

CHAPTER II

THE night came down with leisurely gloom. A dim starlight pervaded rather than shone in the sky; Nature seemed somnolent and gravely meditative. It brooded as broods a man who is seeking his way through a labyrinth of ideas to a conclusion still evading him. This sense of cogitation enveloped land and sea, and was as tangible to feeling as human presence.

At last the night seemed to wake from reverie. A movement, a thrill, ran through the spangled vault of dusk and sleep, and seemed to pass over the world, rousing the sea and the earth. There was no wind, apparently no breath of air, yet the leaves of the trees moved, the weather-vanes turned slightly, the animals in the byres roused themselves, and slumbering folk opening their eyes, turned over in their beds, and dropped into a troubled doze again.

Presently there came a long moaning sound from the tide, not loud but rather mysterious and distant—a plaint, a threatening, a warning, a prelude?

A dull labourer, returning from late toil, felt it, and raised his head in a perturbed way, as though someone had brought him news of a far-off disaster. A midwife, hurrying to a lowly birth-chamber, shivered and gathered her mantle more closely about her. She looked up at the sky, she looked out over