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"WHEN KRAKATAO LET GO"
About 1750 words

For all the good he was doing at the wheel, Larson might as well have been somewhere where at least there was shade. His feet stuck to the pitch which oozed from the little bark's decks; sweat ran down his fingers and onto the spokes of the wheel and he gasped for breath. The wind was gone, and they were motionless, on the greasy swells.

Well, at least he wasn't alone in his discomfort. Squat Captain Sorensen, his face beet-red, hung on his elbows, half in and half out of the cabin hatch, panting. A little cats-paw of wind danced across the water and somewhere far aloft, a block clucked softly as a momentary strain came on the rigging and sails. But it died as quickly as it had come, and just as well that it did -- for the wind was hot, and it stung the eyes and nostrils.

What was the matter, anyhow? Why was this sweltering Sunday afternoon so ominous -- this Sunday, late in August of 1883? What was wrong? Was it the end of the world?

As a matter of fact, for some 27,000 people, it was just that; their world was to end in fire and ashes and choking gas, within a matter of hours. More fortunate were those rugged Scandinavian seamen in the Vega, out of Trondhjem. They would see their homes again -- ship, cargo and all -- even though the run from that sweltering sea, just to the east of Sunda Strait, would take them months.

Over toward Sunda, the sun dropped toward the horizon, and was blotted out in a purplish-brown haze. The current bore the Vega onward and Captain Sorensen, wisely figuring that it might set them ashore in the night, ordered he sails clewed up, the port anchor dropped.

