



THE WHEEL

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wheel from time to time glanced listlessly at the six limp sails on the mizzenmast. The hand of the wheelhouse clock slowly crawled to four, and the steersman tolled rather than struck eight notes with the tongue of the bell above his head. Shelton could not help smiling at the eloquent interval spent by the look-out in repeating the hour on the bell forward.

Dragging feet climbed the ladder and crossed the poopdeck on the other side of the chart house, and Shelton saw an enervated sailor relieve the wheel. As he repeated the course given him by the other, he looked at the compass and raised his eyes disgustedly to the lazy flapping sails.

Pitch oozed out of the blinding deck; heat radiated humidly from the steel of house and bulwark, mast and spar. Heat rays from the oily sea refracted upon the simmering vessel, and Shelton realized languidly that every one of the forty-odd bodies on board must be dripping and trickling with sweat as was his own body. He could follow the slow tickling course of large drops down across a space of ribs untouched by his clinging shirt.

One tiny gnat-fly, incubated heaven knew how or where, drifted aimlessly across his vision. He caught himself wondering pleasantly if his shore clothes were mildewing again in his stateroom locker. They had been sunned and aired a few days before; but he knew that they could mildew undisturbed now, rather than that he should bestir himself. He was conscious of the long-legged Chinese steward, bearing a tea-tray, wearily flapping by in his wide khaki trousers. Seeing the captain asleep, and Shelton nearly so, he set the tray down softly on a locker inside the door, with a gesture to Shelton, who dropped his eyelashes in acknowledgment. Then the sleepy spirit of the doldrams enveloped him completely. He was pulled back reluctantly after he knew not how long by a chuckle from the captain, who advised:

"You'd better wake up out o' that, or you 'll get a wry neck." He straightened up his heavy head, which had been drooping at a perilous

angle, and looked mistily at the clock.
"Full muggy, ain't it?" the other
yawned sonorously, swabbing his drenched
forehead. I ain't never seen it so blame hot in these doldrums as it's been this last week. . . . But think of the good time comin' when that there northeast trade takes hold of us. . . . I ben asleep some spell myself, ain't I†'' He sat up and inspected sea and sky with a speculative eye.

Shelton was startled out of his lethargy. The skipper had risen with a cat-like abruptness, and stepped out of sight around the chart-house. So he, also, rose, stretched leisurely, and took a look.

There it was, coming toward the ship on the port bow - one of the familiar yet ever spectacular doldrum squalls; the slow, sure approach of a well-defined sable curtain of falling water, with a slaty-purple line before it; the greenish hue creeping into the sunlight; then, most amazing of all, the distinctly heard "thresh of the deep sea rain" out of the thick silence of the tropic calm, before the downpour struck the ship.

"It does thresh," Shelton mused, harkening with keen delight.

The skipper was studying the squall, hands characteristically in pockets, and pink face perspiring fine beads.

"I'm tryin' to size up the blame thing, yet ever spectacular doldrum squalls; the

"I'm tryin' to size up the blame thing, to see my northeast trade in it," smiled whimsically, without turning his head, in a sort of apology for so much interest in an equatorial commonplace. "Any one of 'em is like to fetch it," he added.

Shelton nodded, and strolled forward on the poop, where he leaned upon the His senses pleasured in the restful half-light that was enveloping the stabbing white of paint and canvas. He had the eye of an artist, albeit he was no painter, and consciously fed his beautyhunger upon the abundant changeful coloring of sea and ship. He saw the



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