, unless
the body of a middle-aged
negro, with a bullet-hole
in the forehead,
upon which I absolutely
stumbled three miles
farther on, may be
considered as a permanent
improvement. I had a white
companion too, not
a bad chap, but rather too
fleshy and with the
exasperating habit of
fainting on the hot

hillsides, miles away from
the least bit of shade
and water. Annoying, you
know, to hold your own coat
like a parasol over
a man's head while he is
coming-to. I couldn't help
asking him once what
he meant by coming there at
all. 'To make money, of
course. What do you
think?' he said,
scornfully. Then he got
fever, and had to be
carried in
a hammock slung under a
pole. As he weighed sixteen
stone I had no end
of rows with the carriers.
They jibbed, ran away,
sneaked off with their
loads in the night--quite a
mutiny. So, one evening, I
made a speech in
English with gestures, not
one of which was lost to

the sixty pairs of eyes before me, and the next morning I started the hammock off in front all right. An hour afterwards I came upon the whole concern wrecked in a bush--man, hammock, groans, blankets, horrors. The heavy pole had skinned his poor nose. He was very anxious for me to kill somebody, but there wasn't the shadow of a carrier near. I remembered the old doctor,--'It would be interesting for science to watch the mental changes of individuals, on the spot.' I felt I was becoming scientifically interesting. However, all that is to no purpose. On the fifteenth day I came in

sight of the big river again, and hobbled into the Central Station. It was on a back water surrounded by scrub and forest, with a pretty border of smelly mud on one side, and on the three others inclosed by a crazy fence of rushes. A neglected gap was all the gate it had, and the first glance at the place was enough to let you see the flabby devil was running that show. White men with long staves in their hands appeared languidly from amongst the buildings, strolling up to take a look at me, and then retired out of sight somewhere. One of them, a stout, excitable chap with black mustaches, informed me with

great volubility and many digressions, as soon as I told him who I was, that my steamer was at the bottom of the river. I was thunderstruck.

What, how, why? Oh, it was 'all right.' The 'manager himself' was there.

All quite correct.

'Everybody had behaved splendidly! splendidly!--

'you

must,' he said in agitation, 'go and see the general manager at once. He is waiting!'

"I did not see the real significance of that wreck at once. I fancy I see it now, but I am not sure--not at all. Certainly the affair was too stupid--when I think of it--to be altogether natural.

Still. . . . But
at the moment it presented
itself simply as a
confounded nuisance. The
steamer was sunk. They had
started two days before in
a sudden hurry
up the river with the
manager on board, in charge
of some volunteer
skipper, and before they
had been out three hours
they tore the bottom
out of her on stones, and
she sank near the south
bank. I asked myself
what I was to do there, now
my boat was lost. As a
matter of fact, I had
plenty to do in fishing my
command out of the river. I
had to set about
it the very next day. That,
and the repairs when I
brought the pieces to
the station, took some

months.

"My first interview with the manager was curious. He did not ask me to sit down after my twenty-mile walk that morning. He was commonplace in complexion, in features, in manners, and in voice. He was of middle size and of ordinary build. His eyes, of the usual blue, were perhaps remarkably cold, and he certainly could make his glance fall on one as trenchant and heavy as an ax. But even at these times the rest of his person seemed to disclaim the intention. Otherwise there was only an indefinable, faint expression of his lips, something stealthy--a

smile--not a smile--I
remember it, but I can't
explain. It was
unconscious, this smile
was, though just after he
had said something it
got intensified for an
instant. It came at the end
of his speeches like
a seal applied on the words
to make the meaning of the
commonest phrase
appear absolutely
inscrutable. He was a
common trader, from his
youth
up employed in these parts--
nothing more. He was
obeyed, yet he inspired
neither love nor fear, nor
even respect. He inspired
uneasiness. That
was it! Uneasiness. Not a
definite mistrust--just
uneasiness--nothing
more. You have no idea how

effective such a . . . a .
. . faculty can
be. He had no genius for
organizing, for initiative,
or for order even.
That was evident in such
things as the deplorable
state of the station.
He had no learning, and no
intelligence. His position
had come to
him--why? Perhaps because
he was never ill . . . He
had served three
terms of three years out
there . . . Because
triumphant health in the
general rout of
constitutions is a kind of
power in itself. When he
went
home on leave he rioted on
a large scale--pompously.
Jack ashore--with
a difference--in externals
only. This one could gather

from his casual talk. He originated nothing, he could keep the routine going--that's all. But he was great. He was great by this little thing that it was impossible to tell what could control such a man. He never gave that secret away. Perhaps there was nothing within him. Such a suspicion made one pause--for out there there were no external checks. Once when various tropical diseases had laid low almost every 'agent' in the station, he was heard to say, 'Men who come out here should have no entrails.' He sealed the utterance with that smile of his, as though it had been a door opening

into a darkness he had in his keeping. You fancied you had seen things--but the seal was on. When annoyed at meal-times by the constant quarrels of the white men about precedence, he ordered an immense round table to be made, for which a special house had to be built. This was the station's mess-room. Where he sat was the first place--the rest were nowhere. One felt this to be his unalterable conviction. He was neither civil nor uncivil. He was quiet. He allowed his 'boy'--an overfed young negro from the coast--to treat the white men, under his very eyes, with provoking insolence.

"He began to speak as soon as he saw me. I had been very long on the road. He could not wait. Had to start without me. The up-river stations had to be relieved. There had been so many delays already that he did not know who was dead and who was alive, and how they got on--and so on, and so on. He paid no attention to my explanations, and, playing with a stick of sealing-wax, repeated several times that the situation was 'very grave, very grave.' There were rumors that a very important station was in jeopardy, and its chief, Mr. Kurtz, was ill. Hoped it was not true. Mr. Kurtz was . .

. I felt weary and irritable. Hang Kurtz, I thought. I interrupted him by saying I had heard of Mr. Kurtz on the coast. 'Ah! So they talk of him down there,' he murmured to himself. Then he began again, assuring me Mr. Kurtz was the best agent he had, an exceptional man, of the greatest importance to the Company; therefore I could understand his anxiety. He was, he said, 'very, very uneasy.' Certainly he fidgeted on his chair a good deal, exclaimed, 'Ah, Mr. Kurtz!' broke the stick of sealing-wax and seemed dumbfounded by the accident. Next thing he wanted to know 'how long it would take to' . . .

I interrupted him again.
Being hungry, you know, and
kept on my feet
too, I was getting savage.
'How could I tell,' I said.
'I hadn't even
seen the wreck yet--some
months, no doubt.' All this
talk seemed to me
so futile. 'Some months,'
he said. 'Well, let us say
three months before
we can make a start. Yes.
That ought to do the
affair.' I flung out
of his hut (he lived all
alone in a clay hut with a
sort of veranda)
muttering to myself my
opinion of him. He was a
chattering idiot.
Afterwards I took it back
when it was borne in upon
me startingly
with what extreme nicety he
had estimated the time

requisite for the
'affair.'

"I went to work the next day, turning, so to speak, my back on that station. In that way only it seemed to me I could keep my hold on the redeeming facts of life. Still, one must look about sometimes; and then I saw this station, these men strolling aimlessly about in the sunshine of the yard. I asked myself sometimes what it all meant. They wandered here and there with their absurd long staves in their hands, like a lot of faithless pilgrims bewitched inside a rotten fence. The word 'ivory' rang in the air, was whispered, was sighed. You

would think they were praying to it. A taint of imbecile rapacity blew through it all, like a whiff from some corpse. By Jove! I've never seen anything so unreal in my life. And outside, the silent wilderness surrounding this cleared speck on the earth struck me as something great and invincible, like evil or truth, waiting patiently for the passing away of this fantastic invasion.

"Oh, these months! Well, never mind. Various things happened. One evening a grass shed full of calico, cotton prints, beads, and I don't know what else, burst into a blaze so suddenly that

you would have
thought the earth had
opened to let an avenging
fire consume all that
trash. I was smoking my
pipe quietly by my
dismantled steamer, and saw
them all cutting capers in
the light, with their arms
lifted high, when
the stout man with
mustaches came tearing down
to the river, a tin
pail in his hand, assured
me that everybody was
'behaving splendidly,
splendidly,' dipped about a
quart of water and tore
back again. I
noticed there was a hole in
the bottom of his pail.

"I strolled up. There was
no hurry. You see the thing
had gone off like
a box of matches. It had

been hopeless from the very first. The flame had leaped high, driven everybody back, lighted up everything--and collapsed. The shed was already a heap of embers glowing fiercely. A nigger was being beaten near by. They said he had caused the fire in some way; be that as it may, he was screeching most horribly. I saw him, later on, for several days, sitting in a bit of shade looking very sick and trying to recover himself: afterwards he arose and went out--and the wilderness without a sound took him into its bosom again. As I approached the glow from the dark I found myself at the back of two men,

talking. I heard the name of Kurtz pronounced, then the words, 'take advantage of this unfortunate accident.' One of the men was the manager. I wished him a good evening. 'Did you ever see anything like it--eh? it is incredible,' he said, and walked off. The other man remained. He was a first-class agent, young, gentlemanly, a bit reserved, with a forked little beard and a hooked nose. He was stand-offish with the other agents, and they on their side said he was the manager's spy upon them. As to me, I had hardly ever spoken to him before. We got into talk, and by-and-by we strolled away from the hissing ruins.

Then he asked me to his room, which was in the main building of the station. He struck a match, and I perceived that this young aristocrat had not only a silver-mounted dressing-case but also a whole candle all to himself. Just at that time the manager was the only man supposed to have any right to candles. Native mats covered the clay walls; a collection of spears, assegais, shields, knives was hung up in trophies. The business intrusted to this fellow was the making of bricks--so I had been informed; but there wasn't a fragment of a brick anywhere in the station, and he had been

there more than a year--
waiting. It seems he
could not make bricks
without something, I don't
know what--straw maybe.
Anyways, it could not be
found there, and as it was
not likely to be
sent from Europe, it did
not appear clear to me what
he was waiting for.
An act of special creation
perhaps. However, they were
all waiting--all
the sixteen or twenty
pilgrims of them--for
something; and upon my word
it did not seem an
uncongenial occupation,
from the way they took it,
though the only thing that
ever came to them was
disease--as far as I
could see. They beguiled
the time by backbiting and
intriguing against

each other in a foolish kind of way. There was an air of plotting about that station, but nothing came of it, of course. It was as unreal as everything else--as the philanthropic pretense of the whole concern, as their talk, as their government, as their show of work. The only real feeling was a desire to get appointed to a trading-post where ivory was to be had, so that they could earn percentages. They intrigued and slandered and hated each other only on that account,--but as to effectually lifting a little finger--oh, no. By heavens! there is something after all in the world allowing one man to

steal a horse while
another must not look at a
halter. Steal a horse
straight out. Very
well. He has done it.
Perhaps he can ride. But
there is a way of looking
at a halter that would
provoke the most charitable
of saints into a
kick.

"I had no idea why he
wanted to be sociable, but
as we chatted in there
it suddenly occurred to me
the fellow was trying to
get at something--in
fact, pumping me. He
alluded constantly to
Europe, to the people I was
supposed to know there--
putting leading questions
as to my acquaintances
in the sepulchral city, and
so on. His little eyes

glittered like
mica discs--with
curiosity,--though he tried
to keep up a bit of
superciliousness. At first
I was astonished, but very
soon I became
awfully curious to see what
he would find out from me.
I couldn't
possibly imagine what I had
in me to make it worth his
while. It was
very pretty to see how he
baffled himself, for in
truth my body was full
of chills, and my head had
nothing in it but that
wretched steamboat
business. It was evident he
took me for a perfectly
shameless
prevaricator. At last he
got angry, and to conceal a
movement of furious
annoyance, he yawned. I

rose. Then I noticed a small sketch in oils, on a panel, representing a woman, draped and blindfolded, carrying a lighted torch. The background was somber--almost black. The movement of the woman was stately, and the effect of the torchlight on the face was sinister.

"It arrested me, and he stood by civilly, holding a half-pint champagne bottle (medical comforts) with the candle stuck in it. To my question he said Mr. Kurtz had painted this--in this very station more than a year ago--while waiting for means to go to his trading-post. 'Tell me, pray,'

said I, 'who is this Mr. Kurtz?'

"'The chief of the Inner Station,' he answered in a short tone, looking away. 'Much obliged,' I said, laughing. 'And you are the brickmaker of the Central Station. Everyone knows that.' He was silent for a while. 'He is a prodigy,' he said at last. 'He is an emissary of pity, and science, and progress, and devil knows what else. We want,' he began to declaim suddenly, 'for the guidance of the cause intrusted to us by Europe, so to speak, higher intelligence, wide sympathies, a singleness of purpose.' 'Who says that?' I asked. 'Lots of

them,' he replied. 'Some even write that; and so he comes here, a special being, as you ought to know.' 'Why ought I to know?' I interrupted, really surprised. He paid no attention. 'Yes. To-day he is chief of the best station, next year he will be assistant-manager, two years more and . . . but I dare say you know what he will be in two years' time. You are of the new gang--the gang of virtue. The same people who sent him specially also recommended you. Oh, don't say no. I've my own eyes to trust.' Light dawned upon me. My dear aunt's influential acquaintances were producing

an unexpected effect upon that young man. I nearly burst into a laugh.

'Do you read the Company's confidential correspondence?' I asked.

He

hadn't a word to say. It was great fun. 'When Mr. Kurtz,' I continued severely, 'is General Manager, you won't have the opportunity.'

"He blew the candle out suddenly, and we went outside. The moon had risen. Black figures strolled about listlessly, pouring water on the glow, whence proceeded a sound of hissing; steam ascended in the moonlight, the beaten nigger groaned somewhere. 'What a row the brute

makes!' said the indefatigable man with the mustaches, appearing near us. 'Serve him right. Transgression--punishment--bang! Pitiless, pitiless. That's the only way. This will prevent all conflagrations for the future. I was just telling the manager . . .'

He noticed my companion, and became crestfallen all at once. 'Not in bed yet,' he said, with a kind of servile heartiness; 'it's so natural. Ha! Danger--agitation.' He vanished. I went on to the river-side, and the other followed me. I heard a scathing murmur at my ear, 'Heap of muffs--go to.' The pilgrims could be seen in

knots gesticulating,
discussing. Several had
still their staves in their
hands. I verily
believe they took these
sticks to bed with them.
Beyond the fence the
forest stood up spectrally
in the moonlight, and
through the dim stir,
through the faint sounds of
that lamentable courtyard,
the silence of
the land went home to one's
very heart,--its mystery,
its greatness,
the amazing reality of its
concealed life. The hurt
nigger moaned feebly
somewhere near by, and then
fetched a deep sigh that
made me mend my
pace away from there. I
felt a hand introducing
itself under my arm.
'My dear sir,' said the

fellow, 'I don't want to be misunderstood, and especially by you, who will see Mr. Kurtz long before I can have that pleasure. I wouldn't like him to get a false idea of my disposition. . . .'

"I let him run on, this papier-mache Mephistopheles, and it seemed to me that if I tried I could poke my forefinger through him, and would find nothing inside but a little loose dirt, maybe. He, don't you see, had been planning to be assistant-manager by-and-by under the present man, and I could see that the coming of that Kurtz had

upset them both not a little. He talked precipitately, and I did not try to stop him. I had my shoulders against the wreck of my steamer, hauled up on the slope like a carcass of some big river animal. The smell of mud, of primeval mud, by Jove! was in my nostrils, the high stillness of primeval forest was before my eyes; there were shiny patches on the black creek. The moon had spread over everything a thin layer of silver-- over the rank grass, over the mud, upon the wall of matted vegetation standing higher than the wall of a temple, over the great river I could see

through a somber
gap glittering, glittering,
as it flowed broadly by
without a murmur.
All this was great,
expectant, mute, while the
man jabbered about
himself. I wondered whether
the stillness on the face
of the immensity
looking at us two were
meant as an appeal or as a
menace. What were we
who had strayed in here?
Could we handle that dumb
thing, or would it
handle us? I felt how big,
how confoundedly big, was
that thing that
couldn't talk, and perhaps
was deaf as well. What was
in there? I could
see a little ivory coming
out from there, and I had
heard Mr. Kurtz was
in there. I had heard

enough about it too--God knows! Yet somehow it didn't bring any image with it--no more than if I had been told an angel or a fiend was in there. I believed it in the same way one of you might believe there are inhabitants in the planet Mars. I knew once a Scotch sailmaker who was certain, dead sure, there were people in Mars. If you asked him for some idea how they looked and behaved, he would get shy and mutter something about 'walking on all-fours.' If you as much as smiled, he would--though a man of sixty--offer to fight you. I would not have gone so far as to fight for Kurtz, but I went for him near enough

to a lie. You know I hate,
detest, and can't bear a
lie, not because
I am straighter than the
rest of us, but simply
because it appalls me.
There is a taint of death,
a flavor of mortality in
lies,--which is
exactly what I hate and
detest in the world--what I
want to forget.
It makes me miserable and
sick, like biting something
rotten would do.
Temperament, I suppose.
Well, I went near enough to
it by letting the
young fool there believe
anything he liked to
imagine as to my influence
in Europe. I became in an
instant as much of a
pretense as the rest of
the bewitched pilgrims.
This simply because I had a

notion it somehow
would be of help to that
Kurtz whom at the time I
did not see--you
understand. He was just a
word for me. I did not see
the man in the name
any more than you do. Do
you see him? Do you see the
story? Do you see
anything? It seems to me I
am trying to tell you a
dream--making a vain
attempt, because no
relation of a dream can
convey the dream-sensation,
that commingling of
absurdity, surprise, and
bewilderment in a tremor of
struggling revolt, that
notion of being captured by
the incredible which
is of the very essence of
dreams. . . ."

He was silent for a while.

". . . No, it is impossible; it is impossible to convey the life-sensation of any given epoch of one's existence,-- that which makes its truth, its meaning--its subtle and penetrating essence. It is impossible. We live, as we dream--alone. . . ."

He paused again as if reflecting, then added--"Of course in this you fellows see more than I could then. You see me, whom you know. . . ."

It had become so pitch dark that we listeners could hardly see one another. For a long time already he, sitting apart, had been no more

to us than a voice. There was not a word from anybody. The others might have been asleep, but I was awake. I listened, I listened on the watch for the sentence, for the word, that would give me the clew to the faint uneasiness inspired by this narrative that seemed to shape itself without human lips in the heavy night-air of the river.

". . . Yes--I let him run on," Marlow began again, "and think what he pleased about the powers that were behind me. I did! And there was nothing behind me! There was nothing but that wretched, old, mangled steamboat I was leaning

against, while he talked fluently about 'the necessity for every man to get on.' 'And when one comes out here, you conceive, it is not to gaze at the moon.' Mr. Kurtz was a 'universal genius,' but even a genius would find it easier to work with 'adequate tools--intelligent men.' He did not make bricks--why, there was a physical impossibility in the way--as I was well aware; and if he did secretarial work for the manager, it was because 'no sensible man rejects wantonly the confidence of his superiors.' Did I see it? I saw it. What more did I want? What I really wanted was

rivets, by heaven!
Rivets. To get on with the
work--to stop the hole.
Rivets I
wanted. There were cases of
them down at the coast--
cases--piled
up--burst--split! You
kicked a loose rivet at
every second step in that
station yard on the
hillside. Rivets had rolled
into the grove of death.
You could fill your pockets
with rivets for the trouble
of stooping
down--and there wasn't one
rivet to be found where it
was wanted. We had
plates that would do, but
nothing to fasten them
with. And every week
the messenger, a lone
negro, letter-bag on
shoulder and staff in hand,
left our station for the

coast. And several times a week a coast caravan came in with trade goods,--ghastly glazed calico that made you shudder only to look at it, glass beads value about a penny a quart, confounded spotted cotton handkerchiefs. And no rivets. Three carriers could have brought all that was wanted to set that steamboat afloat.

"He was becoming confidential now, but I fancy my unresponsive attitude must have exasperated him at last, for he judged it necessary to inform me he feared neither God nor devil, let alone any mere man. I said I

could see that very well,
but what I wanted was a
certain quantity of
rivets--and rivets were
what really Mr. Kurtz
wanted, if he had only
known it. Now letters went
to the coast every week. .
. . 'My dear
sir,' he cried, 'I write
from dictation.' I demanded
rivets. There was
a way--for an intelligent
man. He changed his manner;
became very
cold, and suddenly began to
talk about a hippopotamus;
wondered whether
sleeping on board the
steamer (I stuck to my
salvage night and day)
I wasn't disturbed. There
was an old hippo that had
the bad habit of
getting out on the bank and
roaming at night over the

station grounds.
The pilgrims used to turn
out in a body and empty
every rifle they could
lay hands on at him. Some
even had sat up o' nights
for him. All this
energy was wasted, though.
'That animal has a charmed
life,' he said;
'but you can say this only
of brutes in this country.
No man--you
apprehend me?--no man here
bears a charmed life.' He
stood there for
a moment in the moonlight
with his delicate hooked
nose set a little
askew, and his mica eyes
glittering without a wink,
then, with a curt
Good night, he strode off.
I could see he was
disturbed and considerably
puzzled, which made me feel

more hopeful than I had been for days. It was a great comfort to turn from that chap to my influential friend, the battered, twisted, ruined, tin-pot steamboat. I clambered on board. She rang under my feet like an empty Huntley & Palmer biscuit-tin kicked along a gutter; she was nothing so solid in make, and rather less pretty in shape, but I had expended enough hard work on her to make me love her. No influential friend would have served me better. She had given me a chance to come out a bit--to find out what I could do. No, I don't like work. I had rather laze about and think of all the fine things that

can be done. I don't like work--no man does--but I like what is in the work,--the chance to find yourself. Your own reality--for yourself, not for others--what no other man can ever know. They can only see the mere show, and never can tell what it really means.

"I was not surprised to see somebody sitting aft, on the deck, with his legs dangling over the mud. You see I rather chummed with the few mechanics there were in that station, whom the other pilgrims naturally despised--on account of their imperfect manners, I suppose. This was the foreman--a boiler-maker by trade--a good worker. He

was a lank, bony,
yellow-faced man, with big
intense eyes. His aspect
was worried, and his
head was as bald as the
palm of my hand; but his
hair in falling seemed
to have stuck to his chin,
and had prospered in the
new locality,
for his beard hung down to
his waist. He was a widower
with six young
children (he had left them
in charge of a sister of
his to come out
there), and the passion of
his life was pigeon-flying.
He was an
enthusiast and a
connoisseur. He would rave
about pigeons. After work
hours he used sometimes to
come over from his hut for
a talk about his
children and his pigeons;

at work, when he had to crawl in the mud under the bottom of the steamboat, he would tie up that beard of his in a kind of white serviette he brought for the purpose. It had loops to go over his ears. In the evening he could be seen squatted on the bank rinsing that wrapper in the creek with great care, then spreading it solemnly on a bush to dry.

"I slapped him on the back and shouted, 'We shall have rivets!' He scrambled to his feet exclaiming 'No! Rivets!' as though he couldn't believe his ears. Then in a low voice, 'You . . . eh?' I don't know why we behaved like lunatics. I

put my finger to the side
of my nose and
nodded mysteriously. 'Good
for you!' he cried, snapped
his fingers above
his head, lifting one foot.
I tried a jig. We capered
on the iron deck.
A frightful clatter came
out of that hulk, and the
virgin forest on
the other bank of the creek
sent it back in a
thundering roll upon the
sleeping station. It must
have made some of the
pilgrims sit up in their
hovels. A dark figure
obscured the lighted
doorway of the manager's
hut,
vanished, then, a second or
so after, the doorway
itself vanished too.
We stopped, and the silence
driven away by the stamping

of our feet
flowed back again from the
recesses of the land. The
great wall of
vegetation, an exuberant
and entangled mass of
trunks, branches, leaves,
boughs, festoons,
motionless in the
moonlight, was like a
rioting
invasion of soundless life,
a rolling wave of plants,
piled up, crested,
ready to topple over the
creek, to sweep every
little man of us out
of his little existence.
And it moved not. A
deadened burst of mighty
splashes and snorts reached
us from afar, as though an
ichthyosaurus had
been taking a bath of
glitter in the great river.
'After all,' said the

boiler-maker in a reasonable tone, 'why shouldn't we get the rivets?'

Why not, indeed! I did not know of any reason why we shouldn't. 'They'll come in three weeks,' I said confidently.

"But they didn't. Instead of rivets there came an invasion, an infliction, a visitation. It came in sections during the next three weeks, each section headed by a donkey carrying a white man in new clothes and tan shoes, bowing from that elevation right and left to the impressed pilgrims. A quarrelsome band of footsore sulky niggers trod on

the heels of the donkeys; a lot of tents, camp-stools, tin boxes, white cases, brown bales would be shot down in the courtyard, and the air of mystery would deepen a little over the muddle of the station. Five such installments came, with their absurd air of disorderly flight with the loot of innumerable outfit shops and provision stores, that, one would think, they were lugging, after a raid, into the wilderness for equitable division. It was an inextricable mess of things decent in themselves but that human folly made look like the spoils of thieving.

"This devoted band called

itself the Eldorado
Exploring Expedition, and
I believe they were sworn
to secrecy. Their talk,
however, was the talk
of sordid buccaneers: it
was reckless without
hardihood, greedy without
audacity, and cruel without
courage; there was not an
atom of foresight
or of serious intention in
the whole batch of them,
and they did not
seem aware these things are
wanted for the work of the
world. To tear
treasure out of the bowels
of the land was their
desire, with no more
moral purpose at the back
of it than there is in
burglars breaking into
a safe. Who paid the
expenses of the noble
enterprise I don't know;

but
the uncle of our manager
was leader of that lot.

"In exterior he resembled a
butcher in a poor
neighborhood, and his eyes
had a look of sleepy
cunning. He carried his fat
paunch with ostentation
on his short legs, and
during the time his gang
infested the station
spoke to no one but his
nephew. You could see these
two roaming about
all day long with their
heads close together in an
everlasting confab.

"I had given up worrying
myself about the rivets.
One's capacity for
that kind of folly is more
limited than you would
suppose. I said

Hang!--and let things slide. I had plenty of time for meditation, and now and then I would give some thought to Kurtz. I wasn't very interested in him. No. Still, I was curious to see whether this man, who had come out equipped with moral ideas of some sort, would climb to the top after all, and how he would set about his work when there."

II

"One evening as I was lying flat on the deck of my steamboat, I heard voices approaching--and there were the nephew and the uncle strolling

along the bank. I laid my head on my arm again, and had nearly lost myself in a doze, when somebody said in my ear, as it were: 'I am as harmless as a little child, but I don't like to be dictated to. Am I the manager--or am I not? I was ordered to send him there. It's incredible.'

. . . I became aware that the two were standing on the shore alongside the forepart of the steamboat, just below my head. I did not move; it did not occur to me to move: I was sleepy. 'It is unpleasant,' grunted the uncle. 'He has asked the Administration to be sent there,' said the other, 'with the idea of showing what he could do;

and I was instructed accordingly. Look at the influence that man must have. Is it not frightful?' They both agreed it was frightful, then made several bizarre remarks: 'Make rain and fine weather--one man--the Council--by the nose'--bits of absurd sentences that got the better of my drowsiness, so that I had pretty near the whole of my wits about me when the uncle said, 'The climate may do away with this difficulty for you. Is he alone there?' 'Yes,' answered the manager; 'he sent his assistant down the river with a note to me in these terms: "Clear this poor devil out of the country, and don't

bother sending more of that sort. I had rather be alone than have the kind of men you can dispose of with me." It was more than a year ago. Can you imagine such impudence!' 'Anything since then?' asked the other, hoarsely. 'Ivory,' jerked the nephew; 'lots of it--prime sort--lots--most annoying, from him.' 'And with that?' questioned the heavy rumble. 'Invoice,' was the reply fired out, so to speak. Then silence. They had been talking about Kurtz.

"I was broad awake by this time, but, lying perfectly at ease, remained still, having no inducement to change my position. 'How

did that ivory
come all this way?' growled
the elder man, who seemed
very vexed. The
other explained that it had
come with a fleet of canoes
in charge of an
English half-caste clerk
Kurtz had with him; that
Kurtz had apparently
intended to return himself,
the station being by that
time bare of goods
and stores, but after
coming three hundred miles,
had suddenly decided
to go back, which he
started to do alone in a
small dug-out with four
paddlers, leaving the half-
caste to continue down the
river with the
ivory. The two fellows
there seemed astounded at
anybody attempting such
a thing. They were at a

loss for an adequate motive. As to me, I seemed to see Kurtz for the first time. It was a distinct glimpse: the dug-out, four paddling savages, and the lone white man turning his back suddenly on the headquarters, on relief, on thoughts of home--perhaps; setting his face towards the depths of the wilderness, towards his empty and desolate station. I did not know the motive. Perhaps he was just simply a fine fellow who stuck to his work for its own sake. His name, you understand, had not been pronounced once. He was 'that man.' The half-caste, who, as far as I could see, had conducted a difficult

trip with great prudence and pluck, was invariably alluded to as 'that scoundrel.' The 'scoundrel' had reported that the 'man' had been very ill--had recovered imperfectly. . . . The two below me moved away then a few paces, and strolled back and forth at some little distance. I heard: 'Military post--doctor--two hundred miles--quite alone now--unavoidable delays--nine months--no news--strange rumors.' They approached again, just as the manager was saying, 'No one, as far as I know, unless a species of wandering trader--a pestilential fellow, snapping ivory from the natives.' Who was it they were talking about

now? I gathered in
snatches that this was some
man supposed to be in
Kurtz's district, and
of whom the manager did not
approve. 'We will not be
free from unfair
competition till one of
these fellows is hanged for
an example,'
he said. 'Certainly,'
grunted the other; 'get him
hanged! Why not?
Anything--anything can be
done in this country.
That's what I say;
nobody here, you
understand, here, can
endanger your position. And
why? You stand the climate--
you outlast them all. The
danger is in
Europe; but there before I
left I took care to--' They
moved off and
whispered, then their

voices rose again. 'The extraordinary series of delays is not my fault. I did my possible.' The fat man sighed, 'Very sad.' 'And the pestiferous absurdity of his talk,' continued the other; 'he bothered me enough when he was here. "Each station should be like a beacon on the road towards better things, a center for trade of course, but also for humanizing, improving, instructing." Conceive you--that ass! And he wants to be manager! No, it's--' Here he got choked by excessive indignation, and I lifted my head the least bit. I was surprised to see how near they were--right under me. I could have spat

upon their hats. They were looking on the ground, absorbed in thought. The manager was switching his leg with a slender twig: his sagacious relative lifted his head. 'You have been well since you came out this time?' he asked. The other gave a start. 'Who? I? Oh! Like a charm--like a charm. But the rest--oh, my goodness! All sick. They die so quick, too, that I haven't the time to send them out of the country--it's incredible!' 'H'm. Just so,' grunted the uncle. 'Ah! my boy, trust to this--I say, trust to this.' I saw him extend his short flipper of an arm for a gesture that took in the forest, the

creek, the mud, the
river,--seemed to beckon
with a dishonoring flourish
before the sunlit
face of the land a
treacherous appeal to the
lurking death, to the
hidden evil, to the
profound darkness of its
heart. It was so startling
that I leaped to my feet
and looked back at the edge
of the forest, as
though I had expected an
answer of some sort to that
black display of
confidence. You know the
foolish notions that come
to one sometimes. The
high stillness confronted
these two figures with its
ominous patience,
waiting for the passing
away of a fantastic
invasion.

"They swore aloud together--
-out of sheer fright, I
believe--then
pretending not to know
anything of my existence,
turned back to the
station. The sun was low;
and leaning forward side by
side, they seemed
to be tugging painfully
uphill their two ridiculous
shadows of unequal
length, that trailed behind
them slowly over the tall
grass without
bending a single blade.

"In a few days the Eldorado
Expedition went into the
patient wilderness,
that closed upon it as the
sea closes over a diver.
Long afterwards the
news came that all the
donkeys were dead. I know
nothing as to the fate

of the less valuable animals. They, no doubt, like the rest of us, found what they deserved. I did not inquire. I was then rather excited at the prospect of meeting Kurtz very soon. When I say very soon I mean it comparatively. It was just two months from the day we left the creek when we came to the bank below Kurtz's station.

"Going up that river was like traveling back to the earliest beginnings of the world, when vegetation rioted on the earth and the big trees were kings. An empty stream, a great silence, an impenetrable forest. The air

was warm, thick, heavy,
sluggish. There was no joy
in the brilliance of
sunshine. The long
stretches of the waterway
ran on, deserted, into
the gloom of overshadowed
distances. On silvery
sandbanks hippos and
alligators sunned
themselves side by side.
The broadening waters
flowed
through a mob of wooded
islands; you lost your way
on that river as you
would in a desert, and
butted all day long against
shoals, trying to
find the channel, till you
thought yourself bewitched
and cut off for
ever from everything you
had known once--somewhere--
far away--in another
existence perhaps. There

were moments when one's
past came back to one,
as it will sometimes when
you have not a moment to
spare to yourself;
but it came in the shape of
an unrestful and noisy
dream, remembered
with wonder amongst the
overwhelming realities of
this strange world of
plants, and water, and
silence. And this stillness
of life did not in
the least resemble a peace.
It was the stillness of an
implacable force
brooding over an
inscrutable intention. It
looked at you with a
vengeful
aspect. I got used to it
afterwards; I did not see
it any more; I had no
time. I had to keep
guessing at the channel; I

had to discern, mostly by
inspiration, the signs of
hidden banks; I watched for
sunken stones; I
was learning to clap my
teeth smartly before my
heart flew out, when I
shaved by a fluke some
infernal sly old snag that
would have ripped the
life out of the tin-pot
steamboat and drowned all
the pilgrims; I had to
keep a look-out for the
signs of dead wood we could
cut up in the night
for next day's steaming.
When you have to attend to
things of that sort,
to the mere incidents of
the surface, the reality--
the reality, I tell
you--fades. The inner truth
is hidden--luckily,
luckily. But I felt it
all the same; I felt often

its mysterious stillness
watching me at
my monkey tricks, just as
it watches you fellows
performing on your
respective tight-ropes for-
-what is it? half-a-crown a
tumble--"

"Try to be civil, Marlow,"
growled a voice, and I knew
there was at
least one listener awake
besides myself.

"I beg your pardon. I
forgot the heartache which
makes up the rest of
the price. And indeed what
does the price matter, if
the trick be well
done? You do your tricks
very well. And I didn't do
badly either, since
I managed not to sink that
steamboat on my first trip.

It's a wonder to me yet. Imagine a blindfolded man set to drive a van over a bad road.

I sweated and shivered over that business considerably, I can tell

you. After all, for a seaman, to scrape the bottom of the thing that's supposed to float all the time under his care is the unpardonable sin.

No one may know of it, but you never forget the thump-eh? A blow on the very heart. You remember it, you dream of it, you wake up at night and think of it--years after--and go hot and cold all over. I don't pretend to say that steamboat floated all the time. More than once she had to

wade for a bit, with twenty cannibals splashing around and pushing.

We had enlisted some of these chaps on the way for a crew. Fine fellows--cannibals--in their place. They were men one could work with, and I am grateful to them. And, after all, they did not eat each other before my face: they had brought along a provision of hippo-meat which went rotten, and made the mystery of the wilderness stink in my nostrils. Phoo! I can sniff it now. I had the manager on board and three or four pilgrims with their staves--all complete. Sometimes we came upon a station close by the bank, clinging to the

skirts of the unknown, and
the white men rushing out
of a tumble-down hovel,
with great gestures of
joy and surprise and
welcome, seemed very
strange,--had the
appearance
of being held there captive
by a spell. The word ivory
would ring in
the air for a while--and on
we went again into the
silence, along empty
reaches, round the still
bends, between the high
walls of our
winding way, reverberating
in hollow claps the
ponderous beat of the
stern-wheel. Trees, trees,
millions of trees, massive,
immense, running
up high; and at their foot,
hugging the bank against
the stream, crept

the little begrimed
steamboat, like a sluggish
beetle crawling on the
floor of a lofty portico.
It made you feel very
small, very lost, and
yet it was not altogether
depressing, that feeling.
After all, if you
were small, the grimy
beetle crawled on--which
was just what you wanted
it to do. Where the
pilgrims imagined it
crawled to I don't know.
To some place where they
expected to get something,
I bet! For me it
crawled toward Kurtz--
exclusively; but when the
steam-pipes started
leaking we crawled very
slow. The reaches opened
before us and closed
behind, as if the forest
had stepped leisurely

across the water to bar
the way for our return. We
penetrated deeper and
deeper into the heart
of darkness. It was very
quiet there. At night
sometimes the roll of
drums behind the curtain of
trees would run up the
river and remain
sustained faintly, as if
hovering in the air high
over our heads, till
the first break of day.
Whether it meant war,
peace, or prayer we could
not tell. The dawns were
heralded by the descent of
a chill stillness;
the woodcutters slept,
their fires burned low; the
snapping of a twig
would make you start. We
were wanderers on a
prehistoric earth, on an
earth that wore the aspect

of an unknown planet. We could have fancied ourselves the first of men taking possession of an accursed inheritance, to be subdued at the cost of profound anguish and of excessive toil. But suddenly, as we struggled round a bend, there would be a glimpse of rush walls, of peaked grass-roofs, a burst of yells, a whirl of black limbs, a mass of hands clapping, of feet stamping, of bodies swaying, of eyes rolling, under the droop of heavy and motionless foliage. The steamer toiled along slowly on the edge of a black and incomprehensible frenzy. The prehistoric man was cursing us, praying to us, welcoming us--who

could tell? We were cut off from the comprehension of our surroundings; we glided past like phantoms, wondering and secretly appalled, as sane men would be before an enthusiastic outbreak in a madhouse. We could not understand, because we were too far and could not remember, because we were traveling in the night of first ages, of those ages that are gone, leaving hardly a sign--and no memories.

"The earth seemed unearthly. We are accustomed to look upon the shackled form of a conquered monster, but there--there you could look at a thing monstrous and free. It was

unearthly, and the men were--No, they were not inhuman. Well, you know, that was the worst of it--this suspicion of their not being inhuman. It would come slowly to one. They howled, and leaped, and spun, and made horrid faces; but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity--like yours--the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar. Ugly. Yes, it was ugly enough; but if you were man enough you would admit to yourself that there was in you just the faintest trace of a response to the terrible frankness of that noise, a dim suspicion of there being a meaning in it

which you--you so remote
from the night of first
ages--could comprehend.
And why not? The mind of
man is capable of anything--
-because everything
is in it, all the past as
well as all the future.
What was there after
all? Joy, fear, sorrow,
devotion, valor, rage--who
can tell?--but
truth--truth stripped of
its cloak of time. Let the
fool gape and
shudder--the man knows, and
can look on without a wink.
But he must at
least be as much of a man
as these on the shore. He
must meet that
truth with his own true
stuff--with his own inborn
strength. Principles?
Principles won't do.
Acquisitions, clothes,

pretty rags--rags that
would
fly off at the first good
shake. No; you want a
deliberate belief. An
appeal to me in this
fiendish row--is there?
Very well; I hear; I admit,
but I have a voice too, and
for good or evil mine is
the speech that
cannot be silenced. Of
course, a fool, what with
sheer fright and fine
sentiments, is always safe.
Who's that grunting? You
wonder I didn't go
ashore for a howl and a
dance? Well, no--I didn't.
Fine sentiments, you
say? Fine sentiments, be
hanged! I had no time. I
had to mess about with
white-lead and strips of
woolen blanket helping to
put bandages on

those leaky steam-pipes--I tell you. I had to watch the steering, and circumvent those snags, and get the tin-pot along by hook or by crook.

There was surface-truth enough in these things to save a wiser man. And between whiles I had to look after the savage who was fireman. He was an improved specimen; he could fire up a vertical boiler. He was there below me, and, upon my word, to look at him was as edifying as seeing a dog in a parody of breeches and a feather hat, walking on his hind-legs.

A few months of training had done for that really fine chap. He squinted at the steam-gauge and at the water-gauge with an

evident effort of
intrepidity--and he had
filed teeth too, the poor
devil, and the wool of
his pate shaved into queer
patterns, and three
ornamental scars on each
of his cheeks. He ought to
have been clapping his
hands and stamping
his feet on the bank,
instead of which he was
hard at work, a thrall to
strange witchcraft, full of
improving knowledge. He was
useful because
he had been instructed; and
what he knew was this--that
should the water
in that transparent thing
disappear, the evil spirit
inside the boiler
would get angry through the
greatness of his thirst,
and take a terrible
vengeance. So he sweated

and fired up and watched
the glass fearfully
(with an impromptu charm,
made of rags, tied to his
arm, and a piece of
polished bone, as big as a
watch, stuck flatways
through his lower lip),
while the wooded banks
slipped past us slowly, the
short noise was left
behind, the interminable
miles of silence--and we
crept on, towards
Kurtz. But the snags were
thick, the water was
treacherous and shallow,
the boiler seemed indeed to
have a sulky devil in it,
and thus neither
that fireman nor I had any
time to peer into our
creepy thoughts.

"Some fifty miles below the
Inner Station we came upon

a hut of reeds,
an inclined and melancholy
pole, with the
unrecognizable tatters of
what had been a flag of
some sort flying from it,
and a neatly stacked
woodpile. This was
unexpected. We came to the
bank, and on the stack of
firewood found a flat piece
of board with some faded
pencil-writing
on it. When deciphered it
said: 'Wood for you. Hurry
up. Approach
cautiously.' There was a
signature, but it was
illegible--not
Kurtz--a much longer word.
'Hurry up.' Where? Up the
river? 'Approach
cautiously.' We had not
done so. But the warning
could not have been
meant for the place where

it could be only found
after approach.
Something was wrong above.
But what--and how much?
That was the
question. We commented
adversely upon the
imbecility of that
telegraphic
style. The bush around said
nothing, and would not let
us look very far,
either. A torn curtain of
red twill hung in the
doorway of the hut, and
flapped sadly in our faces.
The dwelling was
dismantled; but we could
see a white man had lived
there not very long ago.
There remained a rude
table--a plank on two
posts; a heap of rubbish
reposed in a dark corner,
and by the door I picked up
a book. It had lost its

covers, and the pages had been thumbed into a state of extremely dirty softness; but the back had been lovingly stitched afresh with white cotton thread, which looked clean yet. It was an extraordinary find. Its title was, 'An Inquiry into some Points of Seamanship,' by a man Tower, Towson--some such name--Master in his Majesty's Navy. The matter looked dreary reading enough, with illustrative diagrams and repulsive tables of figures, and the copy was sixty years old. I handled this amazing antiquity with the greatest possible tenderness, lest it should dissolve in my hands. Within, Towson

or Towser was inquiring earnestly into the breaking strain of ships' chains and tackle, and other such matters. Not a very enthralling book; but at the first glance you could see there a singleness of intention, an honest concern for the right way of going to work, which made these humble pages, thought out so many years ago, luminous with another than a professional light. The simple old sailor, with his talk of chains and purchases, made me forget the jungle and the pilgrims in a delicious sensation of having come upon something unmistakably real. Such a book being there was wonderful enough; but

still more astounding were the notes penciled in the margin, and plainly referring to the text. I couldn't believe my eyes! They were in cipher! Yes, it looked like cipher. Fancy a man lugging with him a book of that description into this nowhere and studying it--and making notes--in cipher at that! It was an extravagant mystery.

"I had been dimly aware for some time of a worrying noise, and when I lifted my eyes I saw the wood-pile was gone, and the manager, aided by all the pilgrims, was shouting at me from the river-side. I slipped the book into my pocket. I assure you to leave off

reading was like tearing myself away from the shelter of an old and solid friendship.

"I started the lame engine ahead. 'It must be this miserable trader--this intruder,' exclaimed the manager, looking back malevolently at the place we had left. 'He must be English,' I said. 'It will not save him from getting into trouble if he is not careful,' muttered the manager darkly. I observed with assumed innocence that no man was safe from trouble in this world.

"The current was more rapid now, the steamer seemed at her last gasp, the stern-wheel flopped

languidly, and I caught myself listening on tiptoe for the next beat of the boat, for in sober truth I expected the wretched thing to give up every moment. It was like watching the last flickers of a life. But still we crawled. Sometimes I would pick out a tree a little way ahead to measure our progress towards Kurtz by, but I lost it invariably before we got abreast. To keep the eyes so long on one thing was too much for human patience. The manager displayed a beautiful resignation. I fretted and fumed and took to arguing with myself whether or no I would talk openly with Kurtz; but before I could

come to any conclusion it occurred to me that my speech or my silence, indeed any action of mine, would be a mere futility. What did it matter what anyone knew or ignored? What did it matter who was manager? One gets sometimes such a flash of insight. The essentials of this affair lay deep under the surface, beyond my reach, and beyond my power of meddling.

"Towards the evening of the second day we judged ourselves about eight miles from Kurtz's station. I wanted to push on; but the manager looked grave, and told me the navigation up there was so dangerous that it

would be advisable, the sun being very low already, to wait where we were till next morning. Moreover, he pointed out that if the warning to approach cautiously were to be followed, we must approach in daylight--not at dusk, or in the dark. This was sensible enough. Eight miles meant nearly three hours' steaming for us, and I could also see suspicious ripples at the upper end of the reach. Nevertheless, I was annoyed beyond expression at the delay, and most unreasonably too, since one night more could not matter much after so many months. As we had plenty of wood, and caution was the word, I brought up

in the middle
of the stream. The reach
was narrow, straight, with
high sides like a
railway cutting. The dusk
came gliding into it long
before the sun had
set. The current ran smooth
and swift, but a dumb
immobility sat on
the banks. The living
trees, lashed together by
the creepers and every
living bush of the
undergrowth, might have
been changed into stone,
even to the slenderest
twig, to the lightest leaf.
It was not sleep--it
seemed unnatural, like a
state of trance. Not the
faintest sound of any
kind could be heard. You
looked on amazed, and began
to suspect yourself
of being deaf--then the

night came suddenly, and struck you blind as well. About three in the morning some large fish leaped, and the loud splash made me jump as though a gun had been fired. When the sun rose there was a white fog, very warm and clammy, and more blinding than the night. It did not shift or drive; it was just there, standing all round you like something solid. At eight or nine, perhaps, it lifted as a shutter lifts. We had a glimpse of the towering multitude of trees, of the immense matted jungle, with the blazing little ball of the sun hanging over it--all perfectly still--and then the white shutter came

down again, smoothly, as if sliding in greased grooves. I ordered the chain, which we had begun to heave in, to be paid out again. Before it stopped running with a muffled rattle, a cry, a very loud cry, as of infinite desolation, soared slowly in the opaque air. It ceased. A complaining clamor, modulated in savage discords, filled our ears. The sheer unexpectedness of it made my hair stir under my cap. I don't know how it struck the others: to me it seemed as though the mist itself had screamed, so suddenly, and apparently from all sides at once, did this tumultuous and

mournful uproar arise. It culminated in a hurried outbreak of almost intolerably excessive shrieking, which stopped short, leaving us stiffened in a variety of silly attitudes, and obstinately listening to the nearly as appalling and excessive silence. 'Good God! What is the meaning--?' stammered at my elbow one of the pilgrims,--a little fat man, with sandy hair and red whiskers, who wore side-spring boots, and pink pyjamas tucked into his socks. Two others remained open-mouthed a whole minute, then dashed into the little cabin, to rush out incontinently and stand darting scared glances,

with Winchesters at
'ready' in their hands.
What we could see was just
the steamer we
were on, her outlines
blurred as though she had
been on the point of
dissolving, and a misty
strip of water, perhaps two
feet broad, around
her--and that was all. The
rest of the world was
nowhere, as far as our
eyes and ears were
concerned. Just nowhere.
Gone, disappeared; swept
off
without leaving a whisper
or a shadow behind.

"I went forward, and
ordered the chain to be
hailed in short, so as to
be ready to trip the anchor
and move the steamboat at
once if necessary.

'Will they attack?'
whispered an awed voice.
'We will all be butchered
in this fog,' murmured
another. The faces twitched
with the strain, the
hands trembled slightly,
the eyes forgot to wink. It
was very curious
to see the contrast of
expressions of the white
men and of the black
fellows of our crew, who
were as much strangers to
that part of the
river as we, though their
homes were only eight
hundred miles away. The
whites, of course greatly
discomposed, had besides a
curious look of
being painfully shocked by
such an outrageous row. The
others had an
alert, naturally interested
expression; but their faces

were essentially quiet, even those of the one or two who grinned as they hauled at the chain. Several exchanged short, grunting phrases, which seemed to settle the matter to their satisfaction. Their headman, a young, broad-chested black, severely draped in dark-blue fringed cloths, with fierce nostrils and his hair all done up artfully in oily ringlets, stood near me.

'Aha!' I said, just for good fellowship's sake.

'Catch 'im,' he snapped, with a bloodshot widening of his eyes and a flash of sharp teeth--'catch

'im. Give 'im to us.' 'To you, eh?' I asked; 'what would you do with

them?' 'Eat 'im!' he said curtly, and, leaning his elbow on the rail, looked out into the fog in a dignified and profoundly pensive attitude. I would no doubt have been properly horrified, had it not occurred to me that he and his chaps must be very hungry: that they must have been growing increasingly hungry for at least this month past. They had been engaged for six months (I don't think a single one of them had any clear idea of time, as we at the end of countless ages have. They still belonged to the beginnings of time--had no inherited experience to teach them as it were), and of course, as long as there

was a piece of paper
written over in accordance
with some farcical law or
other made down the
river, it didn't enter
anybody's head to trouble
how they would live.
Certainly they had brought
with them some rotten
hippo-meat, which
couldn't have lasted very
long, anyway, even if the
pilgrims hadn't, in
the midst of a shocking
hullabaloo, thrown a
considerable quantity of it
overboard. It looked like a
high-handed proceeding; but
it was really
a case of legitimate self-
defense. You can't breathe
dead hippo waking,
sleeping, and eating, and
at the same time keep your
precarious grip on
existence. Besides that,

they had given them every week three pieces of brass wire, each about nine inches long; and the theory was they were to buy their provisions with that currency in river-side villages. You can see how that worked. There were either no villages, or the people were hostile, or the director, who like the rest of us fed out of tins, with an occasional old he-goat thrown in, didn't want to stop the steamer for some more or less recondite reason. So, unless they swallowed the wire itself, or made loops of it to snare the fishes with, I don't see what good their extravagant salary could be to them. I

must say it was paid with a regularity worthy of a large and honorable trading company. For the rest, the only thing to eat--though it didn't look eatable in the least--I saw in their possession was a few lumps of some stuff like half-cooked dough, of a dirty lavender color, they kept wrapped in leaves, and now and then swallowed a piece of, but so small that it seemed done more for the looks of the thing than for any serious purpose of sustenance. Why in the name of all the gnawing devils of hunger they didn't go for us--they were thirty to five--and have a good tuck in for once, amazes me now when I

think of it. They were big
powerful men,
with not much capacity to
weigh the consequences,
with courage, with
strength, even yet, though
their skins were no longer
glossy and their
muscles no longer hard. And
I saw that something
restraining, one of
those human secrets that
baffle probability, had
come into play there.
I looked at them with a
swift quickening of
interest--not because it
occurred to me I might be
eaten by them before very
long, though I
own to you that just then I
perceived--in a new light,
as it were--how
unwholesome the pilgrims
looked, and I hoped, yes, I
positively hoped,

that my aspect was not so--
what shall I say?--so--
unappetizing: a touch
of fantastic vanity which
fitted well with the dream-
sensation that
pervaded all my days at
that time. Perhaps I had a
little fever too. One
can't live with one's
finger everlastingly on
one's pulse. I had
often 'a little fever,' or
a little touch of other
things--the playful
paw-strokes of the
wilderness, the preliminary
trifling before the more
serious onslaught which
came in due course. Yes; I
looked at them as you
would on any human being,
with a curiosity of their
impulses, motives,
capacities, weaknesses,
when brought to the test of

an inexorable
physical necessity.
Restraint! What possible
restraint? Was it
superstition, disgust,
patience, fear--or some
kind of primitive honor?
No fear can stand up to
hunger, no patience can
wear it out, disgust
simply does not exist where
hunger is; and as to
superstition, beliefs,
and what you may call
principles, they are less
than chaff in a breeze.
Don't you know the devilry
of lingering starvation,
its exasperating
torment, its black
thoughts, its somber and
brooding ferocity? Well,
I do. It takes a man all
his inborn strength to
fight hunger properly.
It's really easier to face

bereavement, dishonor, and
the perdition of
one's soul--than this kind
of prolonged hunger. Sad,
but true. And these
chaps too had no earthly
reason for any kind of
scruple. Restraint! I
would just as soon have
expected restraint from a
hyena prowling amongst
the corpses of a
battlefield. But there was
the fact facing me--the
fact
dazzling, to be seen, like
the foam on the depths of
the sea, like a
ripple on an unfathomable
enigma, a mystery greater--
when I thought
of it--than the curious,
inexplicable note of
desperate grief in this
savage clamor that had
swept by us on the river-

bank, behind the blind
whiteness of the fog.

"Two pilgrims were
quarreling in hurried
whispers as to which bank.
'Left.' 'No, no; how can
you? Right, right, of
course.' 'It is very
serious,' said the
manager's voice behind me;
'I would be desolated if
anything should happen to
Mr. Kurtz before we came
up.' I looked at him,
and had not the slightest
doubt he was sincere. He
was just the kind of
man who would wish to
preserve appearances. That
was his restraint. But
when he muttered something
about going on at once, I
did not even take
the trouble to answer him.
I knew, and he knew, that

it was impossible.
Were we to let go our hold
of the bottom, we would be
absolutely in
the air--in space. We
wouldn't be able to tell
where we were going
to--whether up or down
stream, or across--till we
fetched against one
bank or the other,--and
then we wouldn't know at
first which it was.
Of course I made no move. I
had no mind for a smash-up.
You couldn't
imagine a more deadly place
for a shipwreck. Whether
drowned at once or
not, we were sure to perish
speedily in one way or
another. 'I authorize
you to take all the risks,'
he said, after a short
silence. 'I refuse to
take any,' I said shortly;

which was just the answer he expected, though its tone might have surprised him. 'Well, I must defer to your judgment.

You are captain,' he said, with marked civility. I turned my shoulder to him in sign of my appreciation, and looked into the fog. How long would

it last? It was the most hopeless look-out. The approach to this Kurtz grubbing for ivory in the wretched bush was beset by as many dangers as though he had been an enchanted princess sleeping in a fabulous castle.

'Will they attack, do you think?' asked the manager, in a confidential tone.

"I did not think they would attack, for several obvious reasons. The thick fog was one. If they left the bank in their canoes they would get lost in it, as we would be if we attempted to move. Still, I had also judged the jungle of both banks quite impenetrable--and yet eyes were in it, eyes that had seen us. The river-side bushes were certainly very thick; but the undergrowth behind was evidently penetrable. However, during the short lift I had seen no canoes anywhere in the reach--certainly not abreast of the steamer. But what made the idea of attack inconceivable to me

was the nature of the noise--of the cries we had heard. They had not the fierce character boding of immediate hostile intention. Unexpected, wild, and violent as they had been, they had given me an irresistible impression of sorrow. The glimpse of the steamboat had for some reason filled those savages with unrestrained grief. The danger, if any, I expounded, was from our proximity to a great human passion let loose. Even extreme grief may ultimately vent itself in violence--but more generally takes the form of apathy. . . .

"You should have seen the pilgrims stare! They had no

heart to grin, or
even to revile me; but I
believe they thought me
gone mad--with fright,
maybe. I delivered a
regular lecture. My dear
boys, it was no good
bothering. Keep a look-out?
Well, you may guess I
watched the fog for
the signs of lifting as a
cat watches a mouse; but
for anything else our
eyes were of no more use to
us than if we had been
buried miles deep
in a heap of cotton-wool.
It felt like it too--
choking, warm, stifling.
Besides, all I said, though
it sounded extravagant, was
absolutely
true to fact. What we
afterwards alluded to as an
attack was really an
attempt at repulse. The

action was very far from being aggressive--it was not even defensive, in the usual sense: it was undertaken under the stress of desperation, and in its essence was purely protective.

"It developed itself, I should say, two hours after the fog lifted, and its commencement was at a spot, roughly speaking, about a mile and a half below Kurtz's station. We had just floundered and flopped round a bend, when I saw an islet, a mere grassy hummock of bright green, in the middle of the stream. It was the only thing of the kind; but as we opened the reach more, I perceived it was the head

of a long sandbank,
or rather of a chain of
shallow patches stretching
down the middle of
the river. They were
discolored, just awash, and
the whole lot was seen
just under the water,
exactly as a man's backbone
is seen running down
the middle of his back
under the skin. Now, as far
as I did see, I could
go to the right or to the
left of this. I didn't know
either channel, of
course. The banks looked
pretty well alike, the
depth appeared the same;
but as I had been informed
the station was on the west
side, I naturally
headed for the western
passage.

"No sooner had we fairly

entered it than I became aware it was much narrower than I had supposed. To the left of us there was the long uninterrupted shoal, and to the right a high, steep bank heavily overgrown with bushes. Above the bush the trees stood in serried ranks. The twigs overhung the current thickly, and from distance to distance a large limb of some tree projected rigidly over the stream. It was then well on in the afternoon, the face of the forest was gloomy, and a broad strip of shadow had already fallen on the water. In this shadow we steamed up--very slowly, as you may imagine. I sheered her well

inshore--the water being deepest near the bank, as the sounding-pole informed me.

"One of my hungry and forbearing friends was sounding in the bows just below me. This steamboat was exactly like a decked scow. On the deck there were two little teak-wood houses, with doors and windows. The boiler was in the fore-end, and the machinery right astern. Over the whole there was a light roof, supported on stanchions. The funnel projected through that roof, and in front of the funnel a small cabin built of light planks served for a pilot-house. It contained a couch,

two camp-stools, a loaded Martini-Henry leaning in one corner, a tiny table, and the steering-wheel. It had a wide door in front and a broad shutter at each side. All these were always thrown open, of course. I spent my days perched up there on the extreme fore-end of that roof, before the door. At night I slept, or tried to, on the couch. An athletic black belonging to some coast tribe, and educated by my poor predecessor, was the helmsman. He sported a pair of brass earrings, wore a blue cloth wrapper from the waist to the ankles, and thought all the world of himself. He was the most unstable kind of

fool I had ever seen.
He steered with no end of a
swagger while you were by;
but if he lost
sight of you, he became
instantly the prey of an
abject funk, and would
let that cripple of a
steamboat get the upper
hand of him in a minute.

"I was looking down at the
sounding-pole, and feeling
much annoyed to
see at each try a little
more of it stick out of
that river, when I saw
my poleman give up the
business suddenly, and
stretch himself flat on
the deck, without even
taking the trouble to haul
his pole in. He kept
hold on it though, and it
trailed in the water. At
the same time the

fireman, whom I could also see below me, sat down abruptly before his furnace and ducked his head. I was amazed. Then I had to look at the river mighty quick, because there was a snag in the fairway. Sticks, little sticks, were flying about--thick: they were whizzing before my nose, dropping below me, striking behind me against my pilot-house. All this time the river, the shore, the woods, were very quiet--perfectly quiet. I could only hear the heavy splashing thump of the stern-wheel and the patter of these things. We cleared the snag clumsily. Arrows, by Jove! We were being shot at! I stepped in quickly to

close the shutter
on the land side. That
fool-helmsman, his hands on
the spokes, was
lifting his knees high,
stamping his feet, champing
his mouth, like a
reined-in horse. Confound
him! And we were staggering
within ten feet of
the bank. I had to lean
right out to swing the
heavy shutter, and I saw
a face amongst the leaves
on the level with my own,
looking at me very
fierce and steady; and then
suddenly, as though a veil
had been removed
from my eyes, I made out,
deep in the tangled gloom,
naked breasts,
arms, legs, glaring eyes,--
the bush was swarming with
human limbs in
movement, glistening, of

bronze color. The twigs
shook, swayed, and
rustled, the arrows flew
out of them, and then the
shutter came to.

'Steer her straight,' I
said to the helmsman. He
held his head rigid,
face forward; but his eyes
rolled, he kept on lifting
and setting down
his feet gently, his mouth
foamed a little. 'Keep
quiet!' I said in a
fury. I might just as well
have ordered a tree not to
sway in the wind.

I darted out. Below me
there was a great scuffle
of feet on the iron
deck; confused
exclamations; a voice
screamed, 'Can you turn
back?'

I caught shape of a V-
shaped ripple on the water

ahead. What? Another snag! A fusillade burst out under my feet. The pilgrims had opened with their Winchesters, and were simply squirting lead into that bush. A deuce of a lot of smoke came up and drove slowly forward. I swore at it. Now I couldn't see the ripple or the snag either. I stood in the doorway, peering, and the arrows came in swarms. They might have been poisoned, but they looked as though they wouldn't kill a cat. The bush began to howl. Our woodcutters raised a warlike whoop; the report of a rifle just at my back deafened me. I glanced over my shoulder, and the pilot-house was yet full of

noise and smoke when I made a dash at the wheel. The fool-nigger had dropped everything, to throw the shutter open and let off that Martini-Henry. He stood before the wide opening, glaring, and I yelled at him to come back, while I straightened the sudden twist out of that steamboat. There was no room to turn even if I had wanted to, the snag was somewhere very near ahead in that confounded smoke, there was no time to lose, so I just crowded her into the bank--right into the bank, where I knew the water was deep.

"We tore slowly along the overhanging bushes in a

whirl of broken twigs
and flying leaves. The
fusillade below stopped
short, as I had foreseen
it would when the squirts
got empty. I threw my head
back to a glinting
whizz that traversed the
pilot-house, in at one
shutter-hole and out
at the other. Looking past
that mad helmsman, who was
shaking the empty
rifle and yelling at the
shore, I saw vague forms of
men running bent
double, leaping, gliding,
distinct, incomplete,
evanescent. Something
big appeared in the air
before the shutter, the
rifle went overboard,
and the man stepped back
swiftly, looked at me over
his shoulder in an
extraordinary, profound,

familiar manner, and fell upon my feet. The side of his head hit the wheel twice, and the end of what appeared a long cane clattered round and knocked over a little camp-stool. It looked as though after wrenching that thing from somebody ashore he had lost his balance in the effort. The thin smoke had blown away, we were clear of the snag, and looking ahead I could see that in another hundred yards or so I would be free to sheer off, away from the bank; but my feet felt so very warm and wet that I had to look down. The man had rolled on his back and stared straight up at me; both his hands clutched

that cane. It was the shaft of a spear that, either thrown or lunged through the opening, had caught him in the side just below the ribs; the blade had gone in out of sight, after making a frightful gash; my shoes were full; a pool of blood lay very still, gleaming dark-red under the wheel; his eyes shone with an amazing luster. The fusillade burst out again. He looked at me anxiously, gripping the spear like something precious, with an air of being afraid I would try to take it away from him. I had to make an effort to free my eyes from his gaze and attend to the steering. With one hand I felt above my head

for the line of
the steam-whistle, and
jerked out screech after
screech hurriedly. The
tumult of angry and warlike
yells was checked
instantly, and then from
the depths of the woods
went out such a tremulous
and prolonged wail of
mournful fear and utter
despair as may be imagined
to follow the flight
of the last hope from the
earth. There was a great
commotion in the
bush; the shower of arrows
stopped, a few dropping
shots rang out
sharply--then silence, in
which the languid beat of
the stern-wheel came
plainly to my ears. I put
the helm hard a-starboard
at the moment when
the pilgrim in pink

pyjamas, very hot and agitated, appeared in the doorway. 'The manager sends me--' he began in an official tone, and stopped short. 'Good God!' he said, glaring at the wounded man.

"We two whites stood over him, and his lustrous and inquiring glance enveloped us both. I declare it looked as though he would presently put to us some question in an understandable language; but he died without uttering a sound, without moving a limb, without twitching a muscle. Only in the very last moment, as though in response to some sign we could not see, to some whisper we could not hear,

he frowned heavily,
and that frown gave to his
black death-mask an
inconceivably somber,
brooding, and menacing
expression. The luster of
inquiring glance faded
swiftly into vacant
glassiness. 'Can you
steer?' I asked the agent
eagerly. He looked very
dubious; but I made a grab
at his arm, and he
understood at once I meant
him to steer whether or no.
To tell you
the truth, I was morbidly
anxious to change my shoes
and socks. 'He is
dead,' murmured the fellow,
immensely impressed. 'No
doubt about it,'
said I, tugging like mad at
the shoe-laces. 'And, by
the way, I suppose
Mr. Kurtz is dead as well

by this time.'

"For the moment that was the dominant thought. There was a sense of extreme disappointment, as though I had found out I had been striving after something altogether without a substance. I couldn't have been more disgusted if I had traveled all this way for the sole purpose of talking with Mr. Kurtz. Talking with. . . . I flung one shoe overboard, and became aware that that was exactly what I had been looking forward to--a talk with Kurtz. I made the strange discovery that I had never imagined him as doing, you know, but as discoursing. I didn't say to

myself, 'Now I will never see him,' or 'Now I will never shake him by the hand,' but, 'Now I will never hear him.' The man presented himself as a voice. Not of course that I did not connect him with some sort of action. Hadn't I been told in all the tones of jealousy and admiration that he had collected, bartered, swindled, or stolen more ivory than all the other agents together? That was not the point. The point was in his being a gifted creature, and that of all his gifts the one that stood out pre-eminently, that carried with it a sense of real presence, was his ability to talk, his words--the gift of

expression, the
bewildering,
the illuminating, the most
exalted and the most
contemptible, the
pulsating stream of light,
or the deceitful flow from
the heart of an
impenetrable darkness.

"The other shoe went flying
unto the devil-god of that
river. I thought,
'By Jove! it's all over. We
are too late; he has
vanished--the gift has
vanished, by means of some
spear, arrow, or club. I
will never hear that
chap speak after all,'--and
my sorrow had a startling
extravagance
of emotion, even such as I
had noticed in the howling
sorrow of these
savages in the bush. I

couldn't have felt more of
lonely desolation
somehow, had I been robbed
of a belief or had missed
my destiny in
life. . . . Why do you sigh
in this beastly way,
somebody? Absurd? Well,
absurd. Good Lord! mustn't
a man ever--Here, give me
some tobacco." . . .

There was a pause of
profound stillness, then a
match flared, and
Marlow's lean face
appeared, worn, hollow,
with downward folds and
dropped eyelids, with an
aspect of concentrated
attention; and as he
took vigorous draws at his
pipe, it seemed to retreat
and advance out of
the night in the regular
flicker of the tiny flame.

The match went out.

"Absurd!" he cried. "This is the worst of trying to tell. . . . Here you all are, each moored with two good addresses, like a hulk with two anchors, a butcher round one corner, a policeman round another, excellent appetites, and temperature normal--you hear--normal from year's end to year's end. And you say, Absurd! Absurd be--exploded! Absurd! My dear boys, what can you expect from a man who out of sheer nervousness had just flung overboard a pair of new shoes. Now I think of it, it is amazing I did not shed tears. I am, upon the whole, proud

of my fortitude. I was cut to the quick at the idea of having lost the inestimable privilege of listening to the gifted Kurtz. Of course I was wrong. The privilege was waiting for me. Oh yes, I heard more than enough. And I was right, too. A voice. He was very little more than a voice. And I heard--him--it--this voice--other voices--all of them were so little more than voices--and the memory of that time itself lingers around me, impalpable, like a dying vibration of one immense jabber, silly, atrocious, sordid, savage, or simply mean, without any kind of sense. Voices, voices--even the girl herself--now--"

He was silent for a long time.

"I laid the ghost of his gifts at last with a lie," he began suddenly.

"Girl! What? Did I mention a girl? Oh, she is out of it--completely.

They--the women, I mean--are out of it--should be out of it. We must help them to stay in that beautiful world of their own, lest ours gets worse. Oh, she had to be out of it. You should have heard the disinterred body of Mr. Kurtz saying, 'My Intended.' You would have perceived directly then how completely she was out of it. And the lofty frontal bone of Mr. Kurtz!

They say the hair goes on
growing sometimes,
but this--ah specimen, was
impressively bald. The
wilderness had patted
him on the head, and,
behold, it was like a ball--
an ivory ball; it had
caressed him, and--lo!--he
had withered; it had taken
him, loved him,
embraced him, got into his
veins, consumed his flesh,
and sealed
his soul to its own by the
inconceivable ceremonies of
some devilish
initiation. He was its
spoiled and pampered
favorite. Ivory? I should
think so. Heaps of it,
stacks of it. The old mud
shanty was bursting
with it. You would think
there was not a single tusk
left either above

or below the ground in the whole country. 'Mostly fossil,' the manager had remarked disparagingly. It was no more fossil than I am; but they call it fossil when it is dug up. It appears these niggers do bury the tusks sometimes--but evidently they couldn't bury this parcel deep enough to save the gifted Mr. Kurtz from his fate. We filled the steamboat with it, and had to pile a lot on the deck. Thus he could see and enjoy as long as he could see, because the appreciation of this favor had remained with him to the last. You should have heard him say, 'My ivory.' Oh yes, I heard him. 'My Intended, my

ivory, my station, my
river, my--' everything
belonged to him. It made me
hold my breath in
expectation of hearing the
wilderness burst into a
prodigious peal of
laughter that would shake
the fixed stars in their
places. Everything
belonged to him--but that
was a trifle. The thing was
to know what he
belonged to, how many
powers of darkness claimed
him for their own. That
was the reflection that
made you creepy all over.
It was impossible--it
was not good for one
either--trying to imagine.
He had taken a high seat
amongst the devils of the
land--I mean literally. You
can't understand.
How could you?--with solid

pavement under your feet,
surrounded by kind
neighbors ready to cheer
you or to fall on you,
stepping delicately
between the butcher and the
policeman, in the holy
terror of scandal and
gallows and lunatic
asylums--how can you
imagine what particular
region
of the first ages a man's
untrammelled feet may take
him into by the way
of solitude--utter solitude
without a policeman--by the
way of silence,
utter silence, where no
warning voice of a kind
neighbor can be heard
whispering of public
opinion? These little
things make all the great
difference. When they are
gone you must fall back

upon your own innate
strength, upon your own
capacity for faithfulness.
Of course you may
be too much of a fool to go
wrong--too dull even to
know you are being
assaulted by the powers of
darkness. I take it, no
fool ever made a
bargain for his soul with
the devil: the fool is too
much of a fool, or
the devil too much of a
devil--I don't know which.
Or you may be such
a thunderingly exalted
creature as to be
altogether deaf and blind
to
anything but heavenly
sights and sounds. Then the
earth for you is only
a standing place--and
whether to be like this is
your loss or your gain

I won't pretend to say. But most of us are neither one nor the other.

The earth for us is a place to live in, where we must put up with sights, with sounds, with smells too, by Jove!-- breathe dead hippo, so to speak, and not be contaminated. And there, don't you see?

Your strength comes in, the faith in your ability for the digging of unostentatious holes to bury the stuff in--your power of devotion, not to yourself, but to an obscure, back-breaking business. And that's difficult enough. Mind, I am not trying to excuse or even explain--I am trying to account to myself for--for--Mr. Kurtz--for

the shade of Mr. Kurtz. This initiated wraith from the back of Nowhere honored me with its amazing confidence before it vanished altogether. This was because it could speak English to me. The original Kurtz had been educated partly in England, and--as he was good enough to say himself--his sympathies were in the right place. His mother was half-English, his father was half-French. All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz; and by-and-by I learned that, most appropriately, the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs had intrusted him with the

making of a report, for its future guidance. And he had written it too.

I've seen it. I've read it. It was eloquent, vibrating with eloquence, but too high-strung, I think. Seventeen pages of close writing he had found time for! But this must have been before his-- let us say--nerves, went wrong, and caused him to preside at certain midnight dances ending with unspeakable rites, which--as far as I reluctantly gathered from what I heard at various times--were offered up to him--do you understand?--to Mr. Kurtz himself. But it was a beautiful piece of writing. The opening paragraph, however, in the

light of later
information, strikes me now
as ominous. He began with
the argument
that we whites, from the
point of development we had
arrived at, 'must
necessarily appear to them
[savages] in the nature of
supernatural
beings--we approach them
with the might as of a
deity,' and so on, and
so on. 'By the simple
exercise of our will we can
exert a power for good
practically unbounded,'
&c., &c. From that point he
soared and took me
with him. The peroration
was magnificent, though
difficult to remember,
you know. It gave me the
notion of an exotic
Immensity ruled by an
august Benevolence. It made

me tingle with enthusiasm.
This was the
unbounded power of
eloquence--of words--of
burning noble words. There
were no practical hints to
interrupt the magic current
of phrases,
unless a kind of note at
the foot of the last page,
scrawled evidently
much later, in an unsteady
hand, may be regarded as
the exposition of
a method. It was very
simple, and at the end of
that moving appeal to
every altruistic sentiment
it blazed at you, luminous
and terrifying,
like a flash of lightning
in a serene sky:
'Exterminate all the
brutes!'
The curious part was that
he had apparently forgotten

all about that
valuable postscriptum,
because, later on, when he
in a sense came to
himself, he repeatedly
entreated me to take good
care of 'my pamphlet'
(he called it), as it was
sure to have in the future
a good influence
upon his career. I had full
information about all these
things, and,
besides, as it turned out,
I was to have the care of
his memory. I've
done enough for it to give
me the indisputable right
to lay it, if I
choose, for an everlasting
rest in the dust-bin of
progress, amongst
all the sweepings and,
figuratively speaking, all
the dead cats of
civilization. But then, you

see, I can't choose. He
won't be forgotten.
Whatever he was, he was not
common. He had the power to
charm or
frighten rudimentary souls
into an aggravated witch-
dance in his
honor; he could also fill
the small souls of the
pilgrims with bitter
misgivings: he had one
devoted friend at least,
and he had conquered
one soul in the world that
was neither rudimentary nor
tainted with
self-seeking. No; I can't
forget him, though I am not
prepared to affirm
the fellow was exactly
worth the life we lost in
getting to him. I
missed my late helmsman
awfully,--I missed him even
while his body

was still lying in the
pilot-house. Perhaps you
will think it passing
strange this regret for a
savage who was no more
account than a grain of
sand in a black Sahara.
Well, don't you see, he had
done something, he
had steered; for months I
had him at my back--a help-
-an instrument. It
was a kind of partnership.
He steered for me--I had to
look after him, I
worried about his
deficiencies, and thus a
subtle bond had been
created,
of which I only became
aware when it was suddenly
broken. And the
intimate profundity of that
look he gave me when he
received his hurt
remains to this day in my

memory--like a claim of
distant kinship
affirmed in a supreme
moment.

"Poor fool! If he had only
left that shutter alone. He
had no restraint,
no restraint--just like
Kurtz--a tree swayed by the
wind. As soon as
I had put on a dry pair of
slippers, I dragged him
out, after first
jerking the spear out of
his side, which operation I
confess I performed
with my eyes shut tight.
His heels leaped together
over the little
door-step; his shoulders
were pressed to my breast;
I hugged him from
behind desperately. Oh! he
was heavy, heavy; heavier
than any man on

earth, I should imagine.
Then without more ado I
tipped him overboard.
The current snatched him as
though he had been a wisp
of grass, and I
saw the body roll over
twice before I lost sight
of it for ever. All the
pilgrims and the manager
were then congregated on
the awning-deck
about the pilot-house,
chattering at each other
like a flock of excited
magpies, and there was a
scandalized murmur at my
heartless promptitude.
What they wanted to keep
that body hanging about for
I can't guess.
Embalm it, maybe. But I had
also heard another, and a
very ominous,
murmur on the deck below.
My friends the wood-cutters

were likewise scandalized, and with a better show of reason-- though I admit that the reason itself was quite inadmissible. Oh, quite! I had made up my mind that if my late helmsman was to be eaten, the fishes alone should have him. He had been a very second-rate helmsman while alive, but now he was dead he might have become a first-class temptation, and possibly cause some startling trouble. Besides, I was anxious to take the wheel, the man in pink pyjamas showing himself a hopeless duffer at the business.

"This I did directly the simple funeral was over. We were going

half-speed, keeping right in the middle of the stream, and I listened to the talk about me. They had given up Kurtz, they had given up the station; Kurtz was dead, and the station had been burnt--and so on--and so on. The red-haired pilgrim was beside himself with the thought that at least this poor Kurtz had been properly revenged. 'Say! We must have made a glorious slaughter of them in the bush. Eh? What do you think? Say?' He positively danced, the bloodthirsty little gingery beggar. And he had nearly fainted when he saw the wounded man! I could not help saying, 'You made a glorious lot of smoke,

anyhow.' I had seen, from the way the tops of the bushes rustled and flew, that almost all the shots had gone too high. You can't hit anything unless you take aim and fire from the shoulder; but these chaps fired from the hip with their eyes shut. The retreat, I maintained--and I was right--was caused by the screeching of the steam-whistle. Upon this they forgot Kurtz, and began to howl at me with indignant protests.

"The manager stood by the wheel murmuring confidentially about the necessity of getting well away down the river before dark at all events,

when I saw in the distance
a clearing on the river-
side and the outlines
of some sort of building.
'What's this?' I asked. He
clapped his hands
in wonder. 'The station!'
he cried. I edged in at
once, still going
half-speed.

"Through my glasses I saw
the slope of a hill
interspersed with rare
trees and perfectly free
from undergrowth. A long
decaying building on
the summit was half buried
in the high grass; the
large holes in the
peaked roof gaped black
from afar; the jungle and
the woods made a
background. There was no
inclosure or fence of any
kind; but there had

been one apparently, for near the house half-a-dozen slim posts remained in a row, roughly trimmed, and with their upper ends ornamented with round carved balls. The rails, or whatever there had been between, had disappeared. Of course the forest surrounded all that. The river-bank was clear, and on the water-side I saw a white man under a hat like a cart-wheel beckoning persistently with his whole arm. Examining the edge of the forest above and below, I was almost certain I could see movements--human forms gliding here and there. I steamed past prudently, then stopped the engines and let her drift down. The

man on the shore
began to shout, urging us
to land. 'We have been
attacked,' screamed
the manager. 'I know--I
know. It's all right,'
yelled back the other, as
cheerful as you please.
'Come along. It's all
right. I am glad.'

"His aspect reminded me of
something I had seen--
something funny I had
seen somewhere. As I
maneuvered to get
alongside, I was asking
myself,
'What does this fellow look
like?' Suddenly I got it.
He looked like
a harlequin. His clothes
had been made of some stuff
that was brown
holland probably, but it
was covered with patches

all over, with bright patches, blue, red, and yellow,--patches on the back, patches on front, patches on elbows, on knees; colored binding round his jacket, scarlet edging at the bottom of his trousers; and the sunshine made him look extremely gay and wonderfully neat withal, because you could see how beautifully all this patching had been done. A beardless, boyish face, very fair, no features to speak of, nose peeling, little blue eyes, smiles and frowns chasing each other over that open countenance like sunshine and shadow on a windswept plain. 'Look out, captain!' he cried; 'there's a snag

lodged in here last night.' What! Another snag? I confess I swore shamefully. I had nearly holed my cripple, to finish off that charming trip. The harlequin on the bank turned his little pug nose up to me. 'You English?' he asked, all smiles. 'Are you?' I shouted from the wheel. The smiles vanished, and he shook his head as if sorry for my disappointment. Then he brightened up. 'Never mind!' he cried encouragingly. 'Are we in time?' I asked. 'He is up there,' he replied, with a toss of the head up the hill, and becoming gloomy all of a sudden. His face was like the autumn sky, overcast one moment and bright

the next.

"When the manager, escorted by the pilgrims, all of them armed to the teeth, had gone to the house, this chap came on board. 'I say, I don't like this. These natives are in the bush,' I said. He assured me earnestly it was all right. 'They are simple people,' he added; 'well, I am glad you came. It took me all my time to keep them off.' 'But you said it was all right,' I cried. 'Oh, they meant no harm,' he said; and as I stared he corrected himself, 'Not exactly.' Then vivaciously, 'My faith, your pilot-house wants a clean up!' In the next breath he advised

me to keep enough steam on the boiler to blow the whistle in case of any trouble. 'One good screech will do more for you than all your rifles. They are simple people,' he repeated. He rattled away at such a rate he quite overwhelmed me. He seemed to be trying to make up for lots of silence, and actually hinted, laughing, that such was the case. 'Don't you talk with Mr. Kurtz?' I said. 'You don't talk with that man--you listen to him,' he exclaimed with severe exaltation. 'But now--' He waved his arm, and in the twinkling of an eye was in the uttermost depths of despondency. In a moment he came up again

with a jump,
possessed himself of both
my hands, shook them
continuously, while he
gabbled: 'Brother sailor .
. . honor . . . pleasure .
. . delight . . .
introduce myself . . .
Russian . . . son of an
arch-priest . . .
Government of Tambov . . .
What? Tobacco! English
tobacco; the excellent
English tobacco! Now,
that's brotherly. Smoke?
Where's a sailor that
does not smoke?'

"The pipe soothed him, and
gradually I made out he had
run away from
school, had gone to sea in
a Russian ship; ran away
again; served some
time in English ships; was
now reconciled with the

arch-priest. He made a point of that. 'But when one is young one must see things, gather experience, ideas; enlarge the mind.' 'Here!' I interrupted. 'You can never tell! Here I have met Mr. Kurtz,' he said, youthfully solemn and reproachful. I held my tongue after that. It appears he had persuaded a Dutch trading-house on the coast to fit him out with stores and goods, and had started for the interior with a light heart, and no more idea of what would happen to him than a baby. He had been wandering about that river for nearly two years alone, cut off from everybody and everything. 'I am not so young as I

look. I am twenty-five,' he said. 'At first old Van Shuyten would tell me to go to the devil,' he narrated with keen enjoyment; 'but I stuck to him, and talked and talked, till at last he got afraid I would talk the hind-leg off his favorite dog, so he gave me some cheap things and a few guns, and told me he hoped he would never see my face again. Good old Dutchman, Van Shuyten. I've sent him one small lot of ivory a year ago, so that he can't call me a little thief when I get back. I hope he got it. And for the rest I don't care. I had some wood stacked for you. That was my old house. Did you see?'

"I gave him Towson's book. He made as though he would kiss me, but restrained himself. 'The only book I had left, and I thought I had lost it,' he said, looking at it ecstatically. 'So many accidents happen to a man going about alone, you know. Canoes get upset sometimes--and sometimes you've got to clear out so quick when the people get angry.' He thumbed the pages. 'You made notes in Russian?' I asked. He nodded. 'I thought they were written in cipher,' I said. He laughed, then became serious. 'I had lots of trouble to keep these people off,' he said. 'Did they want to kill you?' I

asked. 'Oh no!' he cried,
and checked
himself. 'Why did they
attack us?' I pursued. He
hesitated, then
said shamefacedly, 'They
don't want him to go.'
'Don't they?' I said,
curiously. He nodded a nod
full of mystery and wisdom.
'I tell you,' he
cried, 'this man has
enlarged my mind.' He
opened his arms wide,
staring
at me with his little blue
eyes that were perfectly
round."

III

"I looked at him, lost in

astonishment. There he was before me, in motley, as though he had absconded from a troupe of mimes, enthusiastic, fabulous. His very existence was improbable, inexplicable, and altogether bewildering. He was an insoluble problem. It was inconceivable how he had existed, how he had succeeded in getting so far, how he had managed to remain--why he did not instantly disappear. 'I went a little farther,' he said, 'then still a little farther--till I had gone so far that I don't know how I'll ever get back. Never mind. Plenty time. I can manage. You take Kurtz away quick--quick--I tell

you.' The glamour of youth enveloped his particolored rags, his destitution, his loneliness, the essential desolation of his futile wanderings. For months--for years--his life hadn't been worth a day's purchase; and there he was gallantly, thoughtlessly alive, to all appearance indestructible solely by the virtue of his few years and of his unreflecting audacity. I was seduced into something like admiration--like envy. Glamour urged him on, glamour kept him unscathed. He surely wanted nothing from the wilderness but space to breathe in and to push on through. His need was to exist, and to

move onwards at
the greatest possible risk,
and with a maximum of
privation. If the
absolutely pure,
uncalculating, unpractical
spirit of adventure had
ever
ruled a human being, it
ruled this be-patched
youth. I almost envied
him the possession of this
modest and clear flame. It
seemed to have
consumed all thought of
self so completely, that,
even while he was
talking to you, you forgot
that it was he--the man
before your eyes--who
had gone through these
things. I did not envy him
his devotion to Kurtz,
though. He had not
meditated over it. It came
to him, and he accepted it

with a sort of eager fatalism. I must say that to me it appeared about the most dangerous thing in every way he had come upon so far.

"They had come together unavoidably, like two ships becalmed near each other, and lay rubbing sides at last. I suppose Kurtz wanted an audience, because on a certain occasion, when encamped in the forest, they had talked all night, or more probably Kurtz had talked. 'We talked of everything,' he said, quite transported at the recollection. 'I forgot there was such a thing as sleep. The night did not seem to last an hour. Everything!

Everything! . . . Of love too.' 'Ah, he talked to you of love!' I said, much amused. 'It isn't what you think,' he cried, almost passionately. 'It was in general. He made me see things--things.'

"He threw his arms up. We were on deck at the time, and the headman of my wood-cutters, lounging near by, turned upon him his heavy and glittering eyes. I looked around, and I don't know why, but I assure you that never, never before, did this land, this river, this jungle, the very arch of this blazing sky, appear to me so hopeless and so dark, so impenetrable to human thought, so pitiless to

human weakness. 'And, ever since, you have been with him, of course?' I said.

"On the contrary. It appears their intercourse had been very much broken by various causes. He had, as he informed me proudly, managed to nurse Kurtz through two illnesses (he alluded to it as you would to some risky feat), but as a rule Kurtz wandered alone, far in the depths of the forest. 'Very often coming to this station, I had to wait days and days before he would turn up,' he said. 'Ah, it was worth waiting for!--sometimes.' 'What was he doing? exploring or what?' I asked. 'Oh yes, of course;' he had

discovered lots of villages, a lake too--he did not know exactly in what direction; it was dangerous to inquire too much--but mostly his expeditions had been for ivory. 'But he had no goods to trade with by that time,' I objected. 'There's a good lot of cartridges left even yet,' he answered, looking away. 'To speak plainly, he raided the country,' I said. He nodded. 'Not alone, surely!' He muttered something about the villages round that lake. 'Kurtz got the tribe to follow him, did he?' I suggested. He fidgeted a little. 'They adored him,' he said. The tone of these words was so extraordinary that

I looked at him
searchingly. It was curious
to see his mingled
eagerness
and reluctance to speak of
Kurtz. The man filled his
life, occupied his
thoughts, swayed his
emotions. 'What can you
expect?' he burst out; 'he
came to them with thunder
and lightning, you know--
and they had never
seen anything like it--and
very terrible. He could be
very terrible.
You can't judge Mr. Kurtz
as you would an ordinary
man. No, no, no!
Now--just to give you an
idea--I don't mind telling
you, he wanted to
shoot me too one day--but I
don't judge him.' 'Shoot
you!' I cried.
'What for?' 'Well, I had a

small lot of ivory the chief of that village near my house gave me. You see I used to shoot game for them. Well, he wanted it, and wouldn't hear reason. He declared he would shoot me unless I gave him the ivory and then cleared out of the country, because he could do so, and had a fancy for it, and there was nothing on earth to prevent him killing whom he jolly well pleased. And it was true too. I gave him the ivory. What did I care! But I didn't clear out. No, no. I couldn't leave him. I had to be careful, of course, till we got friendly again for a time. He had his second illness then. Afterwards I had to

keep out of the way; but I didn't mind. He was living for the most part in those villages on the lake. When he came down to the river, sometimes he would take to me, and sometimes it was better for me to be careful.

This man suffered too much. He hated all this, and somehow he couldn't get away. When I had a chance I begged him to try and leave while there was time; I offered to go back with him. And he would say yes, and then he would remain; go off on another ivory hunt; disappear for weeks; forget himself amongst these people--forget himself--you know.' 'Why! he's mad,' I said. He protested indignantly. Mr.

Kurtz couldn't be mad.
If I had heard him talk,
only two days ago, I
wouldn't dare hint at
such a thing. . . . I had
taken up my binoculars
while we talked and was
looking at the shore,
sweeping the limit of the
forest at each side and
at the back of the house.
The consciousness of there
being people in
that bush, so silent, so
quiet--as silent and quiet
as the ruined house
on the hill--made me
uneasy. There was no sign
on the face of nature
of this amazing tale that
was not so much told as
suggested to me in
desolate exclamations,
completed by shrugs, in
interrupted phrases, in
hints ending in deep sighs.

The woods were unmoved,
like a mask--heavy,
like the closed door of a
prison--they looked with
their air of hidden
knowledge, of patient
expectation, of
unapproachable silence. The
Russian was explaining to
me that it was only lately
that Mr. Kurtz had
come down to the river,
bringing along with him all
the fighting men of
that lake tribe. He had
been absent for several
months--getting himself
adored, I suppose--and had
come down unexpectedly,
with the intention to
all appearance of making a
raid either across the
river or down stream.
Evidently the appetite for
more ivory had got the
better of the--what

shall I say?--less material aspirations. However he had got much worse suddenly. 'I heard he was lying helpless, and so I came up--took my chance,' said the Russian. 'Oh, he is bad, very bad.' I directed my glass to the house. There were no signs of life, but there was the ruined roof, the long mud wall peeping above the grass, with three little square window-holes, no two of the same size; all this brought within reach of my hand, as it were. And then I made a brusque movement, and one of the remaining posts of that vanished fence leaped up in the field of my glass. You remember I told you I had

been struck at the distance by certain attempts at ornamentation, rather remarkable in the ruinous aspect of the place. Now I had suddenly a nearer view, and its first result was to make me throw my head back as if before a blow. Then I went carefully from post to post with my glass, and I saw my mistake. These round knobs were not ornamental but symbolic; they were expressive and puzzling, striking and disturbing--food for thought and also for the vultures if there had been any looking down from the sky; but at all events for such ants as were industrious enough to ascend the pole. They would have been even

more impressive, those heads on the stakes, if their faces had not been turned to the house. Only one, the first I had made out, was facing my way. I was not so shocked as you may think. The start back I had given was really nothing but a movement of surprise. I had expected to see a knob of wood there, you know. I returned deliberately to the first I had seen--and there it was, black, dried, sunken, with closed eyelids,--a head that seemed to sleep at the top of that pole, and, with the shrunken dry lips showing a narrow white line of the teeth, was smiling too, smiling continuously

at some endless and
jocose dream of that
eternal slumber.

"I am not disclosing any
trade secrets. In fact the
manager said
afterwards that Mr. Kurtz's
methods had ruined the
district. I have no
opinion on that point, but
I want you clearly to
understand that there
was nothing exactly
profitable in these heads
being there. They only
showed that Mr. Kurtz
lacked restraint in the
gratification of his
various lusts, that there
was something wanting in
him--some small
matter which, when the
pressing need arose, could
not be found under
his magnificent eloquence.

Whether he knew of this deficiency himself I can't say. I think the knowledge came to him at last--only at the very last. But the wilderness had found him out early, and had taken on him a terrible vengeance for the fantastic invasion. I think it had whispered to him things about himself which he did not know, things of which he had no conception till he took counsel with this great solitude--and the whisper had proved irresistibly fascinating. It echoed loudly within him because he was hollow at the core. . . . I put down the glass, and the head that had appeared near enough to be spoken to seemed at once to

have leaped away from me
into inaccessible distance.

"The admirer of Mr. Kurtz
was a bit crestfallen. In a
hurried,
indistinct voice he began
to assure me he had not
dared to take
these--say, symbols--down.
He was not afraid of the
natives; they would
not stir till Mr. Kurtz
gave the word. His
ascendency was
extraordinary.
The camps of these people
surrounded the place, and
the chiefs came
every day to see him. They
would crawl. . . . 'I don't
want to know
anything of the ceremonies
used when approaching Mr.
Kurtz,' I shouted.
Curious, this feeling that

came over me that such details would be more intolerable than those heads drying on the stakes under Mr. Kurtz's windows. After all, that was only a savage sight, while I seemed at one bound to have been transported into some lightless region of subtle horrors, where pure, uncomplicated savagery was a positive relief, being something that had a right to exist--obviously--in the sunshine. The young man looked at me with surprise. I suppose it did not occur to him Mr. Kurtz was no idol of mine. He forgot I hadn't heard any of these splendid monologues on, what was it? on love, justice, conduct of

life--or what not. If it had come to crawling before Mr. Kurtz, he crawled as much as the veriest savage of them all. I had no idea of the conditions, he said: these heads were the heads of rebels. I shocked him excessively by laughing. Rebels! What would be the next definition I was to hear? There had been enemies, criminals, workers--and these were rebels. Those rebellious heads looked very subdued to me on their sticks. 'You don't know how such a life tries a man like Kurtz,' cried Kurtz's last disciple. 'Well, and you?' I said. 'I! I! I am a simple man. I have no great thoughts. I want nothing

from anybody. How can you compare me to . . .?' His feelings were too much for speech, and suddenly he broke down. 'I don't understand,' he groaned. 'I've been doing my best to keep him alive, and that's enough. I had no hand in all this. I have no abilities. There hasn't been a drop of medicine or a mouthful of invalid food for months here. He was shamefully abandoned. A man like this, with such ideas. Shamefully! Shamefully! I--I--haven't slept for the last ten nights. . . .'

"His voice lost itself in the calm of the evening. The long shadows of

the forest had slipped down
hill while we talked, had
gone far beyond
the ruined hovel, beyond
the symbolic row of stakes.
All this was in the
gloom, while we down there
were yet in the sunshine,
and the stretch
of the river abreast of the
clearing glittered in a
still and dazzling
splendor, with a murky and
over-shadowed bend above
and below. Not a
living soul was seen on the
shore. The bushes did not
rustle.

"Suddenly round the corner
of the house a group of men
appeared, as
though they had come up
from the ground. They waded
waist-deep in the
grass, in a compact body,

bearing an improvised
stretcher in their
midst. Instantly, in the
emptiness of the landscape,
a cry arose whose
shrillness pierced the
still air like a sharp
arrow flying straight to
the very heart of the land;
and, as if by enchantment,
streams of human
beings--of naked human
beings--with spears in
their hands, with bows,
with shields, with wild
glances and savage
movements, were poured into
the clearing by the dark-
faced and pensive forest.
The bushes shook, the
grass swayed for a time,
and then everything stood
still in attentive
immobility.

"'Now, if he does not say

the right thing to them we are all done for,' said the Russian at my elbow. The knot of men with the stretcher had stopped too, half-way to the steamer, as if petrified. I saw the man on the stretcher sit up, lank and with an uplifted arm, above the shoulders of the bearers. 'Let us hope that the man who can talk so well of love in general will find some particular reason to spare us this time,' I said. I resented bitterly the absurd danger of our situation, as if to be at the mercy of that atrocious phantom had been a dishonoring necessity. I could not hear a sound, but through my glasses I saw the

thin arm extended
commandingly, the lower jaw
moving, the eyes of
that apparition shining
darkly far in its bony head
that nodded with
grotesque jerks. Kurtz--
Kurtz--that means short in
German--don't it?

Well, the name was as true
as everything else in his
life--and death.

He looked at least seven
feet long. His covering had
fallen off, and his
body emerged from it
pitiful and appalling as
from a winding-sheet. I
could see the cage of his
ribs all astir, the bones
of his arm waving.

It was as though an
animated image of death
carved out of old ivory had
been shaking its hand with
menaces at a motionless

crowd of men made of
dark and glittering bronze.
I saw him open his mouth
wide--it gave him
a weirdly voracious aspect,
as though he had wanted to
swallow all the
air, all the earth, all the
men before him. A deep
voice reached
me faintly. He must have
been shouting. He fell back
suddenly. The
stretcher shook as the
bearers staggered forward
again, and almost at
the same time I noticed
that the crowd of savages
was vanishing without
any perceptible movement of
retreat, as if the forest
that had ejected
these beings so suddenly
had drawn them in again as
the breath is drawn
in a long aspiration.

"Some of the pilgrims behind the stretcher carried his arms--two shot-guns, a heavy rifle, and a light revolver-carbine--the thunderbolts of that pitiful Jupiter. The manager bent over him murmuring as he walked beside his head. They laid him down in one of the little cabins--just a room for a bed-place and a camp-stool or two, you know. We had brought his belated correspondence, and a lot of torn envelopes and open letters littered his bed. His hand roamed feebly amongst these papers. I was struck by the fire of his eyes and the composed languor of his expression. It was not

so much the exhaustion of disease. He did not seem in pain. This shadow looked satiated and calm, as though for the moment it had had its fill of all the emotions.

"He rustled one of the letters, and looking straight in my face said, 'I am glad.' Somebody had been writing to him about me. These special recommendations were turning up again. The volume of tone he emitted without effort, almost without the trouble of moving his lips, amazed me. A voice! a voice! It was grave, profound, vibrating, while the man did not seem capable of a whisper. However, he had enough strength in

him--factitious no doubt--
to very nearly make an end
of us, as you shall
hear directly.

"The manager appeared
silently in the doorway; I
stepped out at once
and he drew the curtain
after me. The Russian, eyed
curiously by the
pilgrims, was staring at
the shore. I followed the
direction of his
glance.

"Dark human shapes could be
made out in the distance,
flitting
indistinctly against the
gloomy border of the
forest, and near the river
two bronze figures, leaning
on tall spears, stood in
the sunlight under
fantastic headdresses of

spotted skins, warlike and still in statuesque repose. And from right to left along the lighted shore moved a wild and gorgeous apparition of a woman.

"She walked with measured steps, draped in striped and fringed cloths, treading the earth proudly, with a slight jingle and flash of barbarous ornaments. She carried her head high; her hair was done in the shape of a helmet; she had brass leggings to the knee, brass wire gauntlets to the elbow, a crimson spot on her tawny cheek, innumerable necklaces of glass beads on her neck; bizarre things, charms, gifts of witch-men,

that hung about her,
glittered and trembled at
every step. She must have
had the value of several
elephant tusks upon her.
She was savage and
superb, wild-eyed and
magnificent; there was
something ominous and
stately in her deliberate
progress. And in the hush
that had fallen
suddenly upon the whole
sorrowful land, the immense
wilderness, the
colossal body of the fecund
and mysterious life seemed
to look at her,
pensive, as though it had
been looking at the image
of its own tenebrous
and passionate soul.

"She came abreast of the
steamer, stood still, and
faced us. Her long

shadow fell to the water's edge. Her face had a tragic and fierce aspect of wild sorrow and of dumb pain mingled with the fear of some struggling, half-shaped resolve. She stood looking at us without a stir and like the wilderness itself, with an air of brooding over an inscrutable purpose. A whole minute passed, and then she made a step forward. There was a low jingle, a glint of yellow metal, a sway of fringed draperies, and she stopped as if her heart had failed her. The young fellow by my side growled. The pilgrims murmured at my back. She looked at us all as if her life had depended upon

the unswerving
steadiness of her glance.
Suddenly she opened her
bared arms and threw
them up rigid above her
head, as though in an
uncontrollable desire to
touch the sky, and at the
same time the swift shadows
darted out on the
earth, swept around on the
river, gathering the
steamer into a shadowy
embrace. A formidable
silence hung over the
scene.

"She turned away slowly,
walked on, following the
bank, and passed into
the bushes to the left.
Once only her eyes gleamed
back at us in the
dusk of the thickets before
she disappeared.

"'If she had offered to come aboard I really think I would have tried to shoot her,' said the man of patches, nervously. 'I had been risking my life every day for the last fortnight to keep her out of the house. She got in one day and kicked up a row about those miserable rags I picked up in the storeroom to mend my clothes with. I wasn't decent. At least it must have been that, for she talked like a fury to Kurtz for an hour, pointing at me now and then. I don't understand the dialect of this tribe. Luckily for me, I fancy Kurtz felt too ill that day to care, or there would have been mischief. I don't

understand. . . . No--it's too much for me. Ah, well, it's all over now.'

"At this moment I heard Kurtz's deep voice behind the curtain, 'Save me!--save the ivory, you mean. Don't tell me. Save me! Why, I've had to save you. You are interrupting my plans now. Sick! Sick! Not so sick as you would like to believe. Never mind. I'll carry my ideas out yet--I will return. I'll show you what can be done. You with your little peddling notions--you are interfering with me. I will return. I . . .'

"The manager came out. He did me the honor to take me

under the arm and
lead me aside. 'He is very
low, very low,' he said. He
considered it
necessary to sigh, but
neglected to be
consistently sorrowful. 'We
have
done all we could for him--
haven't we? But there is no
disguising the
fact, Mr. Kurtz has done
more harm than good to the
Company. He did
not see the time was not
ripe for vigorous action.
Cautiously,
cautiously--that's my
principle. We must be
cautious yet. The district
is closed to us for a time.
Deplorable! Upon the whole,
the trade will
suffer. I don't deny there
is a remarkable quantity of
ivory--mostly

fossil. We must save it, at all events--but look how precarious the position is--and why? Because the method is unsound.' 'Do you,' said I, looking at the shore, 'call it "unsound method"?' 'Without doubt,' he exclaimed, hotly. 'Don't you?' . . . 'No method at all,' I murmured after a while. 'Exactly,' he exulted. 'I anticipated this. Shows a complete want of judgment. It is my duty to point it out in the proper quarter.' 'Oh,' said I, 'that fellow--what's his name?--the brickmaker, will make a readable report for you.' He appeared confounded for a moment. It seemed to me I had never breathed an

atmosphere so vile,
and I turned mentally to
Kurtz for relief--
positively for relief.
'Nevertheless I think Mr.
Kurtz is a remarkable man,'
I said with
emphasis. He started,
dropped on me a cold heavy
glance, said very
quietly, 'He _was_,' and
turned his back on me. My
hour of favor was
over; I found myself lumped
along with Kurtz as a
partisan of methods
for which the time was not
ripe: I was unsound! Ah!
but it was something
to have at least a choice
of nightmares.

"I had turned to the
wilderness really, not to
Mr. Kurtz, who, I was
ready to admit, was as good

as buried. And for a moment
it seemed to me
as if I also were buried in
a vast grave full of
unspeakable secrets. I
felt an intolerable weight
oppressing my breast, the
smell of the damp
earth, the unseen presence
of victorious corruption,
the darkness of an
impenetrable night. . . .
The Russian tapped me on
the shoulder. I heard
him mumbling and stammering
something about 'brother
seaman--couldn't
conceal--knowledge of
matters that would affect
Mr. Kurtz's reputation.'
I waited. For him evidently
Mr. Kurtz was not in his
grave; I suspect
that for him Mr. Kurtz was
one of the immortals.
'Well!' said I at last,

'speak out. As it happens, I am Mr. Kurtz's friend--in a way.'

"He stated with a good deal of formality that had we not been 'of the same profession,' he would have kept the matter to himself without regard to consequences. 'He suspected there was an active ill-will towards him on the part of these white men that--' 'You are right,' I said, remembering a certain conversation I had overheard. 'The manager thinks you ought to be hanged.' He showed a concern at this intelligence which amused me at first. 'I had better get out of the way quietly,' he

said, earnestly. 'I can do no more for Kurtz now, and they would soon find some excuse. What's to stop them? There's a military post three hundred miles from here.'

'Well, upon my word,' said I, 'perhaps you had better go if you have any friends amongst the savages near by.'

'Plenty,' he said. 'They are simple people--and I want nothing, you know.' He stood biting his lips, then: 'I don't want any harm to happen to these whites here, but of course I was thinking of Mr. Kurtz's reputation--but you are a brother seaman and--' 'All right,' said I, after a time. 'Mr. Kurtz's reputation is safe with

me.' I did not know how truly I spoke.

"He informed me, lowering his voice, that it was Kurtz who had ordered the attack to be made on the steamer. 'He hated sometimes the idea of being taken away--and then again. . . . But I don't understand these matters. I am a simple man. He thought it would scare you away--that you would give it up, thinking him dead. I could not stop him. Oh, I had an awful time of it this last month.' 'Very well,' I said. 'He is all right now.' 'Ye-e-es,' he muttered, not very convinced apparently. 'Thanks,' said I; 'I shall keep my

eyes open.' 'But quiet--
eh?' he urged,
anxiously. 'It would be
awful for his reputation if
anybody here--' I
promised a complete
discretion with great
gravity. 'I have a canoe
and
three black fellows waiting
not very far. I am off.
Could you give me a
few Martini-Henry
cartridges?' I could, and
did, with proper secrecy.
He
helped himself, with a wink
at me, to a handful of my
tobacco. 'Between
sailors--you know--good
English tobacco.' At the
door of the pilot-house
he turned round--' I say,
haven't you a pair of shoes
you could spare?'
He raised one leg. 'Look.'

The soles were tied with knotted strings sandal-wise under his bare feet. I rooted out an old pair, at which he looked with admiration before tucking it under his left arm. One of his pockets (bright red) was bulging with cartridges, from the other (dark blue) peeped 'Towson's Inquiry,' &c., &c. He seemed to think himself excellently well equipped for a renewed encounter with the wilderness.

'Ah! I'll never, never meet such a man again. You ought to have heard him recite poetry--his own too it was, he told me. Poetry!' He rolled his eyes at the recollection of these delights. 'Oh, he enlarged

my
mind!' 'Goodby,' said I. He
shook hands and vanished in
the night.

Sometimes I ask myself
whether I had ever really
seen him--whether it
was possible to meet such a
phenomenon! . . .

"When I woke up shortly
after midnight his warning
came to my mind with
its hint of danger that
seemed, in the starred
darkness, real enough to
make me get up for the
purpose of having a look
round. On the hill a
big fire burned,
illuminating fitfully a
crooked corner of the
station-house. One of the
agents with a picket of a
few of our blacks,
armed for the purpose, was

keeping guard over the ivory; but deep within the forest, red gleams that wavered, that seemed to sink and rise from the ground amongst confused columnar shapes of intense blackness, showed the exact position of the camp where Mr. Kurtz's adorers were keeping their uneasy vigil. The monotonous beating of a big drum filled the air with muffled shocks and a lingering vibration. A steady droning sound of many men chanting each to himself some weird incantation came out from the black, flat wall of the woods as the humming of bees comes out of a hive, and had a strange narcotic effect upon my half-awake senses.

I believe I dozed off leaning over the rail, till an abrupt burst of yells, an overwhelming outbreak of a pent-up and mysterious frenzy, woke me up in a bewildered wonder. It was cut short all at once, and the low droning went on with an effect of audible and soothing silence. I glanced casually into the little cabin. A light was burning within, but Mr. Kurtz was not there.

"I think I would have raised an outcry if I had believed my eyes. But I didn't believe them at first--the thing seemed so impossible. The fact is I was completely unnerved by a sheer blank fright, pure abstract

terror, unconnected with any distinct shape of physical danger. What made this emotion so overpowering was--how shall I define it?--the moral shock I received, as if something altogether monstrous, intolerable to thought and odious to the soul, had been thrust upon me unexpectedly.

This lasted of course the merest fraction of a second, and then the usual sense of commonplace, deadly danger, the possibility of a sudden onslaught and massacre, or something of the kind, which I saw impending, was positively welcome and composing. It pacified me, in fact, so much, that I did not raise an alarm.

"There was an agent
buttoned up inside an
ulster and sleeping on a
chair
on deck within three feet
of me. The yells had not
awakened him; he
snored very slightly; I
left him to his slumbers
and leaped ashore. I
did not betray Mr. Kurtz--
it was ordered I should
never betray him--it
was written I should be
loyal to the nightmare of
my choice. I was
anxious to deal with this
shadow by myself alone,--
and to this day I
don't know why I was so
jealous of sharing with
anyone the peculiar
blackness of that
experience.

"As soon as I got on the bank I saw a trail--a broad trail through the grass. I remember the exultation with which I said to myself, 'He can't walk--he is crawling on all-fours--I've got him.' The grass was wet with dew. I strode rapidly with clenched fists. I fancy I had some vague notion of falling upon him and giving him a drubbing. I don't know. I had some imbecile thoughts. The knitting old woman with the cat obtruded herself upon my memory as a most improper person to be sitting at the other end of such an affair. I saw a row of pilgrims squirting lead in the air out of Winchesters held to the hip. I thought

I would never get back to the steamer, and imagined myself living alone and unarmed in the woods to an advanced age. Such silly things--you know. And I remember I confounded the beat of the drum with the beating of my heart, and was pleased at its calm regularity.

"I kept to the track though--then stopped to listen. The night was very clear: a dark blue space, sparkling with dew and starlight, in which black things stood very still. I thought I could see a kind of motion ahead of me. I was strangely cocksure of everything that night. I actually left the track and

ran in a wide semicircle (I
verily believe
chuckling to myself) so as
to get in front of that
stir, of that motion
I had seen--if indeed I had
seen anything. I was
circumventing Kurtz as
though it had been a boyish
game.

"I came upon him, and, if
he had not heard me coming,
I would have
fallen over him too, but he
got up in time. He rose,
unsteady, long,
pale, indistinct, like a
vapor exhaled by the earth,
and swayed
slightly, misty and silent
before me; while at my back
the fires loomed
between the trees, and the
murmur of many voices
issued from the forest.

I had cut him off cleverly; but when actually confronting him I seemed to come to my senses, I saw the danger in its right proportion. It was by no means over yet. Suppose he began to shout? Though he could hardly stand, there was still plenty of vigor in his voice. 'Go away--hide yourself,' he said, in that profound tone. It was very awful. I glanced back. We were within thirty yards from the nearest fire. A black figure stood up, strode on long black legs, waving long black arms, across the glow. It had horns--antelope horns, I think--on its head. Some sorcerer, some witch-man, no doubt: it looked fiend-like

enough. 'Do you know what you are doing?' I whispered. 'Perfectly,' he answered, raising his voice for that single word: it sounded to me far off and yet loud, like a hail through a speaking-trumpet. 'If he makes a row we are lost,' I thought to myself. This clearly was not a case for fisticuffs, even apart from the very natural aversion I had to beat that Shadow-- this wandering and tormented thing. 'You will be lost,' I said--'utterly lost.' One gets sometimes such a flash of inspiration, you know. I did say the right thing, though indeed he could not have been more irretrievably lost than he was at this very moment,

when the foundations of our intimacy were being laid--to endure--to endure--even to the end--even beyond.

"'I had immense plans,' he muttered irresolutely. 'Yes,' said I; 'but if you try to shout I'll smash your head with--' There was not a stick or a stone near. 'I will throttle you for good,' I corrected myself. 'I was on the threshold of great things,' he pleaded, in a voice of longing, with a wistfulness of tone that made my blood run cold. 'And now for this stupid scoundrel--' 'Your success in Europe is assured in any case,' I affirmed, steadily. I did not want to

have the throttling of
him, you understand--and
indeed it would have been
very little use for
any practical purpose. I
tried to break the spell--
the heavy, mute spell
of the wilderness--that
seemed to draw him to its
pitiless breast by the
awakening of forgotten and
brutal instincts, by the
memory of gratified
and monstrous passions.
This alone, I was
convinced, had driven him
out
to the edge of the forest,
to the bush, towards the
gleam of fires, the
throb of drums, the drone
of weird incantations; this
alone had beguiled
his unlawful soul beyond
the bounds of permitted
aspirations. And, don't

you see, the terror of the position was not in being knocked on the head--though I had a very lively sense of that danger too--but in this, that I had to deal with a being to whom I could not appeal in the name of anything high or low. I had, even like the niggers, to invoke him--himself his own exalted and incredible degradation. There was nothing either above or below him, and I knew it. He had kicked himself loose of the earth. Confound the man! he had kicked the very earth to pieces. He was alone, and I before him did not know whether I stood on the ground or floated in the air. I've been telling

you what we
said--repeating the phrases
we pronounced,--but what's
the good? They
were common everyday
words,--the familiar, vague
sounds exchanged on
every waking day of life.
But what of that? They had
behind them, to my
mind, the terrific
suggestiveness of words
heard in dreams, of phrases
spoken in nightmares. Soul!
If anybody had ever
struggled with a soul,
I am the man. And I wasn't
arguing with a lunatic
either. Believe me
or not, his intelligence
was perfectly clear--
concentrated, it is true,
upon himself with horrible
intensity, yet clear; and
therein was my only
chance--barring, of course,

the killing him there and then, which wasn't so good, on account of unavoidable noise. But his soul was mad. Being alone in the wilderness, it had looked within itself, and, by heavens! I tell you, it had gone mad. I had--for my sins, I suppose--to go through the ordeal of looking into it myself. No eloquence could have been so withering to one's belief in mankind as his final burst of sincerity. He struggled with himself, too. I saw it,--I heard it. I saw the inconceivable mystery of a soul that knew no restraint, no faith, and no fear, yet struggling blindly with itself. I kept my head pretty well;

but when I had him at last stretched on the couch, I wiped my forehead, while my legs shook under me as though I had carried half a ton on my back down that hill. And yet I had only supported him, his bony arm clasped round my neck--and he was not much heavier than a child.

"When next day we left at noon, the crowd, of whose presence behind the curtain of trees I had been acutely conscious all the time, flowed out of the woods again, filled the clearing, covered the slope with a mass of naked, breathing, quivering, bronze bodies. I steamed up a bit, then swung down-stream, and two

thousand eyes followed the evolutions of the splashing, thumping, fierce river-demon beating the water with its terrible tail and breathing black smoke into the air. In front of the first rank, along the river, three men, plastered with bright red earth from head to foot, strutted to and fro restlessly. When we came abreast again, they faced the river, stamped their feet, nodded their horned heads, swayed their scarlet bodies; they shook towards the fierce river-demon a bunch of black feathers, a mangy skin with a pendent tail--something that looked like a dried gourd; they shouted

periodically together strings of amazing words that resembled no sounds of human language; and the deep murmurs of the crowd, interrupted suddenly, were like the response of some satanic litany.

"We had carried Kurtz into the pilot-house: there was more air there.

Lying on the couch, he stared through the open shutter. There was an eddy in the mass of human bodies, and the woman with helmeted head and tawny cheeks rushed out to the very brink of the stream. She put out her hands, shouted something, and all that wild mob took up the shout in a roaring chorus of

articulated, rapid,
breathless utterance.

"'Do you understand this?'
I asked.

"He kept on looking out
past me with fiery, longing
eyes, with a mingled
expression of wistfulness
and hate. He made no
answer, but I saw a
smile, a smile of
indefinable meaning, appear
on his colorless lips
that a moment after
twitched convulsively. 'Do
I not?' he said slowly,
gasping, as if the words
had been torn out of him by
a supernatural
power.

"I pulled the string of the
whistle, and I did this
because I saw the

pilgrims on deck getting out their rifles with an air of anticipating a jolly lark. At the sudden screech there was a movement of abject terror through that wedged mass of bodies. 'Don't! Don't you frighten them away,' cried someone on deck disconsolately. I pulled the string time after time. They broke and ran, they leaped, they crouched, they swerved, they dodged the flying terror of the sound. The three red chaps had fallen flat, face down on the shore, as though they had been shot dead. Only the barbarous and superb woman did not so much as flinch, and stretched tragically her bare arms after us over

the somber and
glittering river.

"And then that imbecile
crowd down on the deck
started their little fun,
and I could see nothing
more for smoke.

"The brown current ran
swiftly out of the heart of
darkness, bearing us
down towards the sea with
twice the speed of our
upward progress; and
Kurtz's life was running
swiftly too, ebbing, ebbing
out of his heart
into the sea of inexorable
time. The manager was very
placid, he had
no vital anxieties now, he
took us both in with a
comprehensive and
satisfied glance: the
'affair' had come off as

well as could be wished.
I saw the time approaching
when I would be left alone
of the party of
'unsound method.' The
pilgrims looked upon me
with disfavor. I was,
so to speak, numbered with
the dead. It is strange how
I accepted this
unforeseen partnership,
this choice of nightmares
forced upon me in the
tenebrous land invaded by
these mean and greedy
phantoms.

"Kurtz discoursed. A voice!
a voice! It rang deep to
the very last. It
survived his strength to
hide in the magnificent
folds of eloquence the
barren darkness of his
heart. Oh, he struggled! he
struggled! The wastes

of his weary brain were
haunted by shadowy images
now--images of wealth
and fame revolving
obsequiously round his
unextinguishable gift of
noble and lofty expression.
My Intended, my station, my
career, my
ideas--these were the
subjects for the occasional
utterances of elevated
sentiments. The shade of
the original Kurtz
frequented the bedside of
the hollow sham, whose fate
it was to be buried
presently in the mold of
primeval earth. But both
the diabolic love and the
unearthly hate of
the mysteries it had
penetrated fought for the
possession of that
soul satiated with
primitive emotions, avid of

lying fame, of sham distinction, of all the appearances of success and power.

"Sometimes he was contemptibly childish. He desired to have kings meet him at railway-stations on his return from some ghastly Nowhere, where he intended to accomplish great things. 'You show them you have in you something that is really profitable, and then there will be no limits to the recognition of your ability,' he would say. 'Of course you must take care of the motives--right motives--always.' The long reaches that were like one and the same reach, monotonous bends that were exactly alike,

slipped past the steamer with their multitude of secular trees looking patiently after this grimy fragment of another world, the forerunner of change, of conquest, of trade, of massacres, of blessings. I looked ahead--piloting. 'Close the shutter,' said Kurtz suddenly one day; 'I can't bear to look at this.' I did so. There was a silence. 'Oh, but I will wring your heart yet!' he cried at the invisible wilderness.

"We broke down--as I had expected--and had to lie up for repairs at the head of an island. This delay was the first thing that shook Kurtz's confidence. One

morning he gave me a packet of papers and a photograph,--the lot tied together with a shoe-string. 'Keep this for me,' he said. 'This noxious fool' (meaning the manager) 'is capable of prying into my boxes when I am not looking.' In the afternoon I saw him. He was lying on his back with closed eyes, and I withdrew quietly, but I heard him mutter, 'Live rightly, die, die . . .' I listened. There was nothing more. Was he rehearsing some speech in his sleep, or was it a fragment of a phrase from some newspaper article? He had been writing for the papers and meant to do so again, 'for the furthering of my

ideas. It's a duty.'

"His was an impenetrable darkness. I looked at him as you peer down at a man who is lying at the bottom of a precipice where the sun never shines. But I had not much time to give him, because I was helping the engine-driver to take to pieces the leaky cylinders, to straighten a bent connecting-rod, and in other such matters. I lived in an infernal mess of rust, filings, nuts, bolts, spanners, hammers, ratchet-drills--things I abominate, because I don't get on with them. I tended the little forge we fortunately had aboard; I toiled wearily in a

wretched scrap-heap--unless I had the shakes too bad to stand.

"One evening coming in with a candle I was startled to hear him say a little tremulously, 'I am lying here in the dark waiting for death.' The light was within a foot of his eyes. I forced myself to murmur, 'Oh, nonsense!' and stood over him as if transfixed.

"Anything approaching the change that came over his features I have never seen before, and hope never to see again. Oh, I wasn't touched. I was fascinated. It was as though a veil had been rent. I saw on that ivory face the expression

of somber pride, of
ruthless power, of craven
terror--of an intense and
hopeless despair. Did he
live his life again
in every detail of desire,
temptation, and surrender
during that supreme
moment of complete
knowledge? He cried in a
whisper at some image, at
some vision,--he cried out
twice, a cry that was no
more than a breath--

"'The horror! The horror!'

"I blew the candle out and
left the cabin. The
pilgrims were dining in
the mess-room, and I took
my place opposite the
manager, who lifted his
eyes to give me a
questioning glance, which I
successfully ignored.

He leaned back, serene,
with that peculiar smile of
his sealing the
unexpressed depths of his
meanness. A continuous
shower of small flies
streamed upon the lamp,
upon the cloth, upon our
hands and faces.

Suddenly the manager's boy
put his insolent black head
in the doorway,
and said in a tone of
scathing contempt--

"'Mistah Kurtz--he dead.'

"All the pilgrims rushed
out to see. I remained, and
went on with my
dinner. I believe I was
considered brutally
callous. However, I did not
eat much. There was a lamp
in there--light, don't you
know--and outside

it was so beastly, beastly dark. I went no more near the remarkable man who had pronounced a judgment upon the adventures of his soul on this earth. The voice was gone. What else had been there? But I am of course aware that next day the pilgrims buried something in a muddy hole.

"And then they very nearly buried me.

"However, as you see, I did not go to join Kurtz there and then. I did not. I remained to dream the nightmare out to the end, and to show my loyalty to Kurtz once more. Destiny. My destiny! Droll thing life

is--that mysterious
arrangement of merciless
logic for a futile purpose.
The most you can hope from
it is some knowledge of
yourself--that comes
too late--a crop of
unextinguishable regrets. I
have wrestled with
death. It is the most
unexciting contest you can
imagine. It takes place
in an impalpable grayness,
with nothing underfoot,
with nothing around,
without spectators, without
clamor, without glory,
without the great
desire of victory, without
the great fear of defeat,
in a sickly
atmosphere of tepid
skepticism, without much
belief in your own right,
and still less in that of
your adversary. If such is

the form of
ultimate wisdom, then life
is a greater riddle than
some of us think
it to be. I was within a
hair's-breadth of the last
opportunity for
pronouncement, and I found
with humiliation that
probably I would
have nothing to say. This
is the reason why I affirm
that Kurtz was a
remarkable man. He had
something to say. He said
it. Since I had peeped
over the edge myself, I
understand better the
meaning of his stare, that
could not see the flame of
the candle, but was wide
enough to embrace
the whole universe,
piercing enough to
penetrate all the hearts
that

beat in the darkness. He had summed up--he had judged. 'The horror!' He was a remarkable man. After all, this was the expression of some sort of belief; it had candor, it had conviction, it had a vibrating note of revolt in its whisper, it had the appalling face of a glimpsed truth--the strange commingling of desire and hate. And it is not my own extremity I remember best--a vision of grayness without form filled with physical pain, and a careless contempt for the evanescence of all things--even of this pain itself. No! It is his extremity that I seem to have lived through. True, he had made that last

stride, he had stepped
over the edge, while I had
been permitted to draw back
my hesitating
foot. And perhaps in this
is the whole difference;
perhaps all the
wisdom, and all truth, and
all sincerity, are just
compressed into that
inappreciable moment of
time in which we step over
the threshold of the
invisible. Perhaps! I like
to think my summing-up
would not have been
a word of careless
contempt. Better his cry--
much better. It was
an affirmation, a moral
victory paid for by
innumerable defeats, by
abominable terrors, by
abominable satisfactions.
But it was a victory!
That is why I have remained

loyal to Kurtz to the last,
and even beyond,
when a long time after I
heard once more, not his
own voice, but
the echo of his magnificent
eloquence thrown to me from
a soul as
translucently pure as a
cliff of crystal.

"No, they did not bury me,
though there is a period of
time which I
remember mistily, with a
shuddering wonder, like a
passage through some
inconceivable world that
had no hope in it and no
desire. I found myself
back in the sepulchral city
resenting the sight of
people hurrying
through the streets to
filch a little money from
each other, to devour

their infamous cookery, to
gulp their unwholesome
beer, to dream their
insignificant and silly
dreams. They trespassed
upon my thoughts. They
were intruders whose
knowledge of life was to me
an irritating pretense,
because I felt so sure they
could not possibly know the
things I knew.

Their bearing, which was
simply the bearing of
commonplace individuals
going about their business
in the assurance of perfect
safety, was
offensive to me like the
outrageous flauntings of
folly in the face of
a danger it is unable to
comprehend. I had no
particular desire to
enlighten them, but I had
some difficulty in

restraining myself from laughing in their faces, so full of stupid importance. I dare say I was not very well at that time. I tottered about the streets--there were various affairs to settle--grinning bitterly at perfectly respectable persons. I admit my behavior was inexcusable, but then my temperature was seldom normal in these days. My dear aunt's endeavors to 'nurse up my strength' seemed altogether beside the mark. It was not my strength that wanted nursing, it was my imagination that wanted soothing. I kept the bundle of papers given me by Kurtz, not knowing exactly what to do with it. His mother had

died lately, watched over,
as I was told, by
his Intended. A clean-
shaved man, with an
official manner and wearing
gold-rimmed spectacles,
called on me one day and
made inquiries, at
first circuitous,
afterwards suavely
pressing, about what he was
pleased
to denominate certain
'documents.' I was not
surprised, because I had
had two rows with the
manager on the subject out
there. I had refused
to give up the smallest
scrap out of that package,
and I took the same
attitude with the
spectacled man. He became
darkly menacing at last,
and with much heat argued
that the Company had the

right to every bit
of information about its
'territories.' And, said
he, 'Mr. Kurtz's
knowledge of unexplored
regions must have been
necessarily extensive
and peculiar--owing to his
great abilities and to the
deplorable
circumstances in which he
had been placed:

therefore'--I assured him
Mr.

Kurtz's knowledge, however
extensive, did not bear
upon the problems
of commerce or
administration. He invoked
then the name of science.

'It
would be an incalculable
loss if,' &c., &c. I
offered him the report on
the 'Suppression of Savage
Customs,' with the

postscriptum torn off. He took it up eagerly, but ended by sniffing at it with an air of contempt. 'This is not what we had a right to expect,' he remarked. 'Expect nothing else,' I said. 'There are only private letters.' He withdrew upon some threat of legal proceedings, and I saw him no more; but another fellow, calling himself Kurtz's cousin, appeared two days later, and was anxious to hear all the details about his dear relative's last moments. Incidentally he gave me to understand that Kurtz had been essentially a great musician. 'There was the making of an immense success,' said the man, who

was an organist, I believe, with lank gray hair flowing over a greasy coat-collar. I had no reason to doubt his statement; and to this day I am unable to say what was Kurtz's profession, whether he ever had any--which was the greatest of his talents. I had taken him for a painter who wrote for the papers, or else for a journalist who could paint--but even the cousin (who took snuff during the interview) could not tell me what he had been--exactly. He was a universal genius--on that point I agreed with the old chap, who thereupon blew his nose noisily into a large cotton handkerchief and

withdrew in senile agitation, bearing off some family letters and memoranda without importance. Ultimately a journalist anxious to know something of the fate of his 'dear colleague' turned up. This visitor informed me Kurtz's proper sphere ought to have been politics 'on the popular side.' He had furry straight eyebrows, bristly hair cropped short, an eye-glass on a broad ribbon, and, becoming expansive, confessed his opinion that Kurtz really couldn't write a bit--'but heavens! how that man could talk! He electrified large meetings. He had faith--don't you see?--he had the faith. He could get

himself to believe anything--anything. He would have been a splendid leader of an extreme party.' 'What party?' I asked. 'Any party,' answered the other. 'He was an--an--extremist.' Did I not think so? I assented. Did I know, he asked, with a sudden flash of curiosity, 'what it was that had induced him to go out there?' 'Yes,' said I, and forthwith handed him the famous Report for publication, if he thought fit. He glanced through it hurriedly, mumbling all the time, judged 'it would do,' and took himself off with this plunder.

"Thus I was left at last with a slim packet of

letters and the girl's
portrait. She struck me as
beautiful--I mean she had a
beautiful
expression. I know that the
sunlight can be made to lie
too, yet one
felt that no manipulation
of light and pose could
have conveyed the
delicate shade of
truthfulness upon those
features. She seemed ready
to
listen without mental
reservation, without
suspicion, without a
thought
for herself. I concluded I
would go and give her back
her portrait
and those letters myself.
Curiosity? Yes; and also
some other feeling
perhaps. All that had been
Kurtz's had passed out of

my hands: his soul,
his body, his station, his
plans, his ivory, his
career. There remained
only his memory and his
Intended--and I wanted to
give that up too to
the past, in a way,--to
surrender personally all
that remained of him
with me to that oblivion
which is the last word of
our common fate. I
don't defend myself. I had
no clear perception of what
it was I really
wanted. Perhaps it was an
impulse of unconscious
loyalty, or the
fulfillment of one of these
ironic necessities that
lurk in the facts of
human existence. I don't
know. I can't tell. But I
went.

"I thought his memory was like the other memories of the dead that accumulate in every man's life,--a vague impress on the brain of shadows that had fallen on it in their swift and final passage; but before the high and ponderous door, between the tall houses of a street as still and decorous as a well-kept alley in a cemetery, I had a vision of him on the stretcher, opening his mouth voraciously, as if to devour all the earth with all its mankind. He lived then before me; he lived as much as he had ever lived--a shadow insatiable of splendid appearances, of frightful realities; a shadow darker than the

shadow of the night, and
draped nobly in the folds
of a gorgeous eloquence.
The vision seemed to
enter the house with me--
the stretcher, the phantom-
bearers, the wild
crowd of obedient
worshipers, the gloom of
the forests, the glitter of
the reach between the murky
bends, the beat of the
drum, regular and
muffled like the beating of
a heart--the heart of a
conquering darkness.
It was a moment of triumph
for the wilderness, an
invading and vengeful
rush which, it seemed to
me, I would have to keep
back alone for the
salvation of another soul.
And the memory of what I
had heard him say
afar there, with the horned

shapes stirring at my back,
in the glow of
fires, within the patient
woods, those broken phrases
came back to
me, were heard again in
their ominous and
terrifying simplicity. I
remembered his abject
pleading, his abject
threats, the colossal scale
of his vile desires, the
meanness, the torment, the
tempestuous anguish
of his soul. And later on I
seemed to see his collected
languid manner,
when he said one day, 'This
lot of ivory now is really
mine. The Company
did not pay for it. I
collected it myself at a
very great personal risk.
I am afraid they will try
to claim it as theirs
though. H'm. It is a

difficult case. What do you think I ought to do-- resist? Eh? I want no more than justice.' . . . He wanted no more than justice--no more than justice. I rang the bell before a mahogany door on the first floor, and while I waited he seemed to stare at me out of the glassy panel--stare with that wide and immense stare embracing, condemning, loathing all the universe. I seemed to hear the whispered cry, 'The horror! The horror!'

"The dusk was falling. I had to wait in a lofty drawing-room with three long windows from floor to ceiling that were like three luminous and

bedraped columns. The bent gilt legs and backs of the furniture shone in indistinct curves. The tall marble fireplace had a cold and monumental whiteness. A grand piano stood massively in a corner, with dark gleams on the flat surfaces like a somber and polished sarcophagus. A high door opened--closed. I rose.

"She came forward, all in black, with a pale head, floating towards me in the dusk. She was in mourning. It was more than a year since his death, more than a year since the news came; she seemed as though she would remember and mourn for ever. She took both my hands in hers and

murmured, 'I had heard you were coming.' I noticed she was not very young--I mean not girlish. She had a mature capacity for fidelity, for belief, for suffering. The room seemed to have grown darker, as if all the sad light of the cloudy evening had taken refuge on her forehead.

This fair hair, this pale visage, this pure brow, seemed surrounded by an ashy halo from which the dark eyes looked out at me. Their glance was guileless, profound, confident, and trustful. She carried her sorrowful head as though she were proud of that sorrow, as though she would say, 'I--I alone know how to mourn for him as he

deserves. But while we were still shaking hands, such a look of awful desolation came upon her face that I perceived she was one of those creatures that are not the playthings of Time. For her he had died only yesterday. And, by Jove! the impression was so powerful that for me too he seemed to have died only yesterday--nay, this very minute. I saw her and him in the same instant of time--his death and her sorrow--I saw her sorrow in the very moment of his death. Do you understand? I saw them together--I heard them together. She had said, with a deep catch of the breath, 'I have survived;' while my

strained ears seemed to hear distinctly, mingled with her tone of despairing regret, the summing-up whisper of his eternal condemnation. I asked myself what I was doing there, with a sensation of panic in my heart as though I had blundered into a place of cruel and absurd mysteries not fit for a human being to behold. She motioned me to a chair. We sat down. I laid the packet gently on the little table, and she put her hand over it. . . .

'You knew him well,' she murmured, after a moment of mourning silence.

''Intimacy grows quick out there,' I said. 'I knew him as well as it is

possible for one man to know another.'

"'And you admired him,' she said. 'It was impossible to know him and not to admire him. Was it?'

"'He was a remarkable man,' I said, unsteadily. Then before the appealing fixity of her gaze, that seemed to watch for more words on my lips, I went on, 'It was impossible not to--'

"'Love him,' she finished eagerly, silencing me into an appalled dumbness. 'How true! how true! But when you think that no one knew him so well as I! I had all his noble confidence. I knew him best.'

"'You knew him best,' I repeated. And perhaps she did. But with every word spoken the room was growing darker, and only her forehead, smooth and white, remained illumined by the unextinguishable light of belief and love.

"'You were his friend,' she went on. 'His friend,' she repeated, a little louder. 'You must have been, if he had given you this, and sent you to me. I feel I can speak to you--and oh! I must speak. I want you--you who have heard his last words--to know I have been worthy of him. . . . It is not pride.

. . . Yes! I am proud to know I understood him better than anyone on earth--he told me so himself. And since his mother died I have had no one--no one--to--to--'

"I listened. The darkness deepened. I was not even sure whether he had given me the right bundle. I rather suspect he wanted me to take care of another batch of his papers which, after his death, I saw the manager examining under the lamp. And the girl talked, easing her pain in the certitude of my sympathy; she talked as thirsty men drink. I had heard that her engagement with Kurtz had been disapproved by her people. He

wasn't rich enough or something. And indeed I don't know whether he had not been a pauper all his life. He had given me some reason to infer that it was his impatience of comparative poverty that drove him out there.

"'. . . Who was not his friend who had heard him speak once?' she was saying. 'He drew men towards him by what was best in them.' She looked at me with intensity. 'It is the gift of the great,' she went on, and the sound of her low voice seemed to have the accompaniment of all the other sounds, full of mystery, desolation, and sorrow, I had ever

heard--the ripple of the river, the souging of the trees swayed by the wind, the murmurs of wild crowds, the faint ring of incomprehensible words cried from afar, the whisper of a voice speaking from beyond the threshold of an eternal darkness. 'But you have heard him! You know!' she cried.

"'Yes, I know,' I said with something like despair in my heart, but bowing my head before the faith that was in her, before that great and saving illusion that shone with an unearthly glow in the darkness, in the triumphant darkness from which I could not have defended her--from

which I could not even defend myself.

"'What a loss to me--to us!'--she corrected herself with beautiful generosity; then added in a murmur, 'To the world.' By the last gleams of twilight I could see the glitter of her eyes, full of tears--of tears that would not fall.

"'I have been very happy--very fortunate--very proud,' she went on. 'Too fortunate. Too happy for a little while. And now I am unhappy for--for life.'

"She stood up; her fair hair seemed to catch all the remaining light in a glimmer of gold. I rose

too.

"'And of all this,' she went on, mournfully, 'of all his promise, and of all his greatness, of his generous mind, of his noble heart, nothing remains--nothing but a memory. You and I--'

"'We shall always remember him,' I said, hastily.

"'No!' she cried. 'It is impossible that all this should be lost--that such a life should be sacrificed to leave nothing--but sorrow. You know what vast plans he had. I knew of them too--I could not perhaps understand,--but others knew of them. Something must remain. His words,

at least, have not died.'

"'His words will remain,' I said.

"'And his example,' she whispered to herself. 'Men looked up to him,--his goodness shone in every act. His example--'

"'True,' I said; 'his example too. Yes, his example. I forgot that.'

"'But I do not. I cannot--I cannot believe--not yet. I cannot believe that I shall never see him again, that nobody will see him again, never, never, never.'

"She put out her arms as if after a retreating figure, stretching them

black and with clasped pale
hands across the fading and
narrow sheen of
the window. Never see him!
I saw him clearly enough
then. I shall see
this eloquent phantom as
long as I live, and I shall
see her too, a
tragic and familiar Shade,
resembling in this gesture
another one,
tragic also, and bedecked
with powerless charms,
stretching bare brown
arms over the glitter of
the infernal stream, the
stream of darkness.
She said suddenly very low,
'He died as he lived.'

''His end,' said I, with
dull anger stirring in me,
'was in every way
worthy of his life.'

"'And I was not with him,' she murmured. My anger subsided before a feeling of infinite pity.

"'Everything that could be done--' I mumbled.

"'Ah, but I believed in him more than anyone on earth--more than his own mother, more than--himself. He needed me! Me! I would have treasured every sigh, every word, every sign, every glance.'

"I felt like a chill grip on my chest. 'Don't,' I said, in a muffled voice.

"'Forgive me. I--I--have mourned so long in silence--in silence. . . . You were with him--to the

last? I think of his loneliness. Nobody near to understand him as I would have understood. Perhaps no one to hear. . . .'

"'To the very end,' I said, shakily. 'I heard his very last words. . . .'
I stopped in a fright.

"'Repeat them,' she said in a heart-broken tone. 'I want--I want--something--something--to--to live with.'

"I was on the point of crying at her, 'Don't you hear them?' The dusk was repeating them in a persistent whisper all around us, in a whisper that seemed to swell menacingly like the first

whisper of a rising wind.
'The horror! The horror!'

"'His last word--to live with,' she murmured. 'Don't you understand I loved him--I loved him--I loved him!'

"I pulled myself together and spoke slowly.

"'The last word he pronounced was--your name.'

"I heard a light sigh, and then my heart stood still, stopped dead short by an exulting and terrible cry, by the cry of inconceivable triumph and of unspeakable pain. 'I knew it--I was sure!' . . . She knew. She was sure. I heard her weeping; she had hidden her face in

her hands. It seemed to me that the house would collapse before I could escape, that the heavens would fall upon my head. But nothing happened. The heavens do not fall for such a trifle. Would they have fallen, I wonder, if I had rendered Kurtz that justice which was his due? Hadn't he said he wanted only justice? But I couldn't. I could not tell her. It would have been too dark--too dark altogether. . . ."

Marlow ceased, and sat apart, indistinct and silent, in the pose of a meditating Buddha. Nobody moved for a time. "We have lost the first of the ebb," said the

Director, suddenly. I
raised my head. The offing
was
barred by a black bank of
clouds, and the tranquil
waterway leading
to the uttermost ends of
the earth flowed somber
under an overcast
sky--seemed to lead into
the heart of an immense
darkness.

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