



bulkboek[®]

ONLINE

english edition 2

HEART OF DARKNESS



**JOSEPH
CONRAD**

MET WOORDVERKLARINGEN VOOR NEDERLANDSTALIGE LEZERS!

Inhoud

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Heart of Darkness was first published as Bulkboek in the English Edition (nr.9) in 1978.

The book was written in 1899 and is one of the most widely read novels in the English language over the last hundred years.

The story has been filmed several times, as a Hollywood movie as well as a television production.

Additionally, the Kurtz character from this story plays a leading role in other major movies as far apart as 'Apocalyps Now' (about the Vietnam war), 'King Kong' and 'Star Trek: Insurrection'.

In 2010 Heart of darkness was published as a wonderful graphic novel, illustrated by Catherine Anyango. The Dutch edition of this graphic novel is available from uitgeverij Atlas.

I am very grateful to Catherine Anyango for her permission to use some of her artwork for this bulkboek.

The other illustrations used in this digital edition are archive photographs from the Congo in the era described in this story, when ivory (the tusks of elephants) was a very valuable commodity in the Western world.

Theo Knippenberg

Impressum

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This bulkboek has been annotated and introduced by Irene Hilgervoord.

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In samenwerking met



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Joseph Conrad

werd op 3 december 1857 geboren in Berdyczew, in de Poolse provincie Podolia, een provincie die toen nog onder het Russische Tsarenregime viel. Zijn oorspronkelijke naam was Jozef Teodor Konrad Nalecz Korzeniowski. Conrad's ouders, Apollo en Evilina Korzeniowski, behoorden tot de klasse van de grootgrondbezitters, en Joseph was hun enig kind. In 1860 werd Josephs vader door de Russische autoriteiten gearresteerd wegens zijn betrokkenheid bij de geheime nationale Poolse beweging, en werd het hele gezin verbannen naar Siberië. Gedurende deze ballingschap overleden zowel Apollo als Evilina, en op zijn elfde jaar werd Joseph als weeskind toevertrouwd aan de zorg van Tadeusz Bobrowski, een oom van zijn moeders kant.

Naar Zee

Tijdens zijn gymnasium opleiding, in Krakau, verbaasde Joseph zijn oom vaak door te zeggen dat hij naar zee wilde. Het leek nogal vreemd dat een jongen die in het binnenland woonde, de zee nog nooit gezien had, en bovendien uit een geslacht van grootgrondbezitters kwam, zo vast besloten was naar zee te gaan.

Maar Joseph hield vol en in 1874 slaagde hij erin Marseille te bereiken. Dit werd het begin van een avontuurlijk en kleurrijk bestaan.

Smokkel

Conrad's kennis van de Franse taal en zijn contacten in de haven van Marseille kwamen hem goed van pas bij het vinden van werk. Na wat ervaring op kleinere zeilschepen, kwam hij terecht op een Frans schip dat op Zuid-Amerika voer en waarmee wapens werden gesmokkeld. De gebeurtenissen uit deze tijd vormden later de basis voor het in 1904 verschenen boek *Nostramo*.

Ook het volgende schip waar Conrad op voer, de Tremolino - dat hij samen met drie anderen had gekocht - werd gebruikt voor het smokkelen van wapens, naar Spanje dit keer. Hij beschrijft deze periode vrij nauwkeurig in een hoofdstuk van *The Mirror of the Sea* (1906). Nog meer autobiografische gegevens zijn te vinden in *The Arrow of Gold*, dat vooral Conrad's "Franse" vaarjaren beschrijft en in , dat meer betrekking heeft op de "Engelse" periode uit zijn loopbaan als zeeman.

England

De Mavis was het eerste Engelse schip, waar Conrad op 1878 in Marseille op aanmonsterde, en waarmee hij ook voor het eerst een Engelse haven binnenvoer. Het duurde echter nog tot 1886 voordat Conrad officieel Brits onderdaan werd. Vanuit Engeland werden de grote reizen



gemaakt die de basis zouden gaan vormen voor enkele van Conrad's meest bekende verhalen zoals *Almayer's Folly* (1895), dat zich afspeelt op Malakka, *The Nigger of the Narcissus* (1898), zijn eerste echte "zeeverhaal", *Lord Jim* (1900), *Youth* (1902) en *Typhoon* (1902).

Congo

In 1890 ging Conrad naar Belgisch Congo om het bevel te gaan voeren op een rivierboot. Hiermee ging een jeugdwens van hem in vervulling. Als kind had hij namelijk blindelings de Congo aangewezen als land waar hij later graag naar toe wilde.

De ervaringen die Conrad in de Congo opdeed, verzwakten hem lichamelijk, maar deden hem geestelijk juist opleven. 't Is ook uit die periode dat het begin van zijn schrijverscarrière dateert. Toen is hij namelijk begonnen aan zijn eerste boek, *Almayer's Folly*. Eveneens in die periode echter kwam het einde van zijn leven als zeeman in zicht.

Pas jaren later schreef Conrad het verhaal rond zijn ervaringen in Belgisch Congo: *Heart of Darkness* (1902).

Vaarwel

Het laatste schip waar Conrad op voer was de *Torrens*. In 1893 zei hij de zee voorgoed vaarwel om gezondheidsredenen. Hij vestigde zich in Engeland en begon zich geheel in te zetten voor zijn schrijverscarrière. Drie jaar later trouwde hij zelfs nog, op negenendertigjarige leeftijd. Uit dit huwelijk werden twee zoons geboren, John Alexander en Borns.

Taalprobleem

Het is niet verwonderlijk dat Conrad vooral in zijn eerste werken problemen had met de Engelse taal. In *Almayer's Folly* en *An Outcast of the Islands* is dat zelfs duidelijk te zien. Hij leerde zijn eerste Engels van zeelieden, die er ongetwijfeld een nogal sappig taaltje op na hielden. Zijn verdere kennis van de taal bouwde

hij op uit handboeken over zeemanskunst, scheepslogboeken, en bovendien uit Engelse literatuurboeken. Overigens leerde hij de Engelse taal, na een moeilijke start, uiteindelijk perfect schrijven.

Onderwerp

Dat Conrad werd gefascineerd door de zee blijkt wel uit de meeste van zijn werken. Maar het citaat uit de Sprookjes van Grimm, dat op de titelpagina van *Youth* voorkomt: “Something human is dearer to me than the wealth of all the world”, spreekt toch wel voor zich zelf. Bovendien heeft Conrad ook nog twee boeken geschreven die werkelijk niets met de zee te maken hebben, *The Secret Agent* (1907) en *Under Western Eyes* (1911).

Beide boeken zijn duidelijk politiek getint, en laten uitkomen dat de politieke situaties waar Conrad als kind mee geconfronteerd moet zijn geweest, hem bepaald niet onberoerd hadden gelaten.

Verteller

In de meeste van zijn “zee-verhalen” zien we dat Conrad gebruik maakt van een verteller, een zekere kapitein Marlow.

Het zou voor de hand liggen om te zeggen dat Marlow voor Conrad zelf staat. Maar toch is dit niet zo. Marlow wordt gebruikt om een verhaal te vertellen, waarin hij zelf als hoofdpersoon optreedt en dat gebaseerd

is op feiten en gebeurtenissen uit Conrad's leven. Dit is dan ook de reden dat Conrad's zeeverhalen niet echt autobiografisch kunnen worden genoemd. Het is grappig om te constateren hoe wezenlijk de persoon van Marlow was geworden in het leven van Conrad. Dit blijkt duidelijk uit de beschrijving die de auteur van hem geeft in de inleiding van *Youth*: ... that story (= *Youth*) marks the first appearance in the world of the man Marlow, with whom my relations have grown very intimate in the course of years. The origins of that gentleman (nobody as far as I know had ever hinted that he was anything but that) - his origins have been subject of some literary speculation of, I am glad to say, a friendly nature.

One would think that I am the proper person to throw a light on the matter; but in truth I find that it isn't so easy.

The man Marlow and I came together in the casual manner of those health-resort acquaintances which sometimes ripen into friendships. This one has ripened. For all his assertiveness in matters of opinion he is not an intrusive person. He haunts my hours of solitude, when, in silence, we lay our heads together in great comfort and harmony; but as we part at the end of a tale I am never sure that it may not be for the last time. Yet I don't think that either of us would care much to survive the other. In his

case, at any rate, his occupation would be gone and he would suffer from extinction, because I suspect him of some vanity. Off all my people he's the one that has never been a vexation to my spirit. A most discrete, understanding man.....

Heart of Darkness

Het zou te gemakkelijk zijn om *Heart of Darkness* eenvoudigweg een “zeeverhaal” te noemen. Het is veel meer dan dat. ‘t Is niet voor niets dat Conrad over zijn reis naar Belgisch Congo eens heeft gezegd: “before the Congo I was only a simple animal” . Het volkomen teruggeworpen zijn op zichzelf, te midden van een wildernis, hadden hem tot een ander mens gemaakt. Het *heart of darkness* in de titel slaat niet alleen op deze wildernis, het onbekende hart van donker Afrika, maar ook op het onbekende in het hart van de mens, en bovenal op het kwaad dat in het boek wordt gesymboliseerd door Kurtz. Kurtz, die tegelijkertijd als een godheid wordt beschouwd door de inboorlingen. Het boek toont ons het effect van dit drievoudige heart of darkness op Marlow, en door hem op Conrad.

Thuis

Volgens zijn vrouw heeft Conrad tot het eind van zijn leven een zeker heimwee gevoeld naar zijn geboorteland Polen. Maar

hij is thuis gebleven, in Engeland bij zijn Engelse gezin. Hij is ook blijven schrijven tot het einde van zijn leven. Zijn laatste werk, *Suspence*, is onvoltooid gebleven. Kort voor zijn dood in 1924, heeft Conrad nog geweigerd zich in de adelstand te laten verheffen.

Hij ligt begraven in Canterbury en zijn grafsteen draagt zijn volledige Poolse naam.

Irene Hilgevoort, Gouda, 1978

Heart of Darkness

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

YAWL: sailing boat with two masts

TO MAKE (OF THE TIDE): to flow, to rise

OFFING: part of the sea far away from the point of observation, but visible | TO WELD: to blend | JOINT: point where two things come together | TANNED: (having become) brown | BARGE: large flat-bottomed boat used on rivers | VARNISHED: *Dutch*: *governist* | HAZE: thin mist

GLOOM: semi-darkness

BOWS: fore-end of the ship

NAUTICAL: belonging to the sea | PILOT: *Dutch*: *havenloods*

ESTUARY: river mouth into which the tide flows

BOND: something that holds together

YARN: story | CONVICTION: *Dutch*: *overtuiging*

[‡] Question: *What does "sharply peaked" refer to?*

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

BONES: *Dutch*: dominostenen
AFT: in the back end of the ship | MIZZEN-MAST: mast at the back end | COMPLEXION: colour of the skin | ASCETIC: self-denying; leading a life of severe self-discipline
IDOL: image of a god

SPECK: small spot | BENIGN: mild, gentle

Drawing for Heart of Darkness, the graphic novel, by Catherine Anyango



unstained* light; the very mist on the Essex marsh 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 sombre every minute, as if angered by the approach of the sun.

UNSTAINED: without a spot
GAUZY: thin, transparent | RADIANT:
shining | RISE: small hill
DIAPHANOUS: transparent

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.

IMPERCEPTIBLE: you can hardly see it

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 sea²” with reverence* and affection, that 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

FORTHWITH: at once

UNRUFFLED: undisturbed, calm

DIGNITY: style, true worth
VENERABLE: deserving respect because of age | FLUSH: rush (of water)

AUGUST: majestic | TO ABIDE: to remain with

REVERENCE: deep respect
TO EVOKE: to bring out

CURRENT: stream of water

KNIGHT-ERRANT: knight who went about in search of adventure

² Question: *What does Conrad mean by “followed the sea”?*

with her rotund 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 light-house, 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

ON 'CHANGE: engaged on a place where merchants meet | INTERLOPER: person, who esp. for profit pushes himself in where he has no right | COMMISSIONED: holding rank by an official paper |
PURSUER: hunter
SPARK: *Dutch*: vonk

SEED, GERM: here: origin, beginning

DUSK: *Dutch*: schemering
ERECT: standing upright | MUD-FLAT: *Dutch*: moddervlakte
FAIRWAY: part of the river where the ships can sail | STIR: movement

OMINOUSLY: in a threatening way
LURID: highly coloured; [laming

DARK: here: unknown

TO WANDER: to go from place to place
SEDENTARY: of which most part is spent sitting

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 existence³ 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

IMMUTABLE: that cannot be changed

TO VEIL: to cover by thin material

DISDAINFUL: showing contempt

(minachting) | IGNORANCE: Dutch: onwetendheid

INSCRUTABLE: that cannot be understood

DESTINY: Dutch: lot

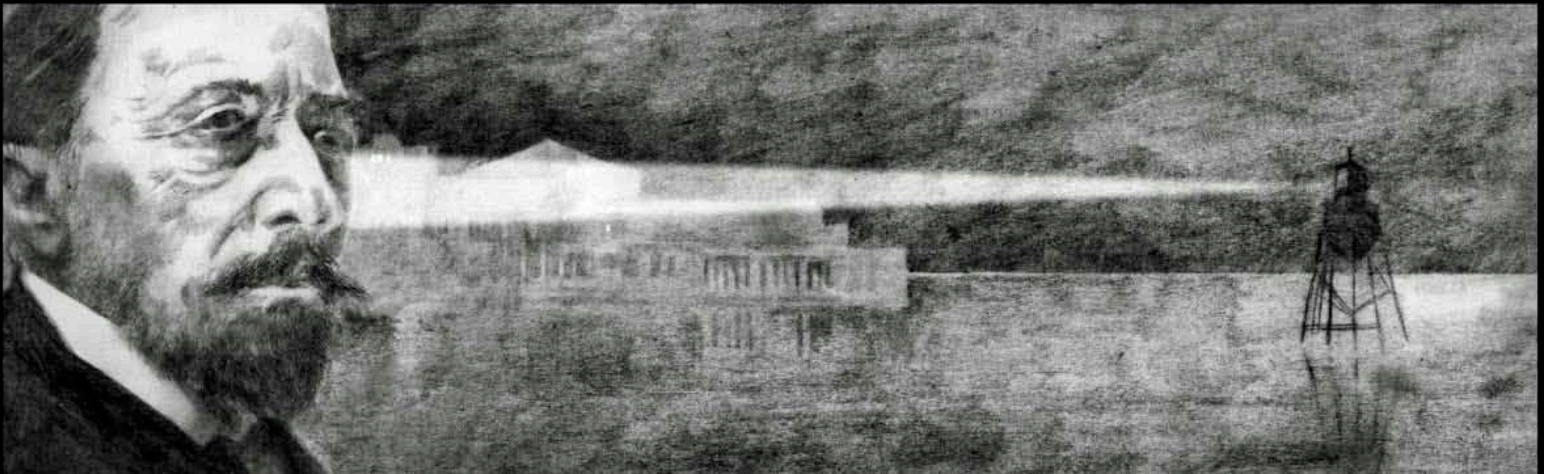
CASUAL: without any special direction |

STROLL: quiet walk | SPREE: happy time |

TO SUFFICE: to be enough, sufficient

³ Question: *What is meant by “mistress of his existence”?*

Drawing for Heart of Darkness, the graphic novel, by Catherine Anyango



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 since⁴ -- 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 colour of lead, a sky the colour of smoke, a kind of ship⁵ about as rigid* as a concertina* -- and going up this river with stores*, or orders, or what you like. Sand-banks, 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

SHELL: *Dutch: dop*
 PROPENSITY: *natural tendency*
 TO SPIN YARNS: *to tell stories*
 KERNEL: *softer inner part of a nut*

HALO: *circle of light round sun or moon*

TO GRUNT: *to make a low sound*

YESTERDAY: *referring to a long time ago*
 TRIREME: *ancient, esp. Greek warship*

GAULS: *Dutch: Galliërs*
 CRAFT: *boats, ships*

RIGID: *strong* | CONCERTINA: *Dutch: concertina, soort accordeon* | STORES: *goods of a particular kind* | PRECIOUS LITTLE: *very little* | FIT FOR: *right for*

TEMPEST: *storm*
 TO SKULK: *to hide, to move secretly*

⁴ Question: *Why does Conrad use the words “Light came out of this river since”?*

⁵ Question: *What “kind of ship” does Conrad mean?*

air, in the water, in the bush. They must have been dying like flies here. Oh, yes -- he did it⁶. 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

TO BRAG: *Dutch*: opscheppen

TO CHEER: to make happy

DICE: *Dutch*: dobbelsteen

TRAIN: number of persons, animals etc. coming with the prefect | PREFECT: title of a military officer | SWAMP: wet, soft ground | UTTER: complete

INITIATION: being made familiar with

INCOMPREHENSIBLE: that which he cannot understand | DETESTABLE: hateful
ABOMINATION: horror and disgust

TO SURRENDER: to give up

POSE: position

DEVOTION TO: strong love for | CHAPS: fellows, people | NOT MUCH ACCOUNT: not worth very much | ADMINISTRATION: management | SQUEEZE: money gotten by force

⁶ Question: *What does "it" refer to in "he did it"?*

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 pretence 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 like best 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

ACCIDENT: something that happens without a cause | TO GRAB: to take with force | FOR THE SAKE OF: because of a desire for | ROBBERY: taking away of property | AGGRAVATED: real | TO TACKLE: to go into

COMPLEXION: colour of the skin

TO REDEEM: to compensate

TO PURSUE: to follow

TO OVERTAKE: *Dutch*: inhalen

TO TURN: to become | FRESH-WATER: not on the sea (on a river, lake etc.) | WE WERE FATED TO HEAR: we had to listen to | INCONCLUSIVE: not convincing

CULMINATING: highest

of light on everything about me -- and into my thoughts. It was sombre 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 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,

REGULAR: real

TO LOAF ABOUT: to waste time, to hang around

TO EXPLORE: to examine thoroughly |
BLANK: with nothing on it

THE GLAMOUR'S OFF: it is not exciting anymore | TO BE SCATTERED: to be wide apart | HEMISPHERE: *Dutch*: halfround

HANKERING: strong desire

PATCH: spot, place

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,’ etc. 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

TO RESEMBLE: to look like | UNCOILED: not twisted, unrolled | CURVING: with no straight part in it: | AFAR: far aft

CONCERN: business
DASH IT ALL: mild substitute for: damn it

NASTY: unpleasant
TO OWN: to say, to confess
A FRESH DEPARTURE: a new beginning, something new

BY HOOK OR BY CROOK: one way or another, somehow

NOTION: idea

ADMINISTRATION: that part of the Government which manages public affairs
NO END OF FUSS: a lot of activity

MY FANCY: what | wanted

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 cause⁷, 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

SCUFFLE: rough fight | NATIVES: *Dutch: inboorlingen* | ANXIOUS: full of desire

TO MAKE THE ATTEMPT: to try | TO RECOVER: to get back | QUARREL: fight

WRONGED: treated badly, not honestly
BARGAIN: agreement to buy or sell something

ENGAGED IN: busy with

TO ASSERT: to show clearly
TO WHACK: to strike with a hard blow |
MERCILESS: without showing pity

JAB: sudden blow

TO CLEAR: to run away
CALAMITIES: terrible things

ENGINEER: *Dutch: machinist*
REMAINS: *Dutch: stoffelijk overschot*

AN OPPORTUNITY OFFERED: a chance came
PREDECESSOR: Fresleven, the man who was there before me

SUPERNATURAL: Presleven had apparently been looked upon as a kind of god

⁷ Question: *What is meant by "the noble cause"?*

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 progress⁸ 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 city⁹ that always makes me think of a whited sepulchre*. 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* 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 down-cast 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 colours of a rainbow. There was a vast*

ASKEW: not standing upright

ENCLOSURE: something that is surrounded by a wall | TO VANISH: to disappear | TERROR: great fear | BUSH: wild land

THROUGH: because of

APPOINTMENT: Dutch: benoeming

EMPLOYER: the man you work or

SEPULCHRE: place where people are buried | PREJUDICE: opinion formed before you really know something

NO END OF COIN: a lot of money

VENETIAN BLINDS: Dutch: jaloezieën | TO SPROUT: to begin to grow | PONDEROUS: very heavy | AJAR: slightly open | CRACK: very small opening | UNGARNISHED: plain, not decorated | ARID: dry
SLIM: the opposite of fat

TO KNIT: Dutch: breien

WITH DOWNCAST EYES: looking to the ground

SOMNAMBULIST: someone who walks while he is sleeping | UMBRELLA: Dutch: paraplu
TO PRECEDE: to walk in front of

DEAL: certain kind of wood

VAST: enormous

⁸ Question: What does 'the cause of progress' refer to?

⁹ Question: Do you have any idea what city Marlow is talking about?

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 centre*. 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 DEUCE OF A LOT: **very much** | SMEAR: **spot, mark**

JOLLY: **merry, a little bit drunk**

LAGER-BEER: **sort of light beer**

DEAD IN THE CENTRE: **right in the centre**

COMPASSIONATE: **showing pity**

TO BECKON: **to call** | SANCTUARY: **holy place**

TO SQUAT: **lit. to sit on its heels**

PLUMP: **round, fat**

FROCK-COAT: **long coat**

TO JUDGE: **here: to say**

I FANCY: | **think**

DESOLATION: **sadness**

TO UNDERTAKE: **to promise**

TO DISCLOSE: **to tell to someone else**

OMINOUS: **threatening**

CONSPIRACY: *Dutch*: **samenzwering**

FEVERISHLY: *Dutch*: **koortsachtig**

TO REPOSE: **to rest**

!• Question: *Could you explain what a “secretarial head” looks like?*

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 inkstains 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

STARCHED: *stiff* | AFFAIR: *something* |
WART: *Dutch: wrat* | RIM: *edge*

PLACIDITY: *calmness*

COUNTENANCE: *face*

EERIE: *causing a feeling of mystery*
UNCANNY: *mysterious* | FATEFUL: *Dutch: fatalistisch* | TO GUARD: *to protect*

PALL: *a dark, heavy covering*
TO SCRUTINIZE: *to examine closely*

AVE (LATIN): *good-bye*
MORITURI TE SALUTANT (LATIN): *those who are going to die say farewell to you*

SHABBY: *poorly dressed*
CRAVAT: *old-fashioned form of neck-tie* |
BILLOWY: *Dutch: golvend* | BOOT: *kind of shoe* | TO PROPOSE: *to suggest*

A VEIN OF: *a bit of*
TO GLORIFY: *to give honour and glory to*
CASUALLY: *Dutch: terloops*

COLLECTED: *calm*
QUOTH: *said*
SENTENTIALLY: *using an air of wisdom* |
TO EMPTY: *to finish*

■ ■ Question: *Could you describe the look of the old lady knitting in the chair?*

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

EAGER: showing a strong wish

TO MEASURE: to take the size of

CALIPERS: *Dutch*: krompasser

THREADBARE: very old-looking

GABARDINE: long, loose coat

HARMLESS: not dangerous | LEAVE: permission | CRANIUM (PL. CRANIA): bony part of the head, enclosing the brains

SEARCHING: taking in all details

MATTER-OF-FACT: casual | ANNOYED: a little angry

MENTAL: in the mind

ALIENIST: expert in the study and treatment of mental illness | ORIGINAL: eccentric person | IMPERTURBABLY: without getting angry | MESSIEURS (FR.): Gentlemen | SHARE: part | TO REAP: to get, to gather | SUCH A MAGNIFICENT: referring to the colony Marlow | DEPENDENCY: is going to | WEALTH: richness

TYPICAL: representative, characteristic

PROFOUND: needing much thought to understand | ERRONEOUS: wrong

a laugh. ‘Avoid* irritation more than exposure to* the sun. Adieu. How do you English say, eh? Good-bye. Ah! Good-bye. 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-bye 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-half-penny river-steamboat^{1 2} 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 labourer 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 has 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*

TO AVOID: to try to stay away from |
EXPOSURE TO: *Dutch*: blootstelling aan

DECENT: proper, as it should be
TO SOOTHE: to make calm
DRAWING-ROOM: room in which guests are
received | CHAT: talk

DIGNITARY: person holding a high office

EXCEPTIONAL: very special | GIFTED: with
many talents

WHISTLE: *Dutch*: (stoom)fluit
TO ATTACH: to fasten on something

EMISSARY: person sent to deliver a message
ROT: nonsense

IN PRINT: on paper

IN THE RUSH: in the middle | HUMBAG:
nonsense | GOT CARRIED OFF HER FEET:
became too excited | TO WEAN: to cause
to turn away | IGNORANT: stupid | HORRID
WAYS: terrible habits | TO VENTURE: to take
the risk

HIS HIRE: the money paid for him |
BRIGHTLY: cheerfully | QUEER: strange

TO GO TO PIECES: to break down |
CONFOUNDED: bewildering

^{1 2} Question: *What does the steamboat look like?*

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 imposter*. 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 centre of a continent, I were about to set off for the centre 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 greyish-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 pinheads* on the untouched expanse* of their background. We pounded* along, stopped, landed soldiers; went

CONTENTEDLY: in peace, without a problem

TO EMBRACE: to put your arms around

IMPOSTER: person pretending to be what he is not | ODD: strange

TO CLEAR OUT: to leave

NOTICE: warning

STARTLED: shocked

COMMONPLACE: ordinary

BLAMED: damned

SOLE: only

enigma: question, something that is puzzling

GRAND: magnificent | MEAN: poor

INSIPID: without spirit | MUTE: not talking

FEATURELESS: without characteristics

EDGE: outer limit

FRINGED WITH: with an edge of | SURF:

Dutch: branding

BLURRED BY: unclear because of

CLUSTERED: being close together

SETTLEMENT: *Dutch:* nederzetting

PINHEAD: *Dutch:* speldenknop

EXPANSE: wide area

TO POUND: to go heavily

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 back-cloth. 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 sombreness of the coast, seemed to keep me away from the truth of things, within the toil* of a

TO LEVY: to get, to collect

SHED: roughly made building

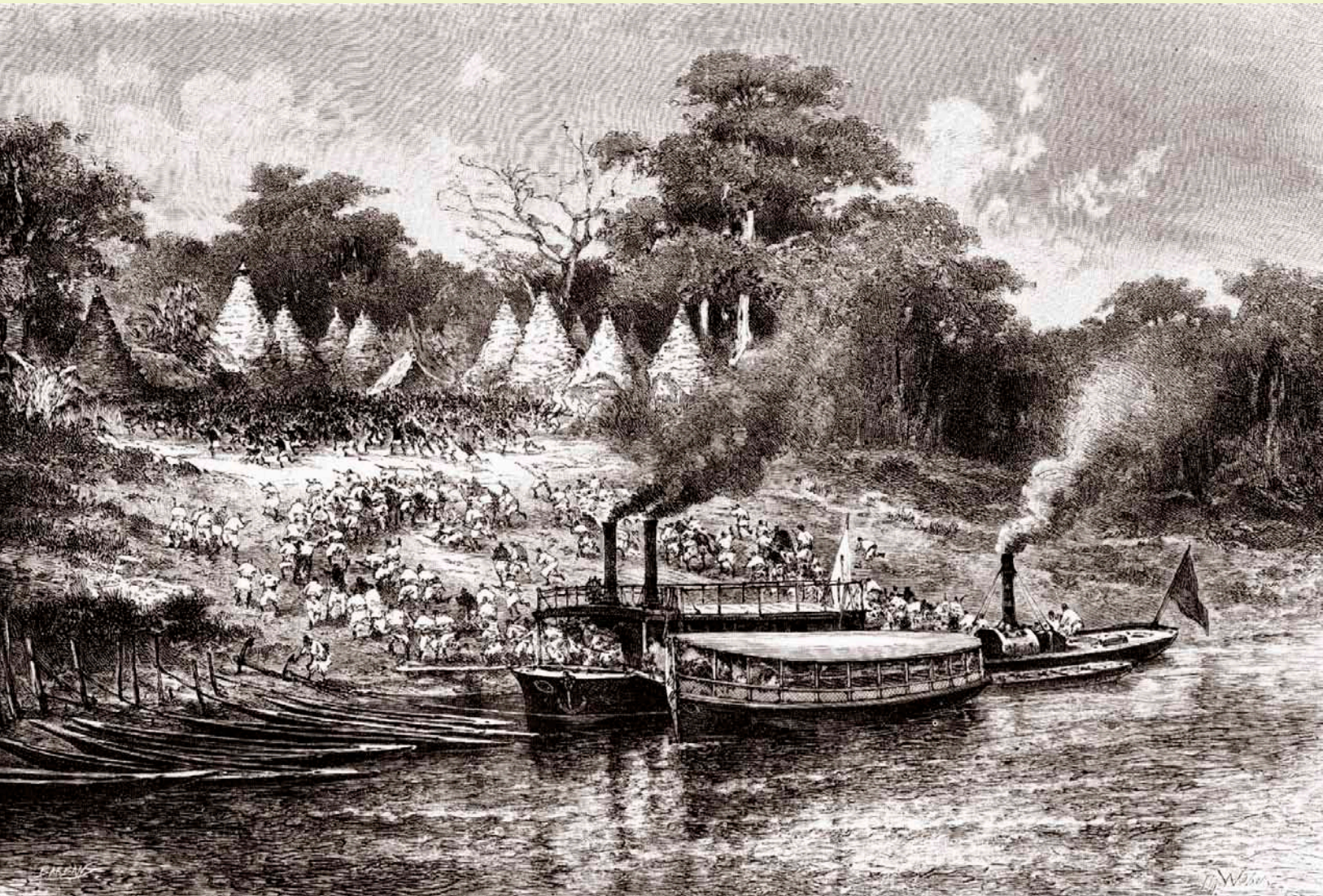
PRESUMABLY: probably

SORDID: stupid

IDLE: having nothing to do

LANGUID: very calm

TOIL: hard work



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 six-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 six-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* **13** 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

SENSELESS: foolish | DELUSION: something that is misleading

STRAIGHTFORWARD: honest

MAN-OF-WAR: armed ship

SHE: referring to the ship | TO SHELL: to shoot with shells (granaten)

ENSIGN: flag | LIMP: not straight, not firm

RAG: old bit of cloth | MUZZLE: mouth of a fire-arm | HULL: frame of a ship | GREASY: covered with oily substance | SWELL: slow rise and fall of the sea's surface

TO DART: move forward suddenly and quickly

FEEBLE: weak | SCREECH: hard sound
INSANITY: madness

DROLLERY: something strange and amusing | TO DISSIPATE: to make go away

13 Question: *Where does it in “it was not dissipated” refer to?*

lonely ship were dying of fever at the rate* of three a day) and went on. We called at some more places with fanciful 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 upcountry?’ 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.

RATE: speed

OVERHEATED: made too warm

TO WARD OFF: to keep away

CONTORTED: twisted | MANGROVES: tropical trees growing in a swamp | TO WRITHE: to twist about in pain

WEARY: making one tired

FAIR: with blond hair | MOROSE: bad tempered, in a bad mood | LANKY: not beautiful | GAIT: way of walking | WHARF: place for ships to load or unload | CONTEMPTUOUS: *Dutch*: minachtend

ATHWART: from one side to the other
VIGILANTLY: in a watchful way

‘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

MOUND: a small hill

WASTE: wilderness

EXCAVATION: *Dutch*: opgraving |

DECLIVITY: *Dutch*: helling | RAPID: place where the water is flowing very fast |

DEVASTATION: wilderness, ruined place |

ANT: *Dutch*: mier | JETTY: structure built out into the river as a landing place |

RECRUDESCENCE: new outburst | GLARE: strong, unpleasant light

TO WALLOW: to roll about

BOULDER: large piece of stone

DECAYING: falling apart | STACK: heap

CLUMP: group

TO BLINK: to shut and open the eyes quickly

DETONATION: explosion

OBJECTLESS: useless

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 the sea. All their meagre 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*¹⁴, 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 --

LOINS: *Dutch: lendenen*

JOINT: *Dutch: gewricht*

BIGHT: *Dutch: lus*

OUTRAGED: *violated (Dutch: geweld aangedaan)* | INSOLUBLE: *that cannot be understood*

TO PANT: *to take short quick breaths* | DILATED: *made wider* | NOSTRILS: *Dutch: neusgaten*

RECLAIMED: *reformed*

TO STROLL: *to walk (carelessly)*
DESPONDENTLY: *showing a loss of hope*

ALACRITY: *cheerful readiness* | PRUDENCE: *careful forethought*

TO REASSURE: *to put at rest* | RASCALLY: *dishonest*

HIS CHARGE: *the savages he is in charge of*
EXALTED: *important* | TRUST: *responsibility*

TENDER: *tender-hearted, easily hurt*

TO FEND OFF: *to defend oneself*

¹⁴ Question: *What was the reaction of “the reclaimed”, when seeing Marlow?*

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 the 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

TO COUNT: to think of

TO BLUNDER INTO: to move into as if blind, not seeing what is going to happen |

GREED: a strong desire to have | THE DEVIL OF: most terrible | TO SWAY: to control

FLABBY: weak, soft

RAPACIOUS: greedy | FOLLY: madness

INSIDIOUS: doing harm secretly

APPALLED: shocked deeply

OBLIQUELY: not straight downwards

ARTIFICIAL: made by people

TO DIVINE: to find out | QUARRY: place where stone (etc.) is got out of the ground

DRAINAGE-PIPES: pipes for carrying away water | TO TUMBLE: to throw

WANTON: serving no useful purpose

INFERNO: hell

HEADLONG: rushing

GROVE: group of trees

TEARING PACE: terrible speed | TO LAUNCH:

Dutch: lanceren

TO CROUCH: *Dutch*: hurken

TRUNK: main stem of a tree

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 the 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 angles¹⁵ sat with their legs drawn up. One, with his chin propped on his knees, stared at nothing,

EFFACED: *hardly visible*
ABANDONMENT: *being deserted*

CONFUSEDLY: *in disorder*
RECESS: *place hard to reach*

UNCONGENIAL: *not familiar*

MORIBUND: *at the point of death*

RECLINED: *at rest*

ORB: *eye*

WORSTED: *twisted woollen thread*

BADGE: *something that shows his rank*

ORNAMENT: *decoration* | CHARM: *something believed to have magic power* |

PROPI TIATORY ACT: *Dutch: verzoenend gebaar*

¹⁵ Question: *Why does the author use the term “bundles of acute angles” to describe the other two black man?*

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 clean 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 book-keeping 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

SCATTERED: wide apart

TO COLLAPSE: to fall down

MASSACRE: cruel killing of many people |

PESTILENCE: Dutch: dodelijke epidemie

TO LAP: to drink like a cat does

SHINS: Dutch: schenen

TO LOITER: to go slowly

GET-UP: style of clothes

CUFF: Dutch: manchet | ALPACA: made of a certain kind of wool

SEDENTARY: done sitting down | DESK: Dutch: bureau

INDISSOLUBLY: essentially

DUMMY: puppet | DEMORALIZATION: weakening of morals | BACKBONE: Dutch: ruggegraat | GOT-UP: beautifully made

ACHIEVEMENT: something done successfully

three years; and, later, 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.' Thus 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 invalid agent from upcountry) 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

TO SPORT: to wear, to show proudly
 MODESTLY: Dutch: bescheiden

SHE HAD A DISTASTE: she did not like
 VERILY: really | TO ACCOMPLISH: to achieve |
 DEVOTED: very loyal, fond of
 IN APPLE PIE ORDER: in perfect order

SPLAY: broad, flat and turned outwards
 MANUFACTURED: produced on a large scale
 by machinery | RUBBISHY: worthless
 BEADS: Dutch: kralen | BRASS-WIRE: Dutch:
 koperdraad | TRICKLE: weak flow
 ETERNITY: period of time that seems
 endless | YARD: little space between the
 buildings

FIENDISHLY: cruelly
 TO STAB: to wound somebody with a
 weapon | FAULTLESS: with nothing wrong
 SCENTED: perfumed | TO PERCH: to sit on
 something high
 TRUCKLE-BED: low, wheeled bed that can
 be pushed under another when not in use
 TO EXHIBIT: to show | GENTLE: light
 TO DISTRACT: to take away

TO GUARD AGAINST: to avoid | CLERICAL:
 made by a clerk
 INTERIOR: inlands

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 deck -- '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 finished and insensible*;

TO ELICIT: to draw out

TO TRAMP: to walk with heavy steps
BABBLE: confused talk | UNCOUTH: rough, uncultured

TEARFULLY: full of tears
ROW: uproar, noise

COMPOSURE: calmness | TO ALLUDE: to refer to | TOSS: quick movement
ENTRY: *Dutch*: boeking

BULGING EYES: *Dutch*: uitpuilende ogen

HOMEWARD-BOUND: who will be sent home soon | INSENSIBLE: unconscious

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*.

TRAMP: long trip, walk



“No use telling you much about that. Paths, paths, everywhere; a stamped-in network of paths spreading over the empty land, through the 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 travelling 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

THICKET: mass of trees

CHILLY: rather cold

ABLAZE: almost burning

YOKELS: simple-minded countrymen

DWELLING: house, hut

PATHETICALLY: sadly

LB.: pound

GOURD: bottle consisting of dried skin of a fruit

TREMOR: trembling

WEIRD: unnatural

TO APPEAL: to attract

UNBUTTONED: *Dutch*: met de knopen los

LANK: tall and thin

HOSPITABLE: friendly | FESTIVE: jovial

UPKEEP: keeping in good order and repair

TO IMPROVE: to make better

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. **16** 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 enclosed 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 moustaches, informed me with great

EXASPERATING: making one desperate | TO
FAINT: to lose consciousness

SCORNFULLY: in a way that shows
contempt | HAMMOCK: *Dutch*: hangmat

TO JIB: to stop suddenly
TO SNEAK OFF: to go away secretly

TO SKIN: to take off the skin

TO HOBBLE: to walk as when lame
SCRUB: trees and bushes of poor quality

FENCE: wall | RUSH: *Dutch*: bies, riet | GAP:
hole

FLABBY DEVIL: weak slow person | TO
RUN THE SHOW: to be in charge of the
organization | LANGUIDLY: very slowly

STOUT: thick | EXCITABLE: easily excited

16 Question: *Was the sick man easy to carry?*

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 axe*. 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

VOLUBILITY: *Dutch*: spraakwater |
 DIGRESSION: the turning away from the
 main subject

SIGNIFICANCE: meaning

CONFOUNDED: damned | NUISANCE:
 something terrible annoying

VOLUNTEER: *Dutch*: vrijwilliger | SKIPPER:
 captain, esp. of a small ship

CURIOUS: strange

COMPLEXION: natural colour of the face |

FEATURE: *Dutch*: gelaatstrek

TRENCHANT: resolute, decisive

AXE: *Dutch*: bijl

TO DISCLAIM: to deny, to say it is not true

INDEFINABLE: very weak, unclear

STEALTHY: secretly

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. **17** 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

INSTANT: moment

SEAL: *Dutch*: zegel

PHRASE: part of a sentence

TO INSPIRE: to give somebody a certain feeling

DEFINITE: clear

FACULTY: power of mind

ROUT: disorderly, noisy crowd

CONSTITUTION: condition of the body

LEAVE: *Dutch*: verlof | TO RIOT: to make trouble | POMPOUSLY: in a way of showing how important he thinks himself

JACK ASHORE: self important official when he is not working | EXTERNALS: outward circumstances | TO GATHER: to conclude

TO ORIGINATE: to begin, to start

SUSPICION: thought

EXTERNAL CHECKS: inspection from the outside | TO LAY LOW: to put to bed, to make sick

ENTRAILS: *Dutch*: ingewanden

KEEPING: care

PRECEDENCE: having right to a better place

17 Question: *Why is health so important for these people?*

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

MESS-ROOM: dining room

UNALTERABLE: that cannot be changed

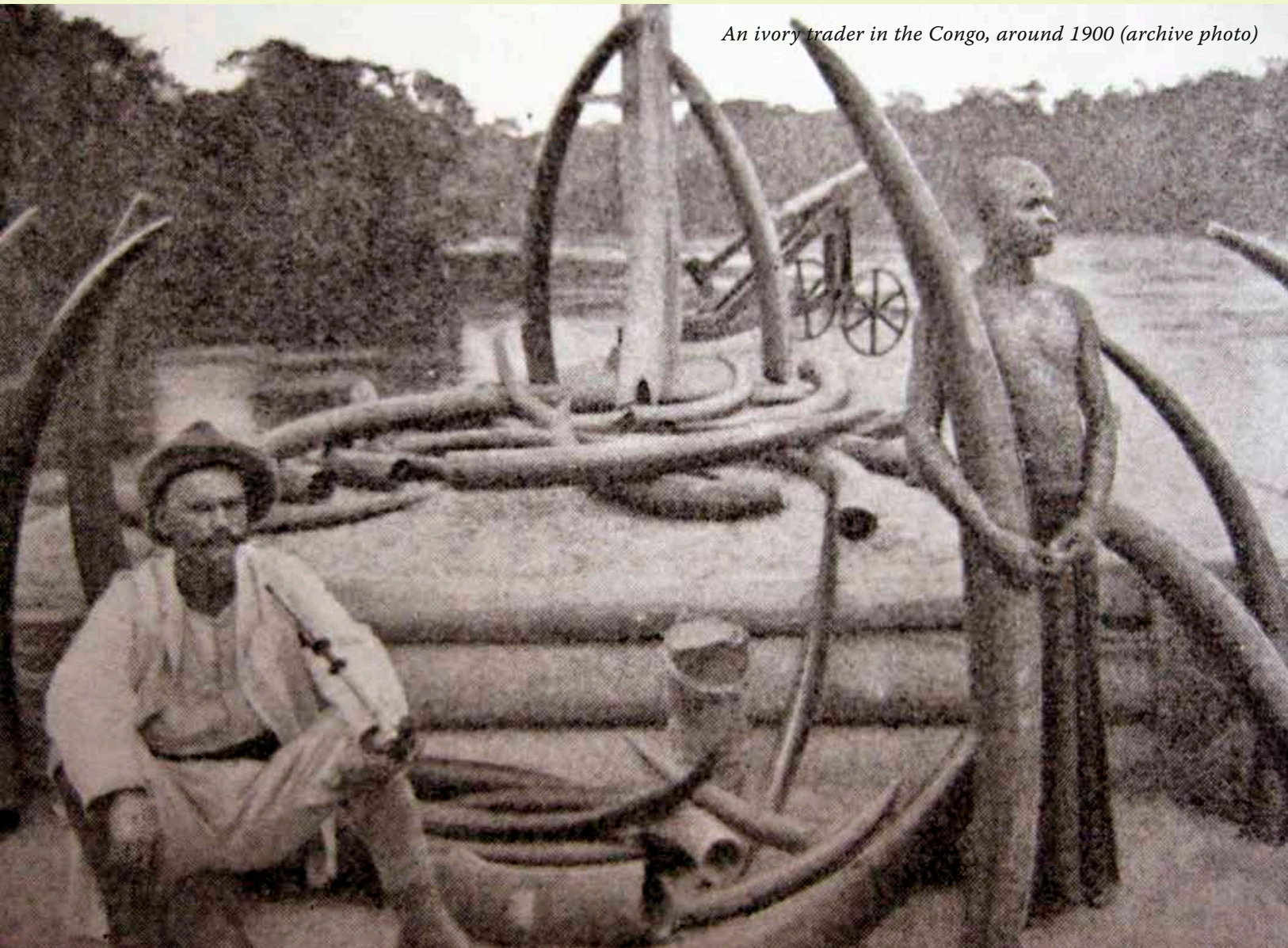
CIVIL: polite

OVERFED: having had too much food

TO PROVOKE: to make angry

INSOLENCE: offensive attitude

TO RELIEVE: to give help



An ivory trader in the Congo, around 1900 (archive photo)

with a stick of sealing-wax*, repeated several times that the situation was 'very grave*', very grave.' There were rumours 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 dumfounded* 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 can I tell?' I said. 'I haven'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 verandah) muttering to myself my opinion of him. He was a chattering* idiot. Afterwards I took it back when it was borne in upon me startlingly 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

SEALING-WAX: *Dutch: zegellak*

GRAVE: serious

JEOPARDY: danger, trouble

WEARY: tired

TO FIDGET: to move about restlessly

DUMFOUNDED: surprised, astonished

FUTILE: stupid

TO CHATTER: to talk very much

TO ESTIMATE: *Dutch: (in)schatten*

REQUISITE: needed

TO REDEEM: to rescue, to repair

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 moustaches 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, 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

FAITHLESS: without faith, trust |

BEWITCHED: *Dutch*: betoverd

TAINT: a bit, spot | RAPACITY: avarice, wanting to have | WHIFF: breath, puff |

CORPSE: (dead) body

INVINCIBLE: too strong to be overcome

CALICO: white cotton | COTTON PRINT: cotton with something printed on it

BURST INTO A BLAZE: began to burn

TO AVENGE: *Dutch*: wreken | TO CONSUME: to eat up | TRASH: worthless material

DISMANTLED: in a very bad state

CAPERS: *Dutch*: kappertjes

CAME TEARING DOWN: came running very fast | PAIL: *Dutch*: emmer

EMBERS: small pieces of burning wood in a dying fire

TO SCREECH: to scream in pain

dark I found myself at the back of two men, talking. I heard the name of Kurtz pronounced, then the words, 'take ad-vantage 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. Anyway, 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 un-congenial* 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 back-biting* and intriguing* against each

FORKED: shaped like a fork
STAND-OFFISH: cold and distant in
behaviour

TO HIS: *Dutch*: sissen

TO PERCEIVE: to see
MOUNTED: *Dutch*: ingelegd | DRESSING-
CASE: a case for holding articles of toilet
when travelling

ASSEGAI: throwing-spear.
TROPHY: something kept in memory (of a
victory or success) | TO ENTRUST: to give
as a task | BRICK: *Dutch*: baksteen

UNCONGENIAL: unpleasant

TO BEGUILLE TIME: to cause time to pass
pleasantly | TO BACKBITE: to speak evil

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 pretence 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*, **18** for in truth my body was full only 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.

TO INTRIGUE,
TO PLOT: to make and carry out secret plans

TO GET APPOINTED TO: to be placed on

TO SLANDER: to say unpleasant things about each other | EFFECTUALLY: with result

HALTER: rope put around a horse's head

CHARITABLE: *Dutch*: liefdadig | TO KICK: to strike with the foot | SOCIABLE: friendly, fond of company

TO PUMP SOMEBODY: to get information out of somebody | TO ALLUDE: to refer
LEADING QUESTION: question that suggests something | SEPULCHRAL CITY: referring to Paris disc: flat round plate | CURIOSITY: wanting to know everything |
SUPERCILIOUS: *Dutch*: hooghartig |
AWFULLY: terribly

TO BAFFLE ONESELF: to make oneself confused

PREVARICATOR: someone who avoids telling the truth | TO CONCEAL: to hide

TO YAWN: *Dutch*: gapen
BLINDFOLDED: with a cloth covering the eyes

18 Question: *Why did this man baffle himself?*

The background was sombre -- 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 an empty 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. Every one 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

MUCH OBLIGED: thank you very much

PRODIGY: person who has unusual abilities

TO DECLAIM: to speak as if addressing an audience | FOR THE GUIDANCE OF: to lead

A SINGLENES OF PURPOSE: with only one purpose

I DARE SAY: | bet
gang: group of people
VIRTUE: excellence

TO RECOMMEND: to speak favourably of
LIGHT DAWNED UPON ME: now |
understood what he meant | INFLUENTIAL:
with power in the right places

CONFIDENTIAL: secret

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 moustaches, 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 that 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 fore-finger through him, and would

LISTLESSLY: too tired to do anything
WHENCE PROCEEDED: from which came
TO ASCEND: to go up

INDEFATIGABLE: that cannot be tired out
SERVE HIM RIGHT: that is what he deserves |
TRANSGRESSION: sin, making of a mistake
CONFLAGRATION: great fire

CRESTFALLEN: disappointed
SERVILE: slave-like

SCATHING: severe
MUFF: person who is stupid | GO TO:
expressing impatience | KNOT: group | TO
GESTICULATE: Dutch: gebaren

SPECTRALLY: in a ghostlike way

LAMENTABLE: ugly
TO GO HOME TO: to reach, to touch

TO FETCH: to produce
TO MEND ONE'S PACE: to go quickly

DISPOSITION: feeling towards Mr. Kurtz

MEPHISTOPHELES: the devil in the Faust legend

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 sombre 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*. ¹⁹ What were we who had strayed* in here? Could we handle that dumb* thing²⁰, 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

DIRT: *Dutch: vuil*

PRECIPITATELY: *in a hasty way*

TO HAUL UP: *to pull up*

PRIMEVAL: *very old*

LAYER: *Dutch: laag*

RANK: *growing too thick*

TO MAT: *to grow in disorder, to be twisted*

GAP: *hole*

TO JABBER: *to talk excitedly*

APPEAL: *earnest call* | MENACE: *threat*

TO STRAY: *to wander*

DUMB: *silent*

INHABITANTS IN: *people living in*

SHY: *Dutch: verlegen*

¹⁹ Question: *What exactly is Marlow thinking about when he says: "I wondered whether the stillness ... as a menace"?*

²⁰ Question: *What is the "dumb thing"?*

‘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 flavour 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 pretence* 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

TO DETEST: to hate very much

STRAIGHT: honest

TO APPAL: to shock deeply

MORTALITY: death

PRETENCE: make-believe, representing something that is false

VAIN: useless

RELATION: the telling | TO CONVEY: to show clearly commingling: mixing

REVOLT: rebellion

TO CAPTURE: to catch | THE INCREDIBLE: that which is difficult to believe

EPOCH: period

TO PENETRATE: to make way into

TO REFLECT: to think about

PITCH DARK: completely dark

A Congo riverboat of the same type Marlow sails in this story (archive photo)



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 clue to the faint uneasiness inspired by this narrative* that seemed to shape* itself without human lips in the heavy night-air of the river²¹.

NARRATIVE: story
TO SHAPE: to form

“... 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 long negro, letter-bag on shoulder and staff in hand, left our station for the coast. And several times a

MANGLED: damaged badly

YOU CONCEIVE: you see

ADEQUATE TOOLS: people fit for the job

PHYSICAL: bodily

SENSIBLE: reasonable, practical | TO REJECT: to refuse to accept | WANTONLY: on purpose

RIVET: *Dutch*: klinknagel

PILED UP: one upon the other

TO STOOP: to bend the body forwards and downwards

²¹ Question: *What river is the l-person talking about?*

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,

GHASTLY: ugly | GLAZED: covered with a glasslike surface

TO SET AFLOAT: to make it ready to go on the water

UNRESPONSIVE: not reacting

I WRITE FROM DICTATION: | write what they tell me to write

HIPPOTAMUS: *Dutch*: nijlpaard
SALVAGE: property that is saved

TO ROAM: to wander

BRUTE: animal

TO APPREHEND: to understand

ASKEW: not straight | WITHOUT A WINK: without closing the eyes | CURT: short

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*

TIN-POT: poorly looking | TO CLAMBER: to climb

TO EXPEND: to spend

TO LAZE ABOUT: to hang around without doing anything

AFT: at the back end

DANGLING: hanging loosely

TO CHUM: to form a friendship with

TO DESPISE: to hate

ASPECT: face, look | BALD: having no hair

TO PROSPER: to do well

LOCALITY: place

WAIST: middle of the body

PIGEON: *Dutch*: duif

CONNOISSEUR: somebody who knows all about it | TO RAVE: to talk wildly

LOOP: *Dutch*: lus

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

TO SQUAT: to sit an one’s heels | TO RINSE: to wash | WRAPPER: referring to the serviette | SOLEMNLY: seriously

IN A LOW VOICE: softly
LUNATICS: madmen

JIG: quick dance | TO CAPER: to jump about playfully | HULK: old ship
VIRGIN FOREST: a forest in its original state, no trees having been felled

HOVEL: small house in a very bad state |
TO OBSCURE: to make dark

EXUBERANT: *Dutch*: weelderig
ENTANGLED: twisted, mixed | TRUNK: main stem of a tree | BOUGH: big branch |
FESTOON: a chain of flowers and leaves hanging from two points | RIOTING: exuberant | CRESTED: with feathers
TO TOPPLE OVER: to overturn and fall down | TO DEADEN: to take away the force |
SPLASH: sound of falling water | SNORT: *Dutch*: gesnuif | ICHTHYOSAURUS: *Dutch*:: prehistorische hagedis

INFLECTION: suffering | VISITATION: trouble

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 donkey²²; a lot of tents, campstools, tin boxes, white cases, brown bales would be shot down in the court-yard, and the air of mystery would deepen a little over the muddle* of the station. Five such instalments* 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 neighbourhood, 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

SECTION: part
HEADED: led (to lead)
TAN: brown
ELEVATION: high position
QUARRELSOME: ready to fight

MUDDLE: confusion
INSTALMENT: delivery
LOOT: *Dutch*: buit | OUTFIT: *Dutch*:
uitrusting
TO LUG: to pull with much effort |
RAID: sudden attack | EQUITABLE: just,
reasonable | INEXTRICABLE: that cannot
be straightened out | SPOILS: profits

SORDID: mean, bad | BUCCANEER: pirate |
RECKLESS: *Dutch*: roekeloos | HARDIHOOD,
AUDACITY: great courage
FORESIGHT: ability to see future needs |
BATCH: group

OUT OF THE BOWELS OF THE LAND: from
under the ground
BURGLAR: thief
EXPENSES: costs

EXTERIOR: outward appearance | BUTCHER:
Dutch: slager
CUNNING: clever in an unpleasant way |
PAUNCH: belly | WITH OSTENTATION:
showing it clearly | TO INFEST: to be
present at

²² Question: *Could you describe the niggers walking after the donkey?*

everlasting confab* .

CONFAB: talk

“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.”

TO SLIDE: to slip along

EQUIPPED WITH: full of

TO SET ABOUT: to organize

“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

DOZE: light sleep

BIZARRE: not making any sense

TO GET THE BETTER OF: to overcome, to defeat | DROWSINESS: sleepiness

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 dugout* 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 dugout, 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

TO BOTHER: to take the trouble

TO DISPOSE OF: to miss

IMPUDENCE: rudeness

HOARSELY: in a rough voice | TO JERK:

Dutch: eruitgooien | PRIME SORT: very good quality

RUMBLE: deep sound | INVOICE: list of goods sold with the price charged

INDUCEMENT: reason

VEXED: annoyed

HALF-CASTE: *Dutch*: halfbloed

TO INTEND: to plan

BARE OF: without

DUGOUT: canoe made by hollowing a tree trunk

ADEQUATE: good, acceptable

RELIEF: help

DESOLATE: lonely

TO CONDUCT: to lead

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 rumours.' 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 best.' 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 centre 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

PRUDENCE: care | PLUCK: courage
 INVARIABLY: always | ALLUDED TO: referred to | SCOUNDREL: rascal, bad person

SPECIES: sort
 PESTILENTIAL: very annoying

UNFAIR: dishonest

TO ENDANGER: to bring in danger
 TO OUTLAST: to last longer than

PESTIFEROUS: morally dangerous

BEACON: *Dutch*: baken

TO HUMANIZE: to make more human
 CONCEIVE YOU: imagine | ASS: *Dutch*: ezel
 HE GOT CHOKED: he almost could not get any breath | EXCESSIVE: very much |
 INDIGNATION: *Dutch*: verontwaardiging

in thought. The manager was switching his leg²³ 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!’ ‘Hm’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 dishonouring* 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 figures²⁴ 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

SLENDER: little | TWIG: *Dutch*: twijg |
SAGACIOUS: wise, showing intelligence

TO DISHONOUR: to bring shame on |
FLOURISH: waving movement |
TREACHEROUS: false | APPEAL: call |
LURKING: waiting

DISPLAY: showing it clearly | CONFIDENCE:
trust

OMINOUS: threatening

TO TUG: to pull hard

BLADE: long leaf of grass

DIVER: *Dutch*: duiker

LESS VALUABLE: they were not needed so
very much

- ²³ Question: *What was the manager doing with his leg?*
²⁴ Question: *What are “these two figures” confronted with?*

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 water-way ran on, deserted, into the gloom of over-shadowed distances. On silvery sand-banks 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* for 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

COMPARATIVELY: rather

TO RIOT: to grow abundantly
IMPENETRABLE: you cannot go into it

ALLIGATOR: reptile, like a crocodile

A MOB OF: very many | WOODED: with trees on it | TO BUTT: to come upon, to run into | SHOALS: places in the water where there are sandbanks

TO SPARE: left

IMPLACABLE: without pity

CHANNEL: deeper part of the waterway | TO DISCERN: to see | INSPIRATION: good thought or idea
TO CLAP MY TEETH SMARTLY: to act in the right way | BEFORE MY HEART FLEW OUT: before losing self-control | TO SHAVE BY A FLUKE: to pass very close by | INFERNAL: devilish | SLY: bad | SNAG: sharp object

drowned all the pilgrims; I had to keep a lookout 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

INCIDENTS OF THE SURFACE: **normal things, just to keep going** | TO FADE: **to become less important**

TO PERFORM ON THE TIGHT-ROPE: **to do something under stress** | TUMBLE: **fall**

Steaming on the Congo river (archive photo)



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

VAN: big car for carrying goods

THUMP: heavy blow

TO WADE: to go with difficulty through the water

TO ENLIST: to take on board

CLINGING TO: hanging close to

TUMBLE-DOWN: likely to fail down

CAPTIVE: prisoner

A SPELL: magic

REVERBERATING: echoing

CLAPS: loud, explosive noises | STERN-WHEEL: *Dutch*: hekwiel

TO HUG: to keep close to

BEGRIMED: dirty

TO CRAWL: to go slowly

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 towards 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 wood-cutters 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 pre-historic 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,

LOFTY: very high | PORTICO: *Dutch:*
zuilengang

TO BAR THE WAY FOR OUR RETURN: to make
it impossible to return

SUSTAINED: going on | TO HOVER: to hang

TO HERALD: to announce, to tell
something is coming | DESCENT: coming
TO SNAP: to break with a sharp noise

ACCURSED: hateful | INHERITANCE: *Dutch:*
erfenis | TO SUBDUE: to bring under
control | ANGUISH: severe suffering
TOIL: hard work
RUSH: *Dutch:* riet

YELL: scream | WHIRL: quick movement
LIMB: *Dutch:* ledemaat

DROOP: hanging down | FOLIAGE: all the
leaves of a tree.
FRENZY: violent excitement

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 travelling in the night of first ages, of those ages that are gone, leaving hardly a sign -- and no memories²⁵.

“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, valour*, 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 in-born strength. 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

SHACKLED: *Dutch:geboeid*

REMOTE: *far away*

KINSHIP: *being related, having connections*

FRANKNESS: *being honest*

VALOUR: *brave attitude*

STRIPPED OF ITS CLOAK OF TIME: *without thinking of time, eternal* | TO SHUDDER: *to shake, tremble with fear*

STUFF: *material*

ACQUISITIONS: *things you have acquired, gotten* | RAGS: *pieces of old cloth*

DELIBERATE: *thought out well*

²⁵ Question: *Why does Marlow say: “We could not understand ... ?”*

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,

WHILES: times

IMPROVED: lit. made better; trained

SPECIMEN: one of a sort | TO FIRE UP: to get, keep burning

EDIFYING: you could learn from it

BREECHES: trousers

TO SQUINT: to look sideways | GAUGE:

Dutch: peilglas | INTREPIDITY: fearlessness

PATE: head

SCAR: *Dutch*: litteken

THRALL: slave | WITCHCRAFT: use of magic

IMPROMPTU: without preparation

FLATWAYS: flat

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* wood-pile. 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 Towser, Towson

TREACHEROUS: dangerous
SHALLOW: not deep

TO PEER: to look | CREEPY: full of fear

REED: *Dutch*: riet | INCLINED: not standing straight | TATTERS: rags

NEATLY STACKED: made into a nice heap

ILLEGIBLE: could not be read

ADVERSELY: differently

TWILL: strong cotton woven in a special way

RUBBISH: things thrown away | TO REPOSE: to throw in

TO STITCH: *Dutch*: stikken (met garen) |
AFRESH: again

INQUIRY INTO: trying to find out about

-- 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 pencilled* 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 riverside. 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

MASTER: commander

DREARY: not interesting

REPULSIVE: hateful

FIGURES: *Dutch*: getallen

TO DISSOLVE: to fall apart

BREAKING STRAIN: *Dutch*: breekspanning |

TACKLE: set of ropes for working a ship's sails | TO ENTHRAL: to take the whole

attention

HUMBLE: *Dutch*: nederig

LUMINOUS: clear

PURCHASE: the buying, something bought

ASTOUNDING: perplexing

PENCILLED: written | MARGIN: *Dutch*: kantlijn

CIPHER: code, secret writing

TO LUG: to carry

EXTRAVAGANT: enormous

TO AID: to help

TO LEAVE OFF: to stop

SHELTER: something that gives a pleasant feeling of safety

INTRUDER: somebody who enters without right | MALEVOLENTLY: angrily

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 any one 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

ASSUMED: *Dutch: geveinsde*

CURRENT: *force of the streaming water*
AT HER LAST GASP: *exhausted* | TO FLOP:
to move with difficulty | LANGUID: *having*
lost energy | I CAUGHT MYSELF: | *found*
that | *was* | ON TIPTOE: *in dead silence* |
IN SOBER TRUTH: *honestly* | FLICKER: *weak*
flame

ABREAST: *side by side with something*

RESIGNATION: *attitude of accepting the*
situation without complaining | TO FRET:
to be bad tempered | TO FUME: *to show*
irritation

A MERE FUTILITY: *of no use at all*

FLASH OF INSIGHT: *short moment of*
understanding | TO MEDDLE WITH: *to be*
busy with, without being asked to

DUSK: *when the light is almost gone*

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.²⁶ 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 clamour*, modulated* in savage discords*, filled our ears. The sheer unexpectedness of it made my hair

SUSPICIOUS: *Dutch: verdacht* | RIPPLES: small movements on the surface of the water

TO BRING UP: to (cause to) stop

CUTTING: passage dug out in the ground

DUMB: silent

TO LASH: to fasten, to tie

CREEPER: plant that creeps along the ground | UNDERGROWTH: *Dutch: kreupelhout* | SLENDER: thin

TO SHIFT: to change position

SHUTTER: movable cover for a window

MULTITUDE: quantity | MATTED: tangled, twisted | TO BLAZE: to burn

TO GREASE: to put an oily substance an

GROOVE: *Dutch: sponning*

TO HEAVE IN: to take in | TO PAY OUT: to throw out | MUFFLED: (made) dull, not too loud | RATTLE: short sounds quickly one after the other | INFINITE: endless |

TO SOAR: to go up in the air | OPAQUE: that cannot be seen through | CLAMOUR: loud, confused shouting | TO MODULATE: to make a change in tone | DISCORD: *Dutch: dissonant*

TO SOAR: to go up in the air | OPAQUE: that cannot be seen through | CLAMOUR: loud, confused shouting | TO MODULATE: to make a change in tone | DISCORD: *Dutch: dissonant*

dissonant

²⁶ Question: *Why was the chain paid out again?*

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 sidespring boots*, and pink pyjamas tucked into* his socks. Two others remained open-mouthed a while 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 hauled 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 be all 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

TO CULMINATE: to reach the highest point

INTOLERABLE: you cannot endure

SHORT: here: suddenly

OBSTINATELY LISTENING: trying hard to hear

WHISKERS: *Dutch*: bakkebaarden |

SIDESPRING BOOTS: high boots | TO TUCK INTO: to put into | TO DASH: to run quickly

INCONTINENTLY: without any self-control

TO DART: to throw | WINCHESTERS: certain kind of rifles

BLURRED: made unclear

TO DISSOLVE: *Dutch*: oplossen (in)

TO BE HAULED IN SHORT: to be taken in as far as possible without actually tripping the anchor

AWED: impressed

BUTCHERED: killed in a terrible way

TO TWITCH: to show sudden uncontrollable movement | STRAIN: stress

DISCOMPOSED: disturbed

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 over-board. It looked like a high-handed* proceeding; but it was really a case of legitimate* self-defence. You can't breathe dead hippo waking, sleeping, and eating, and at the same time keep your precarious* grip on existence.

OUTRAGEOUS: **cruel, shocking** | ALERT: **wide awake**

CHEST: **breast** | FRINGED: *Dutch*: **vol met franjes** | FIERCE: **showing anger, violence** | ARTFULLY: **in a clever way** | RINGLETS: **curls**

PROFOUNDLY: **very** | PENSIVE: **deep in thought**

ENGAGED: **hired**

COUNTLESS: **very many**

HULLABALOO: **uproar, disturbance**

CONSIDERABLE: **rather big**

HIGH-HANDED: **using power without thinking of other people's feelings** |

LEGITIMATE: **lawful**

PRECARIOUS: **uncertain**

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 riverside 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 honourable 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 colour, 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?

PROVISIONS: food
CURRENCY: means of payment

HOSTILE: like enemies
TINS: *Dutch*: blikken
GOAT: *Dutch*: geit
RECONDITE: out of the way

TO SNARE: to catch

LUMP: *Dutch*: homp
DOUGH: *Dutch*: deeg

SUSTENANCE: food
TO GNAW: to bite hard

TUCK IN: full meal

TO WEIGH: to think of

GLOSSY: smooth and shiny
TO RESTRAIN: to hold back
THAT BAFFLED PROBABILITY: that did not seem possible

TO OWN: to confess
UNWHOLESOME: unhealthy

-- 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 honour? 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 chaffin* a breeze. Don't you know the devilry* of lingering* starvation, its exasperating torment*, its black thoughts, its sombre 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*, dishonour, 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 clamour that had swept by us on the river-bank, behind the blind whiteness of the fog.

“Two pilgrims were quarrelling in hurried

UNAPPETIZING: unattractive | VANITY:

Dutch: ijdelheid

TO PERVADE: to go through

PAW-STROKE: rough touch | PRELIMINARY:

coming first and preparing for

what follows | TRIFLING: something

unimportant | ONSLAUGHT: furious attack |

IN DUE COURSE: afterwards

INEXORABLE: without pity

SUPERSTITION: *Dutch: bijgeloof*

CAN WEAR IT OUT: can stand it until it is
past

CHAFF: something very light that can
easily be blown away | DEVILRY: evil | TO
LINGER: to stay close | TORMENT: *Dutch:*
kwelling | FEROCITY: cruelty

BEREAVEMENT: when everything is stolen |
PERDITION: loss

SCRUPLE: uneasiness of conscience
TO PROWL: to go about looking for food |
CORPSE: dead body

DAZZLING: shining too bright | FOAM:
Dutch: schuim

UNFATHOMABLE: you cannot come to the
bottom, you cannot understand | ENIGMA:
mysterious problem | INEXPLICABLE: that
cannot be explained | GRIEF: sadness

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 we 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 lookout. 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,

HE WAS SINCERE: **he meant what he was saying**; | TO PRESERVE APPEARANCES: **to make it look all right**

TO FETCH AGAINST: **to hit**

TO PERISH: **to die** | SPEEDILY: **quickly**
I AUTHORIZE YOU: | **give you the right**

TO DEFER TO: **to depend on**
MARKED: **clear** | CIVILITY: **politeness**
IN SIGN OF: **to show** | APPRECIATION:

Dutch: waardering

TO GRUB FOR IVORY: **to turn over the earth in order to get ivory** | BESET BY: **having on all sides** | ENCHANTED: **under a magic spell**
FABULOUS: **incredible**

OBVIOUS: **clear**

I had also judged the jungle of both banks quite impenetrable -- and yet eyes were in it, eyes that had seen us. The riverside 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* 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 lookout? 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,

BODING OF: which is a sign of | HOSTILE INTENTION: planning war-like actions
 IRRESISTIBLE: *Dutch: onweerstaanbaar*

TO EXPOUND: to explain
 PROXIMITY: nearness, being near
 ULTIMATELY: finally | VENT ITSELF: came out, came to the surface | APATHY: having no interest for what is happening
 TO REVILE: to call bad names

I DELIVERED A REGULAR LECTURE: | made a real speech

COTTON-WOOL: *Dutch: watten* | CHOKING: almost getting no air | STIFLING: difficult to breathe in

AT REPULSE: to drive back

IN ITS ESSENCE: actually

COMMENCEMENT: beginning

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 sand-bank, or rather of a chain of shallow patches stretching down the middle of the river. They were discoloured, 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* friends²⁷ was sounding in the bows* just below me. This steamboat was exactly like a decked scow*. On the deck, there were two little teakwood houses, with doors and windows. The boiler was in the fore-end, and the machinery right astern*. Over the whole there was

TO FLOUNDER: to make violent efforts |
TO FLOP: to move with difficulty | ISLET: small island | HUMMOCK: little hill

AWASH: washed over by water

FAIRLY: completely

IN SERRIED RANKS: close together

LIMB: thick branch TO PROJECT: to stick out | RIGID: that cannot be bent

TO SHEER: to make go (in the direction of)

SOUNDING-POLE: *Dutch*: loodlijn

FORBEARING: patient

BOWS: front part of the boat

SCOW: *Dutch*: schouw

ASTERN: at the back

²⁷ Question: *What was this "hungry friend" doing?*

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 on 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

STANCHION: upright post for supporting something | FUNNEL: *Dutch:*

schoorsteenpijp

COUCH: bed

MARTINI-HENRY: kind of rifle

TRIBE: *Dutch:* stam

HELMSMAN: man at the wheel | TO SPORT: to wear proudly | WRAPPER: kind of dress

UNSTABLE: of changing mood

SWAGGER: air

PREY: *Dutch:* prooi | ABJECT: like a coward |

FUNK: fear

TO WHIZZ: to make the sound of something rushing through the air

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 colour. 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 sight 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 wood-cutters raised a warlike whoop*; the report of a rifle just at my back

SPOKES: *Dutch*:: spaken

TO CHAMP: to bite

REINED IN: restrained

ON THE LEVEL: on the same height

VEIL: *Dutch*: sluier

TO DART OUT: to run out

FUSILLADE: continuous firing

TO SQUIRT LEAD: to shoot | A DEUCE OF A LOT: very much

WHOOOP: loud cry

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

DASH: quick movement

TO LET OFF: to fire

I CROWDED HER INTO THE BANK: made her go towards the bank

Drawings for Heart of Darkness, the graphic novel, by Catherine Anyango



it would when the squirts got empty*. I threw my head back²⁸ to a glinting* whizz that traversed* he 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 lustre*. 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

THE SQUIRTS GOT EMPTY: there were no bullets left | TO GLINT: to gleam, to flash |
TO TRAVERSE: to go through

EVANESCENT: quickly becoming vague

CANE: *Dutch*: rietstengel

TO WRENCH: to take away with difficulty

TO CLUTCH: to hold tightly | SHAFT: long stem of a spear | TO LUNG: to make a sudden forward movement

GASH: long deep wound

LUSTRE: brilliance

PRECIOUS: worth very much

TO ATTEND TO: to pay attention to

TO JERK: to give a pull

SCREECH: hard whistle

CHECKED: slopped

²⁸ Question: *Why did Marlow throw his head back?*

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 questions 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 sombre, brooding, and menacing expression. The lustre 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* 29

TREMULOUS: *trembling* | WAIL: *loud, complaining cry*

COMMOTION: *movement* | SHOWER: *Dutch: (regen)bui*

A-STARBOARD: *Dutch: naar stuurboord*

TO INQUIRE: *to ask* | TO ENVELOP: *to hold*

TO FROWN: *Dutch: fronsen*

TO FADE: *to change slightly* | GLASSINESS: *lifeless stare*

I MADE A GRAB AT: | *took him roughly by*

MORBIDLY: *terribly*

TO TUG: *to pull*

TO STRIVE AFTER: *to try to get somewhere*

29 Question: *What did Marlow feel he had been striving after?*

something altogether without a substance. I couldn't have been more disgusted if I had travelled 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." . . .

TO DISCOURSE: to make a speech

TO BARTER: to exchange goods for other goods | TO SWINDLE: to get something from somebody in a dishonest way

A GIFTED CREATURE: a talented man

PRE-EMINENTLY: most of all

TO BEWILDER: to puzzle | TO ILLUMINATE: to make clear | EXALTED: *Dutch*: waardig

CONTEMPTIBLE: *Dutch*: verachtelijk | TO

PULSATE: to beat (like a heart) | DECEITFUL: misleading

CLUB: heavy stick

TO ROB OF: to take away from somebody

DESTINY: *Dutch*: bestemming | TO SIGH: *Dutch*: zuchten

"Hadn't I been told ...that he had collected, bartered, swindled, or stolen more ivory than all the other agents together?" (Archive photo)



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 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

TO FLARE: to burn with a bright flame

WORN: tired | FOLDS: lines

VIGOROUS: strong

TO RETREAT: to withdraw | TO ADVANCE: to come forward

TO MOOR: to make (a ship) secure by cables

APPETITE: desire for food

TO SHED TEARS: to cry

FORTITUDE: calm self-control when in difficulty | I WAS CUT TO THE QUICK: | was very sad | INESTIMABLE: very important

IMPALPABLE: *Dutch*: ontastbaar

ATROCIOUS: very cruel | SORDID: contemptible

TO LAY: to make go away

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 own³⁰ by the inconceivable ceremonies of some devilish initiation. He was its spoiled* and pampered* favourite. 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 favour 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

LEST: or

TO DISINTER: to dig up from the earth

MY INTENDED: my future wife

LOFTY FRONTAL BONE: noble forehead

BALD: without hair

TO PAT: to hit gently

TO CARESS: to touch friendly

TO WITHER: to become dry

VEINS: blood | TO CONSUME: to eat

TO SEAL: to close tightly

SPOILED: *Dutch: verwend* | PAMPERED:

being treated too friendly

SHANTY: poorly made hut

TUSK: long pointed tooth

DISPARAGINGLY: *Dutch: kleinerend*

PARCEL: packet

PRODIGIOUS: enormous | PEAL: loud

echoing noise

REFLECTION: thought

³⁰ Question: *what is meant by "seal his soul to its own"?*

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 neighbours 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 neighbour 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

GALLOWS: *Dutch: galg*
LUNATIC ASYLUM: *madhouse*

UNTRAMMELLED: *freely*

INNATE: *inborn*

TO ASSAULT: *to attack*

MADE A BARGAIN FOR HIS SOUL WITH THE
DEVIL: *sold his soul to the devil*

SIGHTS: *things we see*
A STANDING PLACE: *a place you can stay*
GAIN: *something you win* | I WON'T
PRETEND TO SAY: | *can't say*

CONTAMINATED: *made dirty*

UNOSTENTATIOUS: *not easy to see*

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 honoured 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 him³¹ -- 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 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*,' etc., etc. 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*.

TO ACCOUNT TO: *Dutch: rekenschap afleggen* | WRAITH: ghost of Kurtz, just before he died

APPROPRIATELY: rightly, justly
TO SUPPRESS: to stop, to put an end to
FOR ITS FUTURE GUIDANCE: acting as a guide for the future

ELOQUENT: in beautiful language
VIBRATING WITH: full of | HIGH-STRUNG: *Dutch: hoogdravend*

TO PRESIDE: to have position of authority

RELUCTANTLY: with difficulty | TO GATHER: to understand

DEITY: god
TO EXERT: to bring to use
UNBOUNDED: unlimited
TO SOAR: *Dutch: zweven*
PERORATION: last part of a speech
AUGUST: majestic | BENEVOLENCE: the showing of good will

³¹ Question: *What exactly is the position of this mr. Kurtz as Marlow describes him?*

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 honour; 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

TO TINGLE: to be moved

ALTRUISTIC: unselfish

TO EXTERMINATE: to destroy completely

POSTSCRIPTUM: sentence added later on

TO ENTREAT: to ask earnestly

INDISPUTABLE: unquestionable

DUST-BIN: *Dutch*: vuilnisbak

SWEEPINGS: dirt

RUDIMENTARY: undeveloped

AGGRAVATED: made worse | WITCH:

woman said to use magic

TAINTED: touched

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 doorstep; 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

DEFICIENCY: something imperfect

PROFUNDITY: depth

TO HUG: to put the arms round tightly

ADO: troubling

WISP: small bundle

TO CONGREGATE: to come together

AWNING-DECK: deck with a canvas cover

over it | MAGPIE: *Dutch*: ekster

PROMPTITUDE: readiness to act

TO EMBALM: *Dutch*: balsemen

INADMISSIBLE: that cannot be allowed

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 avenged. ‘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 riverside 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.

SECOND-RATE: not very good

TEMPTATION: something they wanted badly

DUFFER: stupid person

SLAUGHTER: killing of many people at once

GINGERY: with red hair

TO HOWL: to make loud cries | INDIGNANT: angry

TO EDGE IN: to move in slowly

“Through my glasses I saw the slope of a hill interspersed with rare trees* and perfectly free from under-growth. 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 enclosure 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 waterside 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 manoeuvred 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 the front, patches on elbows, on knees; coloured binding* around his jacket, scarlet edging* at the bottom of his trousers; and the sun-shine made him look extremely gay and wonderfully neat withal*, because you could see

INTERSPERSED WITH RARE TREES: with same trees here and there | DECAYING: almost falling apart | SUMMIT: top

SLIM: thin
 ORNAMENTED: decorated
 CARVED: cut

TO BECKON: to call attention (by the movement of the arm) | PERSISTENTLY: continuingly

PRUDENTLY: carefully

HOLLAND: strong rough cotton cloth

BINDING: strip, string
 EDGING: narrow border

WITHAL: as well, also

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 wind-swept 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

TO PEEL: *Dutch*: vervellen

COUNTENANCE: face

TO LODGE: to become fixed

SHAMEFULLY: terribly, badly | I HAD

HOLED MY CRIPPLE: | had made a hole in

this cripple steamer | PUG-NOSE: *Dutch*:

mopneus

VIVACIOUSLY: lively, gay | MY FAITH: truly

RATE: speed

him,' he exclaimed with severe exaltation. 'But now -- ' He waved his arm, and in the twinkling of an eye was in the utter-most 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 . . . honour . . . 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 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 favourite 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

DESPONDENCY: **loss of hope**
 POSSESSED HIMSELF OF: **took**

TO GABBLE: **to speak quickly and not clear**

ARCH-PRIEST: *Dutch*: aartspriester

WAS RECONCILED: **had become friends again**

ENLARGE THE MIND: **fill the mind with experience**

REPROACHFUL: *Dutch*: verwijtend | I HELD

MY TONGUE: | **did not say anything**

TO FIT OUT: **to supply with**

TO NARRATE: **to tell**

WITH KEEN ENJOYMENT: **full of pleasure**

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.”

“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 parti-coloured* rags, his destitution*, his loneliness, the essential desolation* of his futile* wanderings. For months -- for years

ECSTATICALLY: with great joy

I PURSUED: | went on

IN MOTLEY: in clown’s clothing

TO ABSCOND: to go away suddenly | MIME:

actor in a special kind of drama |

IMPROBABLE: *Dutch*: onwaarschijnlijk |

INEXPLICABLE: you cannot explain it |

INSOLUBLE: that cannot be solved

PARTI-COLOURED: differently coloured
in different parts | DESTITUTION: being
without food, clothes, etc | DESOLATION:

being lonely | FUTILE: without purpose
his life hadn’t been worth a day’s

-- his life hadn't been worth a day's purchase*; and there he was gallantly*, thoughtlessly alive, to all appearances 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*,

PURCHASE: he had been on the point of death | GALLANTLY: looking beautiful | TO ALL APPEARANCES: so far as can be seen | INDESTRUCTIBLE: that cannot be destroyed | SOLELY: only | BY THE VIRTUE OF: because of | UNREFLECTING: thoughtless | AUDACITY: fearlessness | TO SEDUCE TO: to bring to | GLAMOUR: beauty, romance | URGED HIM: forced him | UNSCATHED: unharmed | PRIVATION: destitution | TO CALCULATE: to plan



Ivory trading in the Cogo (archive photo)

unpractical spirit of adventure had ever ruled a human being, it ruled this bepatched 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.

MODEST: *small*

“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.’

UNAVOIDABLY: *inescapably*

RUBBING SIDES: *close to each other*

ENCAMPED: *camping*

TRANSPORTED: *Dutch: in vervoering* |

RECOLLECTION: *thought, memory*

“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.

TO LOUNGE: *to stand*

ARCH: *Dutch: gewelf*

“On the contrary. It appears their intercourse* had been very much broken by various causes. He

INTERCOURSE: *contact*

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

TO NURSE: to look after him when he was ill

FEAT: something difficult, that is well done

TO OBJECT: to protest
 CARTRIDGE: *Dutch*: patrol
 TO RAID: *Dutch*: stropen

TO FIDGET: to move the body restlessly

SEARCHINGLY: trying to find out what he was thinking

TO SWAY: to direct

GAME: animals and birds

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

A FANCY: *desire, liking*

JOLLY WELL: *mighty well*

BINOCULARS: *Dutch: verrekijker*
TO SWEEP: *to pass over in order to examine*

CONSCIOUSNESS: *knowledge*

TO SHRUG: *to lift the shoulders slightly*

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 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

ASPIRATION: *desire*

GLASS: *referring to the binoculars*

PEEPING: *partly being seen*

SQUARE: *Dutch: vierkant*

BLOW: *hard stroke*

KNOBS: *balls*

TO DISTURB: *to confuse*

VULTURES: *large birds which live on the flesh of dead animals and persons* | ANT:

Dutch: mie

INDUSTRIOUS: *working hard* | TO ASCEND: *to climb*

STAKE: *pole*

DELIBERATELY: *of my own free will*

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

JOCOSE: funny
TO DISCLOSE: to tell

LACKED: did not have any | GRATIFICATION:
satisfaction | SOMETHING WANTING IN HIM:
something wrong with him

Drawings for Heart of Darkness, the graphic novel, by Catherine Anyango.



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 ascendancy* 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 that 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,

HAD FOUND HIM OUT: had discovered what was wrong with him

CONCEPTION: idea | TO TAKE COUNSEL WITH: to ask for advice | IRRESISTIBLY: *Dutch: onweerstaanbaar*
CORE: centre

INACCESSIBLE: you cannot reach it
CRESTFALLEN: disappointed
INDISTINCT: not clear

ASCENDANCY: power

BOUND: jump

SAVAGERY: wild behaviour
A POSITIVE RELIEF: something positive

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 downhill 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* splendour, with a murky* and overshadowed 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

THE VERIEST SAVAGE: **the most savage**

SUBDUED: **under control**

ABILITIES: **capacities**

INVALID FOOD: **food for sick people**

ABANDONED: **left alone**

HOVEL: **small house**

DAZZLING: **blinding**

MURKY: **dark**

TO WADE: **to walk with difficulty**

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, halfway 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 dishonouring 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

SHRILLNESS: sharpness | TO PIERCE: to go into

ENCHANTMENT: magic

TO POUR: to cause to flow in a stream

ATTENTIVE: giving attention

TO BE DONE FOR: to run the risk of being killed

PETRIFIED: changed into stone (because of fear)

TO RESENT: to be angry about

ATROCIOUS: horrible | PHANTOM: ghost

EXTENDED: put out

JAW: Dutch: kaak | APPARITION: ghost

TO EMERGE: to come out of

WINDING-SHEET: Dutch: lijkkleed | CAGE:

frame | ASTIR: moving

ANIMATED: made alive again

WEIRDLY: unnatural | VORACIOUS: hungry

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.

PERCEPTIBLE: that can be seen

TO EJECT: to throw out

“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.

THUNDERBOLT: flash of lightning with a crash of thunder

BELATED: delayed

TO ROAM: to go among | FEEBLY: weakly

LANGUOR: weakness

EXHAUSTION: the complete loss of strength

SATIATED: completely satisfied

“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.

TO EMIT: to send out

FACTITIOUS: unnatural

“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 head-dresses 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,

STATUESQUE: like a statue (standbeeld |

REPOSE: rest

GORGEOUS: very beautiful

MEASURED: *Dutch*: afgemeten

HELMET: *Dutch*: helm

GAUNTLETS: certain kind of gloves

CRIMSON: red | TAWNY: brownish yellow

FECUND: *Dutch*: vruchtbaar

TENEBOUS: dark

RESOLVE: resolution

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 have 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

TO GROWL: to make a lot of threatening sound

UNSWERVING: not changing | STEADINESS: firmness. | BARED: with no clothing on them

TO KICK UP A ROW: to make a lot of trouble

DECENT: properly dressed

MISCHIEF: something terrible happening

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 honour 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 heavy glance, said very quietly, ‘he WAS,’ and turned his back on me. My hour of favour 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.

PEDDLING: trivial, unimportant

TO DISGUISE: to make it look better

CAUTIOUSLY: carefully

TO DENY: to say it is not true

PRECARIOUS: unsafe

UNSOOUND: not good, not healthy

TO EXULT: to say triumphantly | TO

ANTICIPATE IT: to see it coming

IN THE PROPER QUARTER: to the people
who are in charge

CONFOUNDED: perplexed

VILE: disgusting

POSITIVELY: really

TO START: to move suddenly

LUMPED ALONG: put together

PARTISAN: person devoted to a certain
cause

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.’

OPPRESSING: **pressing on**

DAMP: **wet**

TO TAP: **to touch**

TO CONCEAL: **to hide**

IMMORTAL: **a man that does not die**

“He stated with a good deal of formality that had we not been ‘of the same profession³²’, 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 over-heard. ‘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 lip, 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.

WITH REGARD TO: **thinking of**

CONCERN: **anxiety**

INTELLIGENCE: **information**

32 Question: *What is meant with “of the same profession”?*

“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 sandalwise 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,’ etc., etc. 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!’ ‘Good-bye,’ 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! . . .

TO URGE: to ask earnestly

GRAVITY: seriousness

TO ROOT OUT: to get rid of

ENCOUNTER: meeting

“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

FITFULLY: properly | CROOKED: not straight
PICKET: small group

GLEAM: *Dutch*: schijnsel
TO WAVER: to move unsteadily
COLUMNAR: like a column (*Dutch*: zuil)

VIGIL: the staying awake to keep watch
MUFFLED: not loud
TO DRONE: to sing in a low, monotonous way | TO CHANT: to sing | INCANTATION: words used in magic
HIVE: *Dutch*: bijenkorf

PENT-UP: shut up | FRENZY: violent excitement
AUDIBLE: you could hear it

UNNERVED: without self-control | BLANK: empty

TO DEFINE: to describe

ODIOUS: hateful

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 any one 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 woman³³ 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

COMMONPLACE: normal

ONSLAUGHT: furious attack

MASSACRE: cruel killing of large numbers

IMPENDING: coming | TO COMPOSE: to make calm | TO PACIFY: to make calm

ULSTER: long loose overcoat

TO SNORE: to make a certain noise when asleep | SLUMBER: sleep

TRAIL: line, mark

EXULTATION: joy

DEW: *Dutch*: dauw

CLENCHED: closed tightly

TO OBTRUDE: to push forward

IMPROPER: not belonging

TO SQUIRT LEAD: to shoot

ADVANCED: old

TO CONFOUND: to mix up

33 Question: *Can you remember ‘the knitting old woman’?*

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 vapour* 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 vigour 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 fiendlike* 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

COCKSURE: sure in an unpleasant way

TO CHUCKLE: to laugh quietly

TO CIRCUMVENT: to go around

VAPOUR: steam, mist | TO EXHALE: to breathe out

TO LOOM: to appear not clearly but in a threatening way

SORCERER: a man who uses magic with the help of evil spirits | FIENDLIKE: like a devil

HAIL: greeting

FISTICUFFS: fighting with the fists

TORMENTED: suffering

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 scoundrel³⁴ -- ' '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

HE IS IRRETRIEVABLY LOST: he will never be the same again

BEYOND: further than
IRRESOLUTELY: *Dutch*: besluiteloos

TO THROTTLE: to take by the throat and stop the breathing | ON THE THRESHOLD OF: just before | WISTFULNESS: *Dutch*: droefgeestigheid

SPELL: magic
MUTE: silent

TO BEGUILE: to deceive

TO INVOKE HIM: to call upon him
DEGRADATION: making less dignified

³⁴ Question: *Who is 'this stupid scoundrel'?*

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 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

LUNATIC: mad man

BARRING: except

ORDEAL: very difficult test
TO WITHER: to make less, to deaden

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 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 responses of some satanic* litany*.

PLASTERED WITH: covered with
TO STRUT: to walk in a stiff way

MANGY: *Dutch*: schurftig
PENDENT: hanging
GOURD: *Dutch*: pompoen

SATANIC: devilish | LITANY: form of prayer

"the crowd...flowed out of the woods again, filled the clearing, covered the slope with a mass of naked, breathing, quivering, bronze bodies." (archive photo)



“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.

EDDY: circular movement

“Do you understand this?’ I asked.

BRINK: edge

“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 colourless 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.

FIERY: flaming

“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 some one 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 sombre and glittering river.

CONVULSIVELY: violently disturbing | TO GASP: to take in breath suddenly

LARK: bit of fun

WEDGED: packed together

DISCONSOLATE: disappointed

TO CROUCH: to lower the body out of fear | TO SWERVE: to change direction suddenly | TO DODGE: to swerve

TO FLINCH: to draw back

“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 disfavour³⁵. 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.

INEXORABLE: pitiless

"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 mould* 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.

WASTE: wilderness | TO HAUNT: to visit frequently | TO REVOLVE: to go (round) | OBSEQUIOUSLY: showing too much respect

INEXTINGUISHABLE: that cannot be stopped

ELEVATE: *Dutch*: verheven

TO FREQUENT: to visit frequently

SHAM: person who pretends to be Kurtz

MOULD: soft loose earth | PRIMEVAL: of the earliest times | DIABOLIC: devilish

AVID OF: eager for, wanting badly

CONTEMPTIBLY: *Dutch*: verachtelijk

"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

GHASTLY: causing fear

³⁵ Question: *Why did the pilgrims look on Marlow 'with disfavour' ?*

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.

SECULAR: *very old*

"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.'

NOXIOUS: *harmful*
TO PRY INTO: *to look into*

TO REHEARSE: *to practise for public performance*

"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,

PRECIPICE: *Dutch: afgrond*

CONNECTING-ROD: *Dutch: drijfstang*

INFERNAL: *abominable; of hell*

FILINGS: *bits filed off* | NUT: *Dutch: moer* |

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 sombre 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

BOLT: *Dutch*: bout | SPANNER: tool for gripping and turning nuts | RATCHET-DRILL: *Dutch*: ratelboor | TO ABOMINATE: to hate | TO TEND: to take care of | FORGE: *Dutch*: smeltoven | SCRAP: small things not wanted anymore; bit | I HAD THE SHAKES: was shaking, feeling sick

TRANSFIXED: unable to move

CRAVEN: cowardly

TEMPTATION: that which attracts

MEANNESS: *Dutch*: gemeenheid | SHOWER: large number

INSOLENT: not polite, insulting

SCATHING: cruel, bitter

CALLOUS: hard, without feeling

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* greyness, with nothing underfoot, with nothing around, without spectators*, without clamour, without glory, without the great desire of victory, without the great fear of defeat, in a sickly atmosphere of tepid* scepticism, 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.

DROLL: *funny*

ARRANGEMENT: *deal*

MERCILESS: *pitiless*

CROP: *Dutch: oogst*

TO WRESTLE: *to fight*

CONTEST: *fight*

IMPALPABLE: *that cannot be felt, touched*

SPECTATORS: *people who are looking*

TEPID: *Dutch: lauw*

RIDDLE: *question, problem*

PRONOUNCEMENT: *to say something formally* | HUMILIATION: *a feeling of not being worth very much*

‘The horror!’ He was a remarkable man. After all, this was the expression of some sort of belief; it had candour*, 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 greyness 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.

CANDOUR: saying freely what one thinks

GLIMPSED: seen in a short look |

COMMINGLING: mixture

STRIDE: one long step

COMPRESSED: brought together

INAPPRECIABLE: too small to be seen

THRESHOLD: limit, border

TRANSLUCENTLY: *Dutch*: doorschijnend |

CLIFF: rock; piece

TO FILCH: to steal

TO DEVOUR: to eat hungrily | INFAMOUS: shameful | TO GULP: to drink thirstily

UNWHOLESOME: unhealthy |

INSIGNIFICANT: unimportant | TO

They were intruders whose knowledge of life was to me an irritating pretence*, 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 daresay* 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 behaviour was inexcusable, but then my temperature was seldom normal in these days. My dear aunt's endeavours* 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

TRESPASS: to force one self in

PRETENCE: make-believe

BEARING: attitude

OFFENSIVE: disagreeable

OUTRAGEOUS: shocking | TO FLAUNT:

Dutch: te koop lopen | FOLLY: foolishness

TO ENLIGHTEN: to free from ignorance

IMPORTANCE: thinking themselves

important | I DARESAY: | bet | TO TOTTER:

to walk unsteadily

ENDEAVOUR: attempt, try

TO SOOTHE: to make calm again

GOLD-RIMMED: with a golden edge

MADE INQUIRIES: tried to get information |

CIRCUITOUS: indirect | SUAVE: smooth in

manner | TO DENOMINATE: to call

TO MENACE: to threaten

EXTENSIVE: far-reaching | PECULIAR:

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,' etc., etc. 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 grey 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

special

COMMERCE: trade

INCALCULABLE: that cannot be measured

SNUFF: powdered tobacco to be taken by sniffing

SPHERE: person's surroundings

side.' He had furry* straight eyebrows, bristly* hair cropped* short, an eyeglass 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

FURRY: thick, like fur (*Dutch*: bont) |

BRISTLY: rough | CROPPED: cut

EXPANSIVE: talking without reserve

TO ASSENT: to agree

TO SURRENDER: to give over
OBLIVION: state of being quite forgotten

PERCEPTION: idea

the fulfilment of one of those 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 worshippers, 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

TO LURK: to keep out of sight waiting to attack

TO ACCUMULATE: to come together

IMPRESS: influence

PONDEROUS: heavy

DECOROUS: proper

CEMETERY: place where people are buried

SALVATION: rescue

AFAR: far away

the colossal scale of his vile desires: his many disgusting habits in all different directions

TEMPESTUOUS: violent, stormy | ANGUISH: severe suffering | COLLECTED: calm

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 sombre 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 forever. 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

JUSTICE: honest treatment

MAHOGANY: *Dutch*: mahoniehouten

TO CONDEMN: *Dutch*: vervloeken | TO LOATHE: to hate very strongly

LOFTY: high

BEDRAPED: with large curtains on it | GILT: *Dutch*: verguld | FURNITURE: chairs, tables etc. | CURVE: bent line | MARBLE: *Dutch*: marmeren | GRAND PIANO: *Dutch*: vleugel

SARCOPHAGUS: stone coffin(*Dutch*: doodskist)

IN MOURNING: wearing black clothes because she was sad about Kurtz' death

MATURE: grown, ripe | FIDELITY: loyalty, faithfulness

TO TAKE REFUGE: to come together in a safe place | VISAGE: face

BROW: forehead | ASHY: ash-coloured, pale | HALO: circle of light

GUILELESS: honest

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.

PLAYTHING: *Dutch: speelgoed*

STRAINED: *forced, unnatural*

TO BEHOLD: *to see* | SHE MOTIONED: *she brought* | GENTLY: *carefully*

INTIMACY: *close friendship*

"'Intimacy* grows quickly 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?'

UNSTEADILY: *weakly, not very firmly*

APPEALING: *questioning* | FIXITY OF GAZE: *steady gaze*

"'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

DUMBNESS: *not able to say anymore*

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 inextinguishable 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 any one 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 sougning* of the trees

BATCH: **number**

IN THE CERTITUDE OF: **in the firm belief**

PAUPER: **poor man**

TO INFER: **to come to the opinion**

COMPARATIVE: **some**

ACCOMPANIMENT OF: **instrumental part to go with**

SOUGHING: **whispering sound**

swayed by the wind, the murmurs of the 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.'

GENEROSITY: greatness of heart

TWILIGHT: semi-darkness

FORTUNATE: lucky

TO SACRIFICE: to offer

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 no-body will see him again, never, never, never.’

“She put out her arms as if after a retreating* figure, stretching them back 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 any one 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 murmured in a heart-broken tone. ‘I want -- I want -- something -- something --

TO RETREAT: to withdraw

CLASPED: held together tightly

TO FADE AWAY: to disappear slowly |

SHEEN: brightness

DULL: slow

TO SUBSIDE: to go down slowly | INFINITE: endless

TO TREASURE: to think something worth very much

SHAKILY: trembling

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 insisted. '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 happened³⁶. 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 sombre under an overcast sky -- seemed to lead into the heart of an immense darkness.

TO SWELL: to become louder

TO WEEP: to cry

TO COLLAPSE: to fall down

TO RENDER: to give

WHICH WAS HIS DUE: which was what he deserved

OFFING: *Dutch: volle zee* | WAS BARRED: could not be reached

36 Question: *What were Kurtz' last words?*

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