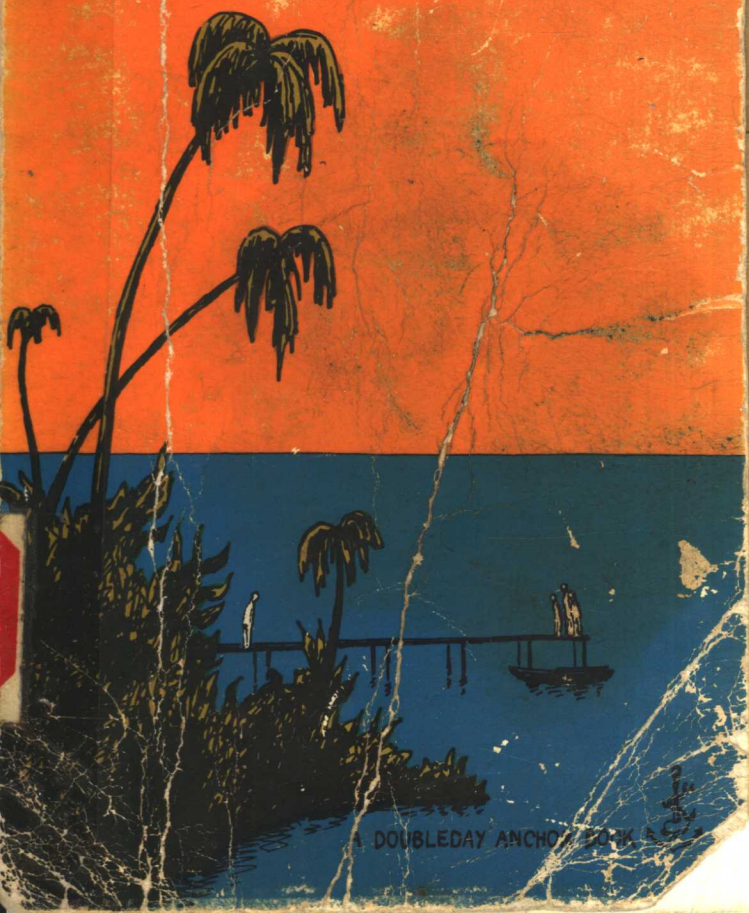


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# VICTORY

A NOVEL BY  
JOSEPH CONRAD



A DOUBLEDAY ANCHOR BOOK

# VICTORY

Joseph Conrad



DOUBLEDAY ANCHOR BOOKS  
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Joseph Conrad (1857-1924), one of the greatest English novelists, was born in Poland and spent his boyhood in Cracow. At seventeen he went to Marseilles and shipped out on French vessels for a few years. In 1878 he entered the British Merchant Marine, serving on a ship which sailed the South Pacific. He became a British subject and a master in the service in 1884, and for the next ten years he travelled all over the world. In 1894 he finished his first book, *Almayer's Folly*, and soon left the sea to devote himself to writing. Among his early works are *Outcast of the Islands* (1896), *The Nigger of the Narcissus* (1897), *Lord Jim* (1900), *Youth* (1902), and *Typhoon* (1903). The writing of his later period includes *The Secret Agent* (1907), *Chance* (1914), and *VICTORY*, which first appeared in 1915.

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#### NOTE TO THE FIRST EDITION

THE last word of this novel was written on the 29th of May, 1914. And that last word was the single word of the title.

Those were the times of peace. Now that the moment of publication approaches I have been considering the discretion of altering the title-page. The word Victory, the shining and tragic goal of noble effort, appeared too great, too august, to stand at the head of a mere novel. There was also the possibility of falling under the suspicion of commercial astuteness deceiving the public into the belief that the book had something to do with war.

Of that, however, I was not afraid very much. What influenced my decision most were the obscure promptings of that pagan residuum of awe and wonder which lurks still at the bottom of our old humanity. Victory was the last word I had written in peace time. It was the last literary thought which had occurred to me before the doors of the Temple of Janus flying open with a crash shook the minds, the hearts, the consciences of men all over the world. Such coincidence could not be treated lightly. And I made up my mind to let the word stand, in the same hopeful spirit in which some simple citizen of Old Rome would have "accepted the Omen."

The second point on which I wish to offer a remark is the existence (in the novel) of a person named Schomberg.

That I believe him to be true goes without saying. I am

not likely to offer pinchbeck wares to my public consciously. Schomberg is an old member of my company. A very subordinate personage in Lord Jim as far back as the year 1899, he became notably active in a certain short story of mine published in 1902. Here he appears in a still larger part, true to life (I hope), but also true to himself. Only, in this instance, his deeper passions come into play, and thus his grotesque psychology is completed at last.

I don't pretend to say that this is the entire Teutonic psychology; but it is indubitably the psychology of a Teuton. My object in mentioning him here is to bring out the fact that, far from being the incarnation of recent animosities, he is the creature of my old, deep-seated and, as it were, impartial conviction.

J. C.

### AUTHOR'S NOTE

ON APPROACHING the task of writing this Note for "Victory" the first thing I am conscious of is the actual nearness of the book, its nearness to me personally, to the vanished mood in which it was written and to the mixed feelings aroused by the critical notices the book obtained when first published almost exactly a year after the beginning of the great war. The writing of it was finished in 1914 long before the murder of an Austrian Archduke sounded the first note of a warning for a world already full of doubts and fears.

The contemporaneous very short Author's Note which is preserved in this edition bears sufficient witness to the feelings with which I consented to the publication of the book. The fact of the book having been published in the United States early in the year made it difficult to delay its appearance in England any longer. It came out in the thirteenth month of the war, and my conscience was troubled by the awful incongruity of throwing this bit of imagined drama into the welter of reality, tragic enough in all conscience but even more cruel than tragic and more inspiring than cruel. It seemed awfully presumptuous to think there would be eyes to spare for those pages in a community which in the crash of the big guns and in the din of brave words expressing the truth of an indomitable faith could not but feel the edge of a sharp knife at its throat.

The unchanging Man of history is wonderfully adaptable cloth by his power of endurance and in his capacity for detachment. The fact seems to be that the play of his destiny is too great for his fears and too mysterious for his understanding. Were the trump of the Last Judgment to sound suddenly on a working day the musician at his piano would go on with his performance of Beethoven's Sonata and the cobbler at his stall stick to his last in undisturbed confidence in the virtues of the leather. And with perfect propriety. For what are we to let ourselves be disturbed by an angel's vengeful music too mighty for our ears and too awful for our terrors? Thus it happens to us to be struck suddenly by the lightning of wrath. The reader will go on reading if the book pleases him and the critic will go on criticising with that faculty of detachment born perhaps from a sense of infinite littleness and which is yet the only faculty that seems to assimilate man to the immortal gods.

It is only when the catastrophe matches the natural obscurity of our fate that even the best representative of the race is liable to lose his detachment. It is very obvious that on the arrival of the gentlemanly Mr. Jones, the single-minded Ricardo and the faithful Pedro, Heyst, the man of universal detachment, loses his mental self-possession, that fine attitude before the universally irremediable which wears the name of stoicism. It is all a matter of proportion. There should have been a remedy for that sort of thing. And yet there is no remedy. Behind this minute instance of life's hazards Heyst sees the power of blind destiny. Besides, Heyst in his fine detachment had lost the habit of asserting himself. I don't mean the courage of self-assertion, either moral or physical, but the mere way of it, the trick of the thing, the readiness of mind and the turn of the hand that come without reflection and lead the man to excellence in life, in art, in crime, in virtue and for the matter of that, even in love. Thinking is the great enemy of perfection. The habit of profound reflection, I am compelled to say, is the most pernicious of all the habits formed by the civilised man.

But I wouldn't be suspected even remotely of making fun of Axel Heyst. I have always liked him. The flesh and

blood individual who stands behind the infinitely more familiar figure of the book I remember as a mysterious Swede right enough. Whether he was a baron, too, I am not so certain. He himself never laid a claim to that distinction. His detachment was too great to make any claims big or small on one's credulity. I will not say where I met him because I fear to give my readers a wrong impression, since a marked incongruity between a man and his surroundings is often a very misleading circumstance. We became very friendly for a time and I would not like to expose him to unpleasant suspicions though, personally, I am sure he would have been indifferent to suspicions as he was indifferent to all the other disadvantages of life. He was not the whole Heyst of course; he is only the physical and moral foundation of my Heyst laid on the ground of a short acquaintance. That it was short was certainly not my fault, for he had charmed me by the mere amenity of his detachment which, in this case, I cannot help thinking he had carried to excess. He went away from his rooms without leaving a trace. I wondered where he had gone to—but now I know. He vanished from my ken only to drift into this adventure that, unavoidable, waited for him in a world which he persisted in looking upon as a malevolent shadow spinning in the sunlight. Often in the course of years an expressed sentiment, the particular sense of a phrase heard casually, would recall him to my mind so that I have fastened on to him many words heard on other men's lips and belonging to other men's less perfect, less pathetic moods.

The same observation will apply *mutatis mutandis* to Mr. Jones, who is built on a much slenderer connection. Mr. Jones (or whatever his name was) did not drift away from me. He turned his back on me and walked out of the room. It was in a little hotel in the Island of St. Thomas in the West Indies (in the year '75) where we found him one hot afternoon extended on three chairs, all alone in the loud buzzing of flies to which his immobility and his cadaverous aspect gave a most gruesome significance. Our invasion must have displeased him because he got off the chairs brusquely and walked out leaving with me an indelibly weird impression of his thin shanks. One of the men with



me said that the fellow was the most desperate gambler he had ever come across. I said: "A professional sharper?" and got for answer: "He's a terror; but I must say that up to a certain point he will play fair. . . ." I wonder what the point was. I never saw him again because I believe he went straight on board a mail-boat which left within the hour for other ports of call in the direction of Aspinall. Mr. Jones's characteristic insolence belongs to another man of a quite different type. I will say nothing as to the origins of his mentality because I don't intend to make any damaging admissions.

It so happened that the very same year Ricardo—the physical Ricardo—was a fellow passenger of mine on board an extremely small and extremely dirty little schooner, during a four days' passage between two places in the Gulf of Mexico whose names don't matter. For the most part he lay on deck aft as it were at my feet, and raising himself from time to time on his elbow would talk about himself and go on talking, not exactly to me or even at me (he would not even look up but kept his eyes fixed on the deck) but more as if communing in a low voice with his familiar devil. Now and then he would give me a glance and make the hairs of his stiff little moustache stir quaintly. His eyes were green, and to this day every cat I see reminds me of the exact contour of his face. What he was travelling for or what was his business in life he never confided to me. Truth to say the only passenger on board that schooner who could have talked openly about his activities and purposes was a very snuffy and conversationally delightful friar, the Superior of a convent, attended by a very young lay brother, of a particularly ferocious countenance. We had with us also, lying prostrate in the dark and unspeakable cuddy of that schooner, an old Spanish gentleman, owner of much luggage and, as Ricardo assured me, very ill indeed. Ricardo seemed to be either a servant or the confidant of that aged and distinguished-looking invalid, who early on the passage held a long murmured conversation with the friar, and after that did nothing but groan feebly, smoke cigarettes and now and then call for Martin in a voice full of pain. Then he who has become Ricardo in the book

would go below into that beastly and noisome hole, remain there mysteriously, and coming up on deck again with a face on which nothing could be read, would as likely as not resume for my edification the exposition of his moral attitude toward life illustrated by striking particular instances of the most atrocious complexion. Did he mean to frighten me? Or seduce me? Or astonish me? Or arouse my admiration? All he did was to arouse my amused incredulity. As scoundrels go he was far from being a bore. For the rest my innocence was so great then that I could not take his philosophy seriously. All the time he kept one ear turned to the cuddy in the manner of a devoted servant, but I had the idea that in some way or other he had imposed the connection on the invalid for some end of his own. The reader therefore won't be surprised to hear that one morning I was told without any particular emotion by the padrone of the schooner that the "Rich man" down there was dead: He had died in the night. I don't remember ever being so moved by the desolate end of a complete stranger. I looked down the skylight, and there was the devoted Martin busy cording cowhide trunks belonging to the deceased whose white beard and hooked nose were the only parts I could make out in the dark depths of a horrible stuffy bunk.

As it fell calm in the course of the afternoon and continued calm during all that night and the terrible, flaming day, the late "Rich man" had to be thrown overboard at sunset, though as a matter of fact we were in sight of the low, pestilential, mangrove-lined coast of our destination. The excellent Father Superior mentioned to me with an air of immense commiseration: "The poor man has left a young daughter." Who was to look after her I don't know, but I saw the devoted Martin taking the trunks ashore with great care just before I landed myself. I would perhaps have tracked the ways of that man of immense sincerity for a little while but I had some of my own very pressing business to attend to, which in the end got mixed up with an earthquake and so I had no time to give to Ricardo. The reader need not be told that I have not forgotten him, though.

My contact with the faithful Pedro was much shorter and my observation of him was less complete but incomparably more anxious. It ended in a sudden inspiration to get out of his way. It was in a hovel of sticks and mats by the side of a path. As I went in there only to ask for a bottle of lemonade I have not to this day the slightest idea what in my appearance or actions could have roused his terrible ire. It became manifest to me less than two minutes after I had set eyes on him for the first time, and though immensely surprised of course I didn't stop to think it out. I took the nearest short cut—through the wall. This bestial apparition and a certain enormous buck nigger encountered in Haiti only a couple of months afterwards, have fixed my conception of blind, furious, unreasoning rage, as manifested in the human animal, to the end of my days. Of the nigger I used to dream for years afterwards. Of Pedro never. The impression was less vivid. I got away from him too quickly.

It seems to me but natural that those three buried in a corner of my memory should suddenly get out into the light of the world—so natural that I offer no excuse for their existence. They were there, they had to come out; and this is a sufficient excuse for a writer of tales who had taken to his trade without preparation, or premeditation and without any moral intention but that which pervades the whole scheme of this world of senses.

Since this Note is mostly concerned with personal contacts and the origins of the persons in the tale, I am bound also to speak of Lena, because if I were to leave her out it would look like a slight; and nothing would be further from my thoughts than putting a slight on Lena. If of all the personages involved in the "mystery of Samburan" I have lived longest with Heyst (or with him I call Heyst) it was at her, whom I call Lena, that I have looked the longest and with a most sustained attention. This attention originated in idleness for which I have a natural talent. One evening I wandered into a café, in a town not of the tropics but of the South of France. It was filled with tobacco smoke, the hum of voices, the rattling of dominoes and the sounds of strident music. The orchestra was rather smaller than the one that performed at Schomberg's hotel, had the

air more of a family party than of an enlisted band, and, I must confess, seemed rather more respectable than the Zangiacomo musical enterprise. It was less pretentious also, more homely and familiar, so to speak, insomuch that in the intervals when all the performers left the platform one of them went amongst the marble tables collecting offerings of sous and francs in a battered tin receptacle recalling the shape of a sauceboat. It was a girl. Her detachment from her task seems to me now to have equalled or even surpassed Heyst's aloofness from all the mental degradations to which a man's intelligence is exposed in its way through life. Silent and wide-eyed she went from table to table with the air of a sleep-walker and with no other sound but the slight rattle of the coins to attract attention. It was long after the sea-chapter of my life had been closed but it is difficult to discard completely the characteristics of half a lifetime, and it was in something of the jack-ashore spirit that I dropped a five-franc piece into the sauceboat; whereupon the sleep-walker turned her head to gaze at me and said "Merci, Monsieur," in a tone in which there was no gratitude but only surprise. I must have been idle indeed to take the trouble to remark on such slight evidence that the voice was very charming and when the performers resumed their seats I shifted my position slightly in order not to have that particular performer hidden from me by the little man with the beard who conducted, and who might for all I know have been her father, but whose real mission in life was to be a model for the Zangiacomo of "Victory." Having got a clear line of sight I naturally (being idle) continued to look at the girl through all the second part of the programme. The shape of her dark head inclined over the violin was fascinating, and, while resting between the pieces of that interminable programme she was, in her white dress and with her brown hands reposing in her lap, the very image of dreamy innocence. The mature, bad-tempered woman at the piano might have been her mother, though there was not the slightest resemblance between them. All I am certain of in their personal relation to each other is that cruel pinch on the upper part of the arm. That I am sure I have seen! There could be no

mistake. I was in a too idle mood to imagine such a gratuitous barbarity. It may have been playfulness, yet the girl jumped up as if she had been stung by a wasp. It may have been playfulness. Yet I saw plainly poor "dreamy innocence" rub gently the affected place as she filed off with the other performers down the middle aisle between the marble tables in the uproar of voices, the rattling of dominoes, through a blue atmosphere of tobacco smoke. I believe that those people left the town next day.

Or perhaps they had only migrated to the other big café, on the other side of the Place de la Comédie. It is very possible. I did not go across to find out. It was my perfect idleness that had invested the girl with a peculiar charm, and I did not want to destroy it by any superfluous exertion. The receptivity of my indolence made the impression so permanent that when the moment came for her meeting with Heyst I felt that she would be heroically equal to every demand of the risky and uncertain future. I was so convinced of it that I let her go with Heyst, I won't say without a pang but certainly without misgivings. And in view of her triumphant end what more could I have done for her rehabilitation and her happiness?

1920.

J. C.

# PART I

## I

THERE is, as every schoolboy knows in this scientific age, a very close chemical relation between coal and diamonds. It is the reason, I believe, why some people allude to coal as "black diamonds." Both these commodities represent wealth; but coal is a much less portable form of property. There is, from that point of view, a deplorable lack of concentration in coal. Now, if a coal-mine could be put into one's waistcoat pocket—but it can't! At the same time, there is a fascination in coal, the supreme commodity of the age in which we are camped like bewildered travellers in a garish, unrestful hotel. And I suppose those two considerations, the practical and the mystical, prevented Heyst—Axel Heyst—from going away.

The Tropical Belt Coal Company went into liquidation. The world of finance is a mysterious world in which, incredible as the fact may appear, evaporation precedes liquidation. First the capital evaporates, and then the company goes into liquidation. These are very unnatural physics, but they account for the persistent inertia of Heyst, at which we "out there" used to laugh among ourselves—but not inimically. An inert body can do no harm to any one, provokes no hostility, is scarcely worth derision. It may, indeed, be in the way sometimes; but this could not be said of Axel Heyst. He was out of everybody's way, as if he were perched on the highest peak of the Himalayas, and

in a sense as conspicuous. Every one in that part of the world knew him, dwelling on his little island. An island is but the top of a mountain. Axel Heyst, perched on it immovably, was surrounded, instead of the imponderable stormy and transparent ocean of air merging into infinity, by a tepid, shallow sea; a passionless off-shoot of the great waters which embrace the continents of this globe. His most frequent visitors were shadows, the shadows of clouds, relieving the monotony of the inanimate, brooding sunshine of the tropics. His nearest neighbour—I am speaking now of things showing some sort of animation—was an indolent volcano which smoked faintly all day with its head just above the northern horizon, and at night levelled at him, from amongst the clear stars, a dull red glow, expanding and collapsing spasmodically like the end of a gigantic cigar puffed at intermittently in the dark. Axel Heyst was also a smoker; and when he lounged out on his verandah with his cheroot, the last thing before going to bed, he made in the night the same sort of glow and of the same size as that other one so many miles away.

In a sense, the volcano was company to him in the shades of the night—which were often too thick, one would think, to let a breath of air through. There was seldom enough wind to blow a feather along. On most evenings of the year Heyst could have sat outside with a naked candle to read one of the books left him by his late father. It was not a mean store. But he never did that. Afraid of mosquitoes, very likely. Neither was he ever tempted by the silence to address any casual remarks to the companion glow of the volcano. He was not mad. Queer chap—yes, that may have been said, and in fact was said; but there is a tremendous difference between the two, you will allow.

On the nights of full moon the silence around Samburan—the “Round Island” of the charts—was dazzling; and in the flood of cold light Heyst could see his immediate surroundings, which had the aspect of an abandoned settlement invaded by the jungle: vague roofs above low vegetation, broken shadows of bamboo fences in the sheen of long grass, something like an overgrown bit of road slanting among ragged thickets towards the shore only a couple of

hundred yards away, with a black jetty and a mound of some sort, quite inky on its unlighted side. But the most conspicuous object was a gigantic blackboard raised on two posts and presenting to Heyst, when the moon got over that side, the white letters "T. B. C. Co." in a row at least two feet high. These were the initials of the Tropical Belt Coal Company, his employers—his late employers, to be precise.

According to the unnatural mysteries of the financial world, the T. B. C. Company's capital having evaporated in the course of two years, the company went into liquidation—forced, I believe, not voluntary. There was nothing forcible in the process, however. It was slow; and while the liquidation—in London and Amsterdam—pursued its languid course, Axel Heyst, styled in the prospectus "manager in the tropics," remained at his post on Samburan, the No. 1 coaling-station of the company.

And it was not merely a coaling-station. There was a coal-mine there, with an outcrop in the hillside less than five hundred yards from the rickety wharf and the imposing blackboard. The company's object had been to get hold of all the outcrops on tropical islands and exploit them locally. And, Lord knows, there were any amount of outcrops. It was Heyst who had located most of them in this part of the tropical belt during his rather aimless wanderings, and being a ready letter-writer had written pages and pages about them to his friends in Europe. At least, so it was said.

We doubted whether he had any visions of wealth—for himself, at any rate. What he seemed mostly concerned for was the "stride forward," as he expressed it, in the general organisation of the universe, apparently. He was heard by more than a hundred persons in the islands talking of a "great stride forward for these regions." The convinced wave of the hand which accompanied the phrase suggested tropical distances being impelled onward. In connection with the finished courtesy of his manner, it was persuasive, or at any rate silencing—for a time, at least. Nobody cared to argue with him when he talked in this strain. His earnestness could do no harm to anybody. There was no danger of



any one taking seriously his dream of tropical coal, so what was the use of hurting his feelings?

Thus reasoned men in reputable business offices where he had his entrée as a person who came out East with letters of introduction—and modest letters of credit, too—some years before these coal-outcrops began to crop up in his playfully courteous talk. From the first there was some difficulty in making him out. He was not a traveller. A traveller arrives and departs, goes on somewhere. Heyst did not depart. I met a man once—the manager of the branch of the Oriental Banking Corporation in Malacca—to whom Heyst exclaimed, in no connection with anything in particular (it was in the billiard-room of the club):

“I am enchanted with these islands!”

He shot it out suddenly, *à propos des bottes*, as the French say, and while chalking his cue. And perhaps it was some sort of enchantment. There are more spells than your commonplace magicians ever dreamed of.

Roughly speaking, a circle with a radius of eight hundred miles drawn round a point in North Borneo was in Heyst's case a magic circle. It just touched Manila, and he had been seen there. It just touched Saigon, and he was likewise seen there once. Perhaps these were his attempts to break out. If so, they were failures. The enchantment must have been an unbreakable one. The manager—the man who heard the exclamation—had been so impressed by the tone, fervour, rapture, what you will, or perhaps by the incongruity of it that he had related the experience to more than one person.

“Queer chap, that Swede,” was his only comment; but this is the origin of the name “Enchanted Heyst” which some fellows fastened on our man.

He also had other names. In his early years, long before he got so becomingly bald on the top, he went to present a letter of introduction to Mr. Tesman of Tesman Brothers, a Sourabaya firm—tip-top house. Well, Mr. Tesman was a kindly, benevolent old gentleman. He did not know what to make of that caller. After telling him that they wished to render his stay among the islands as pleasant as possible, and that they were ready to assist him in his plans, and so