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Tension in The Pit and the Pendulum

Edgar Allan Poe was a master of creating tension in his writings. Below is a passage from Poe's short story, "The Pit and the Pendulum." In the story, the narrator has been convicted during the Spanish Inquisition of an unnamed crime and sentenced to death. He is tied on the floor and a large, sharp blade is swinging back and forth towards his body.

The vibration of the pendulum was at right angles to my breath. I saw that the crescent was designed to cross the region of the heart. It would fray the serge of my robe—it would return and repeat its operation—again—and again. Notwithstanding terrifically wide sweep (some thirty feet or more) and the hissing voice of its descent, sufficient to smother these very walls of iron, still the fraying of my robe would be all that, for several minutes, it would accomplish. And at this thought I pained. I dared not go further than this reflection. I drew upon it with a pertinacity of attention—as if, in so breathing, I could arrest here the descent of the steel. I forced myself to ponder upon the sound of the crescent as it should pass across the garment—upon the possible thrilling sensation which the friction of cloth produces on the nerves. I pondered upon all this (truly could my teeth were on edge. Down—steadily down it crept. I took a focused pleasure in contrasting its downward with its lateral velocity. To the right—to the left—far and wide—with the shriek of a damned spirit; to my heart with the stealthy pace of the tiger! I alternately laughed and howled as the one or the other idea grew predominant.

Down—continually, relentlessly down! I struggled violently, furiously, to free my left arm. This was five inches from the elbow to the hand. I could reach the latter, from the plating beside me, in my mouth, with great effort, but no further. Could I have broken the fastenings above the elbow, I would have seized and attempted to arrest the pendulum. I might as well have attempted to arrest an earthquake!

Down—still unceasingly—still inevitably down! I gasped and struggled at each vibration. I shrank convulsively at its every sweep. My eyes followed its outward or upward whirle with the eagerness of the most unassuming despair; they closed themselves spasmodically at the descent, although death would have been a relief, oh! how unspcakable!

How does Poe add tension to the passage? Use text examples to support your analysis.

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