

Heart of Darkness Opening: Annotation

¹The *Nellie*, a cruising yawl, swung to her anchor without a flutter of the sails and was at rest. ²The flood had made, the wind was nearly calm, and being bound down the river the only thing for it was to come to wait for the turn of the tide.

³The Sea-reach of the Thames stretched before us like the beginning of an interminable waterway. ⁴In 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. ⁵A haze rested on the low shores that ran out to sea in vanishing flatness. ⁶The 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.

⁷The Director of Companies was our Captain and our host. ⁸We four affectionately watched his back as he stood in the bows looking to seaward. ⁹On the whole river there was nothing that looked half so nautical. ¹⁰He resembled a pilot which to a seaman is trustworthiness personified. ¹¹It was difficult to realize his work was not out there in the luminous estuary, but behind him, within the brooding gloom.

¹²Between us there was as I have already said somewhere, the bond of the sea. ¹³Besides 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. ¹⁴The 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. ¹⁵The Accountant had brought out already a box of dominoes and was toying architecturally with the bones. ¹⁶Marlow sat cross-legged right aft, leaning against the mizzen-mast. ¹⁷He 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. ¹⁸The Director satisfied the anchor had good hold made his way aft and sat down amongst us. ¹⁹We exchanged a few words lazily. ²⁰Afterwards there was silence on board the yacht. ²¹For some reason or other we did not begin that game of dominoes. ²²We felt meditative and fit for nothing but placid staring. ²³The day was ending in a serenity of still and exquisite brilliance. ²⁴The water shone pacifically, the sky without a speck was a benign immensity of unstained light, the very mist on the Essex marshes was like a gauzy and radiant fabric hung from the wooded rises inland and draping the low shores in diaphanous folds. ²⁵Only the gloom to the west brooding over the upper reaches became more somber every minute as if angered by the approach of the sun.

²⁶And 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.