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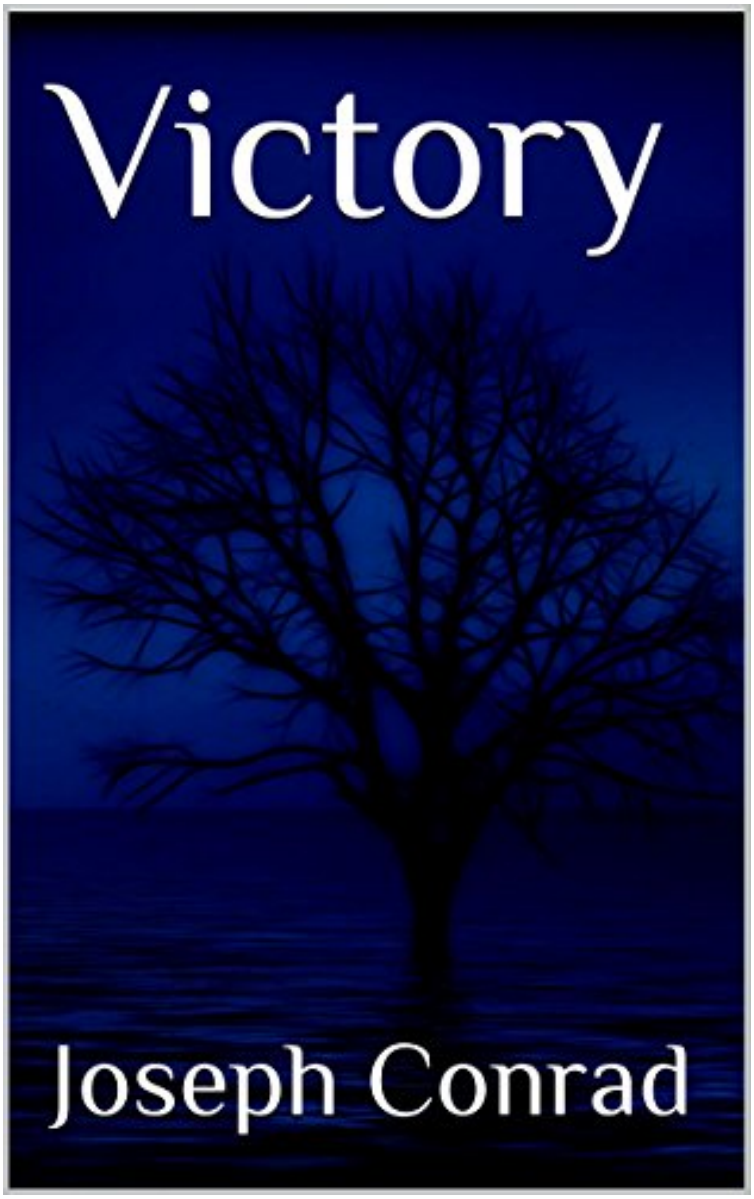
Victory



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[E-BOOK] Victory

Par Joseph Conrad : Victory before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Victory:

Description : Description du produitIn Victory (1915), Conrad returns to the Malay Archipelago, to the setting of his first mature novel, Lord Jim, and in Axel Heyst he creates a hero who is in many ways similar to Jim, a noble altruist destroyed by his ideals. It is a story of action and high adventure coexisting with an exhaustive study of the psychology of a man who's philosophy of life is summed up in the dying words of his father: "Look on -- make no sound."

Prsentation de l'diteurThere 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 pocketbut 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 HeystAxel Heystfrom going away.ExtraitIThere 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 ones waistcoat pocketbut it cant! 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 HeystAxel Heystfrom 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 ourselvesbut 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 everybodys 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 of 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 offshoot 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 neighbourI am speaking now of things showing some sort of animationwas 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 veranda 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 nightwhich 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 chapyes, 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 Samburanthe Round Island of the chartswas 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 toward 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 employershis late employers, to be precise.According to the unnatural mysteries of the financial world, the T. B. C. Companys capital having evaporated in the course of two years, the company went into liquidationforced, I believe, not voluntary. There was nothing forcible in the process, however. It was slow; and while the liquidationin London and Amsterdampursued 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 companys 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 wealthfor 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 silencingfor 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 entre as a person who came out East with letters of introductionand modest letters of credit, toosome 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 oncethe manager of the branch of the Oriental Banking Corporation in Malaccato 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, propos de 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 Heysts 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 managerthe man who heard the exclamationhad 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 firmtip-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 on, and after receiving Heysts thanksyou know the usual kind of conversationhe proceeded to query in a slow, paternal tone:And you are interested in?Facts, broke in Heyst in his courtly voice. Theres nothing worth knowing but facts. Hard facts! Facts alone, Mr. Tesman.I dont know if old Tesman agreed with him or not, but he must have spoken about it, because, for a time, our man got the name of Hard Facts. He had the singular good fortune that his sayings stuck to him and became part of his name. Thereafter he mooned about the Java Sea in some of the Tesmans trading schooners, and then vanished, on board an Arab ship, in the direction of New Guinea. He remained so long in that outlying part of his enchanted circle that he was nearly forgotten before he swam into view again in a native proa full of Goram vagabonds burnt black by the sun, very lean, his hair much thinned, and a portfolio of sketches under his arm. He showed these willingly, but was very reserved as to anything else. He had had an amusing time, he said. A man who will go to New Guinea for funwell!Later, years afterward, when the last vestiges of youth had gone off his face and all the hair off the top of his head, and his red-gold pair of horizontal moustaches had grown to really noble proportions, a certain disreputable white man fastened upon him an epithet. Putting down with a shaking hand a long glass emptied of its contentspaid for by Heysthe said, with that deliberate sagacity which no mere water-drinker ever attained:Heysts a puffect gnlman. Puffect! But hes a ut-uto-utopist.Heyst had just gone out of the place of public refreshment where this pronouncement was voiced. Utopist, eh? Upon my word, the only thing I heard him say which might have had a bearing on the point was his invitation to old McNab himself. Turning with that finished courtesy of attitude, movement, voice, which was his obvious characteristic, he had said with delicate playfulness:Come along and quench your thirst with us, Mr. McNab!Perhaps that was it. A man who could propose, even playfully, to quench old McNabs thirst must have been an utopist, a pursuer of chimras; for of downright irony Heyst was not prodigal. And, may be, this was the reason why he was generally liked. At that epoch in his life, in the fulness of his physical development, of a broad, martial presence, with his bald head and long moustaches, he resembled the portraits of Charles XII, of adventurous memory. However, there was no reason to think that Heyst was in any way a fighting man.Revue de presseI am glad that I am alive, if, for no other reason, because of the joy of reading this book. Jack London