

CHAPTER II

AN OCEAN MYSTERY

TOWARDS midnight the fog which had for some hours been creeping about the horizon closed in upon them, bringing with it a cold penetrating drizzle, while the wind freshened so considerably that an occasional dash of spray broke completely over the boat.

"It's turned a nasty night, sir, and no mistake," observed Winters, buttoning his jacket tightly about him. "There'll be precious little sleep for the crew of this craft to-night."

The old sailor had apparently recovered his spirits by this time, and handled his oars with as much unconcern as if he were in charge of a pleasure excursion. "Here you, Cato!" he bawled. "Catch on to that saucepan and heave some of this water overboard; we'll be swamped if we ain't keerful."

Hours passed, the boat wrapped in a smother of fog and night, lashed by the keen whips of the flying crests, laboriously climbed the long sides of the crinkling hills of green water which thrust themselves forward with monotonous regularity out of the darkness, only to feel her way into the yawning valleys between with irresolute pauses and sudden shivers as if she were minded to give up the unequal struggle.

"The water's about my ankles," growled Winters at length. "Quit rowing, mate, and bear a hand with the bailing. I can hold her up to the sea."