

Chapter 5

8 I looked at the Russian in his colourful clothes, and wondered how he had existed, how he had succeeded in coming so far down the river and how he had managed to remain here.

‘I went a little farther,’ he said, ‘and then a little further – till I had gone so far that I don’t know how to get back. No – in the Plenty of time. I can manage. You take Kurtz away quick! – quickly, I tell you!’

He told me about his time with Kurtz. I suppose that Kurtz wanted an audience, because one time when they had camped together in the forest, they had talked all night, or more probably Kurtz had talked.

‘We talked about everything,’ he said, excited by his memories. ‘I forgot there was such a thing as sleep. For nothing! Or love, too. He made me see things.’

‘And have you been with him ever since?’ I asked.

‘No, he likes to wander alone and he often goes off into the depths of the forest,’ he replied.

‘Does he go exploring?’ I asked.

He told me that Kurtz had discovered lots of villages, a lake, too – he did not know exactly in what directions – but that his expeditions had been for ivory.

‘To speak plainly, he had raided the country,’ I suggested.

He nodded.

‘Not alone, surely,’ I asked. ‘Kurtz got the tribe to follow him, didn’t he?’

Glossary

- **raided:** made a short sudden attack; (here) entered by force in order to steal the ivory

‘They adored him,’ he said. By the way that he said this, I could see that Kurtz filled his life, occupied his thoughts, changed his emotions.

‘What can you expect?’ he shouted. ‘He came to them with thunder and lightning – his guns. They had never seen anything like it. He could be very terrible. You can’t judge Kurtz as you would an ordinary man. No, no, no! He said he would shoot me if I gave him my ivory because nothing could stop him from doing what he pleased. And that was true, too. I gave him the ivory. What could I care? But I didn’t leave. No, no. I couldn’t leave him. I had to be careful, of course, until we got friendly again. He was living for the most part in those villages by the lake. When he came down to the river, sometimes he got angry with me, and it was better for me to be a refugee. The man suffered too much. He hated this place, but 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 said yes, and then he remained to go off on another ivory hunt, or disappeared for weeks and forget himself amongst these people.’

‘Why, he’s mad!’ I said.

KURTZ

What do we learn about Kurtz from the Russian?

Work with a partner.

He protested strongly. Kurtz couldn't be mad. He was such a great talker and was a brilliant man. But it appeared, from what the Russian said, that Kurtz's appetite for more ivory had gradually changed his view of what was the right or wrong way to get it.

The Russian then explained that Kurtz had suddenly become quite ill. 'I heard he was lying helpless, and so I came there and took my chance,' he said. 'Oh, he is bad, very bad.'

There were no signs of life up at Kurtz's house on the hill, with its ruined roof, long mud wall and three square windows of different sizes. I looked at it again through my telescope and saw something which shocked me.

