

Chapter 1

Marlow Starts His Story

Five men sat on the sailing ship, *The Nellie*. They watched the scenery as the sun set. On one side, they could see the ocean gleaming as the last rays of the sun touched the water. London was on the other side, gloomy and dark. The white sun sank lower and lower towards the city, but just as it touched the first buildings it became dull red, without rays and without heat. It looked like the city had poisoned the sun.

The men had all been close friends for many years, mainly because they had all been sailors and captains. They had the sea in common, although now only Marlow still went out on long voyages. The others had settled down and found lives for themselves in that dirty, monstrous city. This evening, as the sun finally disappeared entirely behind London, Marlow had a familiar look on his face. They could tell he was going to tell a story. And so they waited.

Finally, Marlow spoke:

Ever since I was a little boy, I have loved maps. I would look for hours at South America, or Africa, or Australia, and imagine that I was a famous explorer – seeing people and places no European had ever seen before. In those days, there were many blank spaces on the maps, and I wanted to visit all of them!

The Heart of Darkness


Joseph Conrad


retold by Peter Kipling



But there was one place, the biggest and emptiest space, that I wanted to see the most. Finally, after being a sailor for many years and seeing many different places, I decided it was time to visit that place. I had dreamt about going there throughout my childhood, and I couldn't wait any longer to see it for myself: Africa!

By that time, many places in Africa had been explored. It wasn't as mysterious as it had been when I was a child, but there was still one mysterious river. On the maps it looked like a giant snake with its head in the sea and its tail lost in the depths of the land. That's where I would go. It was like a big, dangerous snake, and I was like a silly little bird, fascinated by the snake.

Before I could go, though, I had to find a job. I decided I would try to be the captain of one of the river steamboats that went up and down that river. I used all my family connections to help me get that job. I'd never wanted to do anything so badly in my whole life.

