

## **The Mysterious Bell**

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Attributed to "B"

*Transcriber's note: Transcribed from the version in Tales of Terror (1833), editor Henry St. Clair. Slightly re-paragraphed, for legibility.*

It was a dead calm: the sun beamed bright and beautiful upon the ocean in setting glory, and all life and animation had given place to that overpowering listlessness, which none can form any conception of, but they who have experienced a long continued calm at sea.

I was leaning against the taffrail, gazing upon the dark waters below, in that state of apathy, in which thought itself becomes almost too great an exertion, when suddenly a gentle breath of wind, that swept along so lightly as to cause no ripple upon the glossy surface of the waveless deep, wafted to my awakened sense, a tinkling sound, like the ringing of a small bell at an immense distance. The unusual circumstance aroused my dormant faculties, and I listened with breathless attention; but the flaw had passed, and all was again silent and death-like.

I remained upon the same spot nearly an hour, but it came not again; at length overcome with drowsiness, I retired to my berth. The next morning when I came upon deck, I found that the calm still continued, and the Captain was of opinion that it would last some days. I mentioned to him the incident that had attracted my attention; but he laughed, and said I had been dreaming. He knew we were too far from land for any sound to reach us, and no vessel he said could have been near enough for me to hear the ringing of the bell, without also being in sight. The mate agreed with him, but I observed one weatherbeaten tar who was standing near, to shake his head doubtfully, and his rugged countenance betrayed great anxiety; but he said nothing. The morning passed away, still the sea was unruffled by any breeze.

After dinner, to while away the tedious hours, the Captain and I sat down upon the quarter deck to cards. We had scarcely commenced playing, when I was startled by hearing the same bell-like tones, so faint and far, that "nothing lived

'twixt them and silence." I called to the Captain to listen; he sat a moment without speaking, and then started up, exclaiming, "I hear it, too." The sailors seemed to have noticed it also, for they were hushed, and listening.

The Captain went aloft with his glass, and looked in every direction. "I hear it," said he, "distinctly, but I can see nothing; it cannot be from shore, for we are more than fifty leagues from any land." The attention of all on board was now fully awake. The sailors stood upon the forecastle in anxious groups, all but the old man, the singular expression of whose features I had remarked in the morning. He sat upon the windlass with his hands folded, and his eyes intently fixed upon the deck; but still he spoke not. Various conjectures were hazarded among us, but none that satisfactorily accounted for the noise.

The afternoon passed, and the sun again set, while the tinkling sound still came floating over the waters. It was late before sleep closed my eyes that night. When the morning of the next day dawned, the Captain went again to the mast head with his glass, but no sail appeared upon the horizon; yet still the ceaseless bell was plainly to be heard, while not a breath of wind could be felt. Noon came, and still the calm continued, and the sound approached nearer and nearer, when on a sudden, the Captain from the top cried out, "I see it now, but what it is God only knows: it does not look like any craft that ever the hand of man fashioned."

We all rushed to the forecastle, and in silence awaited the approach of this strange navigator. It came careering over the waters with a rapid motion, and as it drew near, exhibited to our wondering gaze a single black mast, rising from the centre of what seemed a square and solid block of wood, but without yard or sail, nor did any living creature appear upon it.

I proposed to take the boat and board it; but the sailors shook their heads, and the Captain was silent. Determined to discover the meaning of this phenomenon, I jumped into the boat, intending to scull towards it, when the old sailor, seeing my resolution, declared that he would go with me; and the Captain, after a moment's hesitation, also joined us.

We rowed swiftly onwards to meet the object of our curiosity, which was now within half a mile of the ship, and in a few minutes, were sufficiently near to perceive the bell at the top of the mast, the ringing of which had announced its coming. It was green and rusty as if with age, and the sides of the nondescript

barque were covered with barnacles, and tangled masses of seaweed. Immediately beneath the bell, which still swung from side to side with deafening din, was attached a deep sea line, passing over the side and descending into the water. The moment our boat touched this strange vessel, the bell ceased to toll, and the floating mass became immovable.

We gazed upon it, and upon each other in amazement; and at length, the Captain in a low and tremulous voice, proposed to return, but the sailor said "No!-- it was an evil hour when we met this accursed"----(his voice sunk, and I could not distinguish what he uttered) "but we *have* met it, and we must not leave it thus. Let us haul upon this line." We did so for nearly twenty minutes, but with great difficulty, for it seemed as if some ponderous body at the extremity resisted our efforts.

At length the profound stillness that had hitherto prevailed amongst us was broken by the Captain, who looked down into the water, and exclaimed, "Great God! what have we here?"

We followed with our eyes the motion of his hand, and saw a large object glistening white beneath the waves, and appearing like a gigantic corpse, wrapped in a white cloth and bound with cords. "Now may heaven shield us!" said the seaman, in a husky voice, "it is the shrouded Demon of the Sea."

As he spoke he drew his knife from his belt, and in an instant severed the line. The body turned, its white sides flashing through the dark waters, and with the rapidity of lightning, disappeared from our view.