

It was the close of autumn, and as the sun set, masses of lurid and sulphureous clouds gathered upon the western horizon, but save an occasional sweep of wind which moaned through the funeral trees, all remained still, buried in that ringing silence which may be heard; and the moon, as yet untouched by the rising vapours, gleamed on the narrow window of the cell, and cast upon the floor the quivering shadows of the trees beside it. But at length came midnight, the moon was veiled in clouds, and a sweeping wind rushed through the long grass upon the graves, and swayed to and fro the tall branches of the yews and cypresses: next came the sound of falling rain—large, heavy drops which plashed upon the foliage, and then fell with a mullen reverberation upon the dry and thirsty earth. Gradually the storm increased; and ere long, as the thunder began to growl hoarsely in the distance, it beat angrily against the diamond panes, and dropped in a shower from the eaves of the little building. Elric breathed more freely. This elemental warfare was more congenial to his troubled spirit than the fearful silence by which it had been preceded. He tried to think of Mina; but as though her pure and innocent image could not blend with the objects around him, he found it impossible to pursue a continuous chain of thought. Once more he bent over the book before him, but as he turned the page a sudden light filled the narrow chamber, and through the sheeted glare sprang a fierce flash, which for a moment seemed to destroy his power of vision. He rose hurriedly from his chair; the thunder appeared to be bursting over his head, the lightning danced like fiery demons across the floor, the wind howled and roared in the wide chimney; and suddenly, as he stood there, aghast and conscience-stricken, a sharp blast penetrating through some aperture in the walls, extinguished his solitary lamp. At this instant the bell rang.

"The Bell!" shouted the young count, like a maniac—"THE BELL!" And then, gaining strength from his excess of horror, he laughed as wildly as he had spoken. "Fool that I am! Is not such a wind as this enough to shake the very edifice from its foundation? and am I scared because it has

vibrated along a wire? Has not the same blast put out my lamp? All is still again. My own thoughts have made a coward of me!"

As he uttered these words, another and a brighter flash shot through the casement and ran along the wire, and again the bell rang out; but his eye had been upon it, and he could no longer cheat himself into the belief that he had endeavored to create. The fiery vapour had disappeared, but still louder and louder rang the bell, as though pulled by a hand of agony.

Elric sank helpless to his knees. At every successive flash he saw the violent motion of the bell which hung above him, and as the darkness again gathered about the cell, he still heard the maddening peal, which seemed to split his brain. "Light! light!" he moaned at last, as he rose painful from the floor. "I must have light, or I shall become a raving maniac."

And then he strove to re-illumine the lamp; but his shaking hand ill obeyed the impulse of his frenzied will. And still, without the intermission of a second, the bell rang on. At length he obtained a light, and staggering to the wall, he fixed his eyes upon the frightful wire.

"It stretches," he muttered, unconsciously; "still it stretches, and there is no wind now; there is a lull. Some one must be pulling it from the other chamber, and if so, it must be——"

His voice became extinct; he could not utter the name of his sister.

With a frantic gesture he seized the lamp and turned towards the door which opened into the death-chamber, and still the bell rang on, without the cessation of an instant. A short passage parted the two cells, and as he staggered onwards he was compelled to cling to the wall, for his knees knocked together, and he could scarcely support himself. At length he reached the inner door, and desperately flung it open. A chill like that which escapes from a vault fell upon his brow, and the sound of the bell pursued him still. He moved a pace forward, retreated, again advanced, and, finally, by a mighty effort, sprang into the centre of the chamber.