

The Tell-Tale Heart

by Edgar Allan Poe

(slightly adapted)



PART 1

True! Nervous, very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and still I am. But why will you say that I am mad? The disease had sharpened my senses, not destroyed, not *dulled* them. Above all was the sense of acute hearing. I heard all things in heaven and on earth. I heard many things in hell. How then am I mad? Listen and observe how healthily, how calmly, I can tell you the whole story:

It is impossible to say how first the idea came into my brain, but since I got it, it *haunted* me day and night. Object there was none. Passion there was none. I loved the old man. He had never treated me wrong. He had never insulted me. For his gold I had no desire. I think it was his eye! Yes, it was this! One of his eyes looked like that of a *vulture* -- a pale blue eye with a film over it. Whenever it watched or observed me my blood ran cold, and so by degrees, very gradually, I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, *to get rid of* the eye forever.

Now this is the point. You think I'm mad. Madmen know nothing. But you should have seen me. You should have seen how wisely I proceeded -- with what caution -- with what *foresight*, with what secrecy, I went to work! 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 knob of his door and opened it oh, so gently! And then, when I had opened the door wide enough for my head, I put in a dark *lantern* - all closed - closed so that no light shone out, and then I pushed in my head. Oh, you would have laughed to see how cunningly I pushed my head in! I moved it slowly, very, very slowly, so that I might not disturb the old man's sleep. It took me an hour to place my whole head within the opening so far that I could see him as he lay upon his bed. Ha, would a madman have been so wise as this? And then when my head was in the room I opened the lantern cautiously -- oh, so cautiously -- cautiously for the *hinges* creaked. I opened it just so much that a single thin ray of light fell upon the vulture eye. And this I did for seven long nights, every night just at midnight, but I found the eye always closed, and so it was impossible to do the work, for it was not the old man who made me angry but his evil eye. (...)

On the eighth night:

(...) perhaps he heard me, because he suddenly moved on the bed as if *startled*. Now you may think that I drew back -- but no. His room was as black as pitch with the thick darkness, for the shutters were closed because of his fear of robbers. So I knew that he could not see the opening of the door, and I kept pushing it on steadily, steadily.

I had my head in, and was about to open the lantern, when my thumb slipped upon the *tin fastening*, and the old man sprang up in the bed, crying out, "Who's there?" (...)

And now haven't I told you that what you think is madness, it is just over-acuteness of the senses. Now there came a low, dull, quick sound to my ears, such as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton. I knew that sound well too. 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.

But even yet I waited and kept still. I hardly breathed. I held the lantern motionless. I tried, as steadily as possible, to keep the ray upon the eye. In the meantime the beating of the heart increased. It grew quicker and quicker, and louder and louder, every moment. The old man must have been in extreme terror! It grew louder, I say, louder every moment! -- do you understand what I mean? I have told you that I am nervous - yes I am. And now at the dead hour of the night, amid the dreadful silence of that old

to dull = to make sth. slow; to haunt = to chase s.o.; vulture = Geier; to get rid of = etw. loswerden ; foresight = the feeling that something probably might happen; lantern = Laterne; hinge = Türangel; startled = frightened; tin fastening = Verschluss aus Zinn; fury = rage; to be really mad at someone

house, such strange noise excited me to uncontrollable terror. For some minutes longer I stood still. But the beating grew louder, louder! I thought the heart must *burst*. And now a new fear *welled up* inside me -- the sound would be heard by a neighbour! The old man's hour had come! With a loud yell, I threw open the lantern and jumped into the room. He shrieked once -- once only. In one instant I pushed him to the floor, and pulled the heavy blanket over him. I then smiled, to find the deed done so far. But for many minutes the heart beat on with a *muffled* sound. This, however, did not annoy me; now it would not be heard through the wall. The old man was dead. I removed the blanket and examined the corpse. Yes, he was stone, stone dead. I placed my hand upon the heart and held it there many minutes. There was no pulsation. He was stone dead. His eye would trouble me no more.

If you still think me mad, you will think so no longer when I describe the wise precautions I took for the hiding of the body. The night had proceeded, and I worked hastily, but in silence.

I took up three *planks* from the floor of the chamber, and put the corpse in the coffin-like hole under the planks. I then replaced the planks so cleverly so cautiously, that no human eye -- not even his -- could have noted anything wrong. There was nothing to wash out -- no stain of any kind -- no blood-spot whatever. I had been too cautious for that. (...)

PART 2

Police officers came to the house of the old man, because the neighbours had alarmed them after hearing a shriek. At first the narrator is calm and thinks that he has nothing to fear. But then he suddenly hears a sound:

No doubt, now I grew very pale; but I talked more fluently, and with a louder voice. The sound increased -- and what could I do? It was a low, dull, quick sound, such as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton. I gasped for breath, and the officers didn't hear it. I talked more quickly, more vehemently but the noise steadily increased. I stood up and argued about nothing and everything, in a high voice and with violent gesticulations; but the noise steadily increased. Why did they not go? I walked to and fro with heavy *strides*, excited to fury, but the noise steadily increased. Oh God! what could I do? I foamed -- I raved -- I swore! I swung the chair upon which I had been sitting, and scratched with it on the planks, but the noise arose and continually increased. It grew louder -- louder -- louder! And still the men chatted pleasantly, and smiled. Was it possible they didn't hear it? Almighty God! -- no, no? They heard! -- they suspected! -- they knew! -- they were making a *mockery* of my horror! -- this I thought, and this I think. But anything was better than this *agony*! Anything was more tolerable than this *derision*! I could bear those smiles no longer! I felt that I must scream or die! -- and now -- again -- listen! louder! louder! louder! LOUDER! --

"*Villains!*" I screamed, "I admit the deed! -- tear up the planks! -- here, here! -- it is the beating of his hideous heart!"

1. Describe the effects of the narrator's disease on his senses.
2. Which was the idea that came into the narrator's brain?
3. Because of over-acuteness of the senses the narrator noted a sound -describe it and explain where it came from.
4. Why did he finally admit the deed?

to burst = zerspringen; to well up = hochsteigen; muffled = gedämpft; plank = Planke, Bohle; strides = Schritte; mockery = Spott; agony = Qual; derision = Hohn; villains = Ganoven, Bösewichte