

## THE TELL-TALE HEART

True! - nervous - very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and 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 hearing acute. I heard all things in the heaven and in the 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.

You fancy me mad. Madmen know nothing. But you should have seen me. You should have seen how wisely I proceeded - with what caution 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 **latch** of his door and opened it - oh so gently! And then, when I had made an opening sufficient for my head, I put in a dark lantern, all closed so that no light **shone** out, and then I thrust in my head. I moved it 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 well in the room, I undid the lantern cautiously. And this I did for seven long nights but I found the eye always closed; and so it was impossible to do the work; for it was not the old man who vexed me, but his Evil Eye. And every morning, when the day broke, I went **boldly** into the chamber, and spoke courageously to him, calling him by name in a hearty tone, and inquiring how he had passed the night. So you see he would have been a very profound old man, indeed, to suspect that every night, just at twelve, I looked upon him while he slept.

Upon the eighth night I was more than usually cautious in opening the door. I had my head in, and was about to open the lantern, when my thumb slipped and the old man sprang up in bed, crying out - 'Who's there?' I kept quite still and said nothing. For a whole hour I did not move a muscle, and in the meantime I did not hear him lie down. He was still sitting up in the bed listening; - just as I have done, night after night, listening to the death watches in the wall.

Presently I heard a slight **groan**, and I knew it was the groan of mortal terror. I knew the sound well. I knew what the old man felt, and **pitied** him, although I **chuckled at heart**. I knew that he had been lying awake ever since the first slight noise, when he had turned in the bed. His fears had been ever since growing upon him. He had been trying to fancy them causeless, but could not. Yes, he had been trying to comfort himself with these suppositions: but he had found all in vain. All in vain; because Death, in approaching him had **stalked** with his black shadow before him, and enveloped the victim.

And have I not told you that what you mistake for madness is but **over acuteness** of the senses? - now, I say, there came to my ears a low, dull, quick sound, 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.

I held the lantern motionless. Meantime the **hellish tattoo** of the heart increased. It grew quicker and quicker, and louder and louder every instant. The old man's terror must have been extreme! It grew louder, I say, louder every moment! - do you **mark me well**? I have told you that I am nervous: so I am. And now at the dead hour of the night, amid the dreadful silence of that old house, so strange a noise as this excited me to uncontrollable terror. The beating grew louder, louder! I thought the heart must burst. And now a new anxiety seized 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 **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. I then smiled gaily, to find the deed so far done. But, for many minutes, the heart beat on with a muffled sound. This, however, did not vex me; it would not be heard through the wall. At length it ceased. The old man was dead. I removed the bed and examined the corpse. I placed my hand upon the heart and held it there many minutes. There was no pulsation. He was stone dead.

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. The night **waned**; and I worked hastily, but in silence. First of all I **dismembered** the corpse. I cut off the head and the arms and the legs.

Then 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 any thing wrong. There was nothing to wash out - no **stain** of any kind - no blood-spot whatever. I had been too **wary** for that. A tub had caught all - ha! ha!

When I had made an end of these labours, it was four o'clock - still dark as 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 now to fear? There entered three men, who introduced themselves, with perfect suavity, as

officers of the police. A **shriek** had been heard by a neighbour during the night; suspicion of **foul play** had been aroused; information had been lodged at the police office, and they (the officers) had been deputed to search the **premises**.

I smiled, - for what had I to fear? 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. I 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 here to rest from their fatigues, while I myself, in the wild audacity of my perfect triumph, placed my own seat upon the very spot beneath which reposed the corpse of the victim.

The officers were satisfied. My manner had convinced them. I was singularly **at ease**. They say, and while I answered cheerily, they chatted of familiar things. But before long, I felt myself getting pale and wished them gone. My **head ached**, and I fancied a ringing in my ears: but still they sat and still chatted. The ringing became more distinct: - it continued and became more distinct: I talked more freely to get rid of the feeling: but it continued and gained definiteness - until, at length, I found that the noise was not within my ears.

No doubt I now grew very pale; - but I talked more fluently, and with a **heightened** voice. Yet the sound increased - and what could I do? I was a low, **dull**, quick sound - much such a sound as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton. I gasped for breath - and yet the officers heard it not. I talked more quickly - more vehemently; but the noise steadily increased. I arose and argued about trifles, in a high key and with violent gesticulations; but the noise steadily increased. Why would they not be gone? I paced the floor to and fro with heavy strides, as if excited to fury by the observations of the men - 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 grated it upon the boards, but the noise arose over all and continually increased. It grew louder - louder - louder! And still the men chatted pleasantly, and smiled. Was it possible they heard not? **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 hypocritical smiles no longer! I felt that I must scream or die! and now - again! - hark! louder! 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!'

*Abridged from Edgar Allan Poe, January 1843*

**dulled** : *ennuyeux*

**latch** : *loquet*

**boldly** : *avec audace*

**groan** : *grogement* – **pitied** : *prendre pitié* – **chuckled at heart** : *se réjouir en secret* – **stalked** : *traqué*

**over acuteness**: *grande acuité*

**hellish tattoo** : *bruit d'enfer* – **mark me well** : *ici comprenez -vous bien* – **leaped** : *sauter*

**waned**: *décroître*– **dismembered**: *démembrer* – **planks**: *planches* – **stain**: *tâche* – **wary**: *méfiant*

**shriek** : *cri aigu* – **foul play** : *acte criminel* – **premises** : *lieux*

**bade** : *inviter*

**at ease** : *à l'aise* – **head ached**: *mal de tête*

**dull** : *ennuyeyx*

**almighty God** : *Dieu tout puissant*

**dissemble** : *masquer, prétendre*