

# “THE TELL-TALE HEART”

by Edgar Allan Poe

True! -- nervous – dreadfully nervous, I had been and am; but why will you say that I am mad? Hearken! And observe how calmly I can tell you the whole story.

It is impossible to say how first the idea entered my brain; but once conceived, it haunted me day and night. Object, there was none. I loved the old man. For his gold I had no desire. I think it was his eye! One of his eyes resembled that of a vulture – a pale blue eye, with a film over it. Whenever it fell upon me, my blood ran cold; and so, I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and thus rid myself of the eye forever.

You should have seen how wisely I proceeded. I was never kinder to the old man than during the whole week before I killed him. And every night, about midnight, I turned the latch of his door and opened it – oh, so gently! I put in a dark lantern, so that no light shone out, and then I thrust in my head. I moved it slowly – very slowly, so that I might not disturb the old man’s sleep. And then, when my head was well in the room, I undid the lantern cautiously so that a single thin ray fell upon the vulture eye. This I did for seven long nights.

Upon the eighth night I was more than usually cautious in opening the door. A watch’s minute hand moves no more slowly than did mine. When I had waited a long time, very patiently, I resolved to open a very little crevice in the lantern, until, at length, a single dim ray, like the thread of the spider, shot out and fell upon the vulture eye.

It was open – wide open – and I grew furious as I gazed upon it! A dull blue, with a hideous veil over it that chilled the very marrow in my bones. Now, There came to my ears a low, dull, quick sound, such as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton. It was the beating of the old man’s heart. It increased my fury, as the beating of a drum stimulates the soldier into courage.

A new anxiety seized me – the sound would be heard by a neighbor! The old man’s hour had come! With a loud yell, I threw open the lantern and leaped into the room. He shrieked once – once only. In an instant I dragged him to the floor, and pulled the heavy bed over him. But, for many minutes, the heart beat on with a muffled sound. At length it ceased. I removed the bed and examined the corpse. The old man was dead! His eye would trouble me no more.

If still you think me mad, you will think so no longer when I describe the wise precautions I took for the concealment of the body. First, I dismembered the corpse. I cut off the head and the arms and the legs.

Next, I took up three planks from the flooring of the chamber, and deposited all between the scantlings. I then replaced the boards so cleverly that no human eye – not even his – could have detected anything wrong.

It was four o'clock – still dark a midnight. As the bell sounded the hour, there came a knocking at the street door. I went down to open it with a light heart, for what had I to fear? There entered three men, officers of the police. A shriek had been heard by a neighbor during the night, suspicion of foul play had been aroused, and the officers had been deputed to search the premises.

I bade the gentlemen welcome. The shriek, I said, was my own in a dream. The old man, I mentioned, was absent in the country. I took my visitors all over the house and bade them search – search well. I led them, at length, to his chamber. I showed them his treasures, secure, undisturbed. In the enthusiasm of my confidence, I brought chairs into the room, and desired them to rest from their fatigue, while I myself, placed my own seat upon the very spot beneath which reposed the corpse of the victim.

The officers were satisfied. They sat, and while I answered cheerily, they chatted of familiar things. But, ere long, I felt myself getting pale and wished them gone. I fancied a ringing in my ears. I talked more freely to get rid of the feeling, but in continued – until, at length, I found that the noise was not within my ears.

I talked more fluently, and with a heightened voice. Yet the sound increased. It was a low, dull, quick sound – such as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton. I paced the floor, but the noise steadily increased. Oh, God! What could I do? I foamed – I raved – I swore! But the noise arose over all. It grew louder – louder – louder! Was it possible they heard not? Almighty God! No, no! They heard! They suspected! They knew! They were making a mockery of my horror! I felt that I must scream or die! And now, again! Hark! Louder! Louder! Louder!

“Villains!” I shrieked, “dissemble no more! I admit the deed! Tear up the planks! Here, here! It is the beating of his hideous heart!”