The Tell-Tale Heart

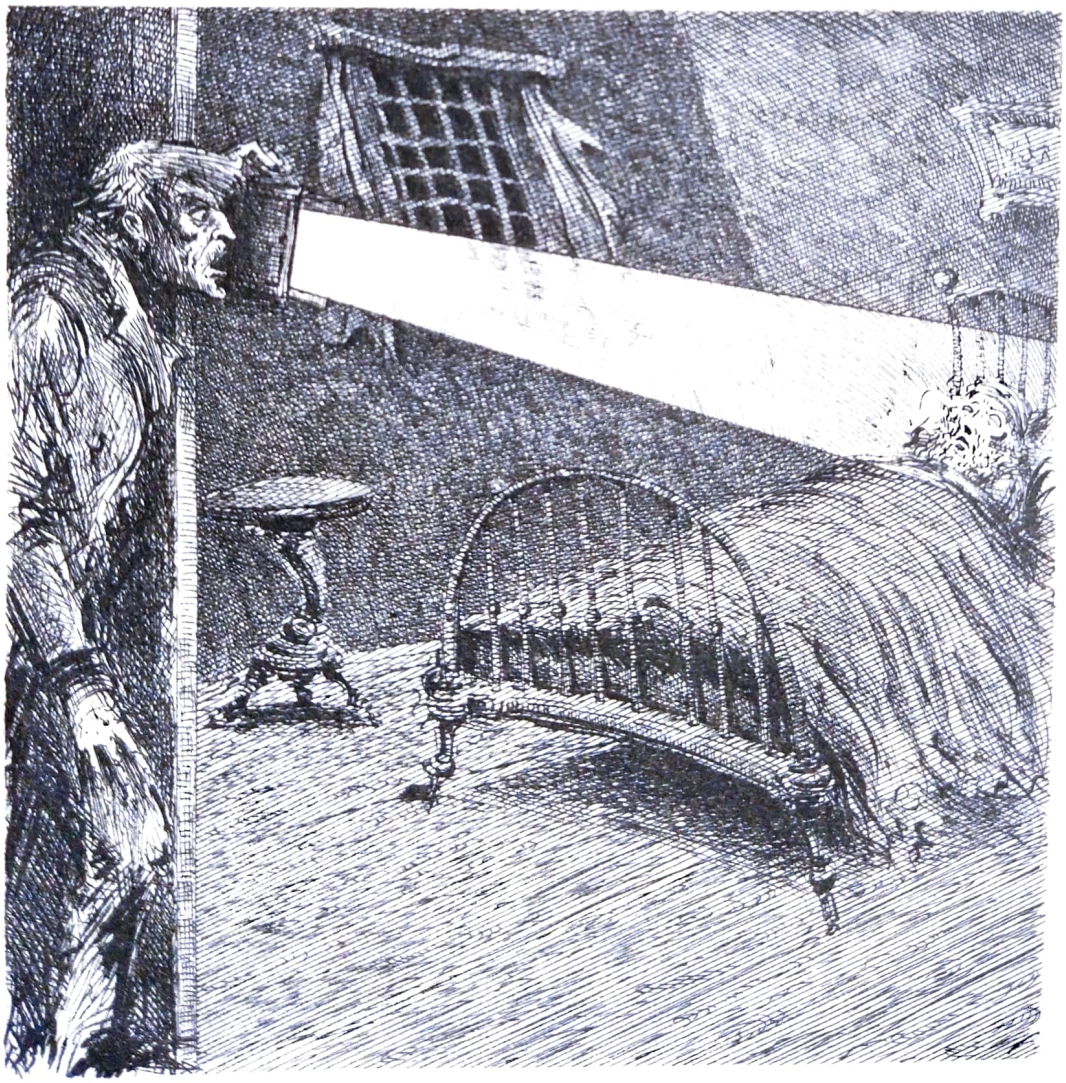
It is true that I had been – and I am – very nervous, but do you really think that I am mad? I could see and hear *more* clearly – not less, because of the disease. My hearing, more than anything, was excellent. I could hear all things, things in this world and things in heaven. I heard many things in hell, too. So how can I be mad? See how clearly and calmly I can tell my story.

I cannot explain how the idea first came into my head. But once I had thought of the idea, I could not forget it. I had no reason to do it. I was not angry. I loved the old man. He had never hurt me in any way. I didn't want his gold. I think it was his eye! Yes! He had a pale, blue eye, the eye of a vulture. Whenever I looked at it, my blood became cold; and so, very slowly, I decided to kill the old man and escape from the eye for ever.

You are thinking, I know, that I am mad. But madmen are not clever. And see how cleverly I prepared my plan! Every day that week I was so kind to the old man! And every night of that week, at about midnight, I opened his door very, very quietly. First I put my dark lantern through the opening of the door. The lantern was closed, and so no light came out of it, none at all. Then slowly, very slowly, I put my head inside the opening. I took sixty long minutes just to put my head inside. Would a madman have worked so carefully? And when my head was inside the room, I opened the lantern carefully and a thin ray of light fell onto the vulture

eye. But the eye was always closed, so I could not do the work. You see, I did not hate the man; it was only the eye that I hated.

On the eighth night I started opening the door even more carefully. I was feeling calm and strong. There I was, opening his door, and he did not even know that I was there! I almost laughed at the idea. And perhaps, at that moment, he heard me, because he suddenly moved in his bed. But I did not move away. I knew that he could not see the opening of the door, so I continued pushing it open, slowly and quietly.



But the eye was always closed, so I could not do the work.

When my head was in the room, I tried to open the lantern but my thumb slipped and I made a noise. Immediately, the man sat up in bed and shouted, 'Who's there?'

I said nothing. For an hour I just stood there, without moving, and he sat in his bed, listening. Then he made a soft noise, a noise which I recognized. It was the noise of terror, the terror of death. I knew the sound because I had made it myself, many times, in the deep of the night, when all the world was asleep. I felt sorry for the old man, but I laughed silently. I knew that he had been awake since the first noise, and his fear had grown and grown. Death had entered his room, and now the shadow of death lay all around him. He could neither see me nor hear me, but he could *feel* my head inside his room.

I opened the lantern a little and a thin ray of light fell on his eye. It was open, and as I looked at it, I became angry. I could see it clearly, a horrible, pale blue eye that turned my blood cold. I could see nothing of the man's face or body, just his eye.

And then I heard a sound. Hadn't I told you that my hearing was excellent? I knew the sound. It was the beating of the old man's heart. It grew louder and quicker. Yes, louder and louder with every minute. The old man's terror must have been very great. And now a new terror came to me – a neighbour might hear the noise of this beating heart! The old man's time had come!

I opened the lantern fully and ran into the room. He shouted once – but only once because I pulled him to the floor and pulled the heavy bed over him. For many minutes the heart continued to beat, but then it stopped. The old



I pulled the old man to the floor.

man was dead. I put my hand on his heart and held it there for many minutes. There was no life in him at all. Now his eye would not trouble me again.

Perhaps you are still thinking that I am mad. You will not, when I tell you of the clever way I hid the body. First,

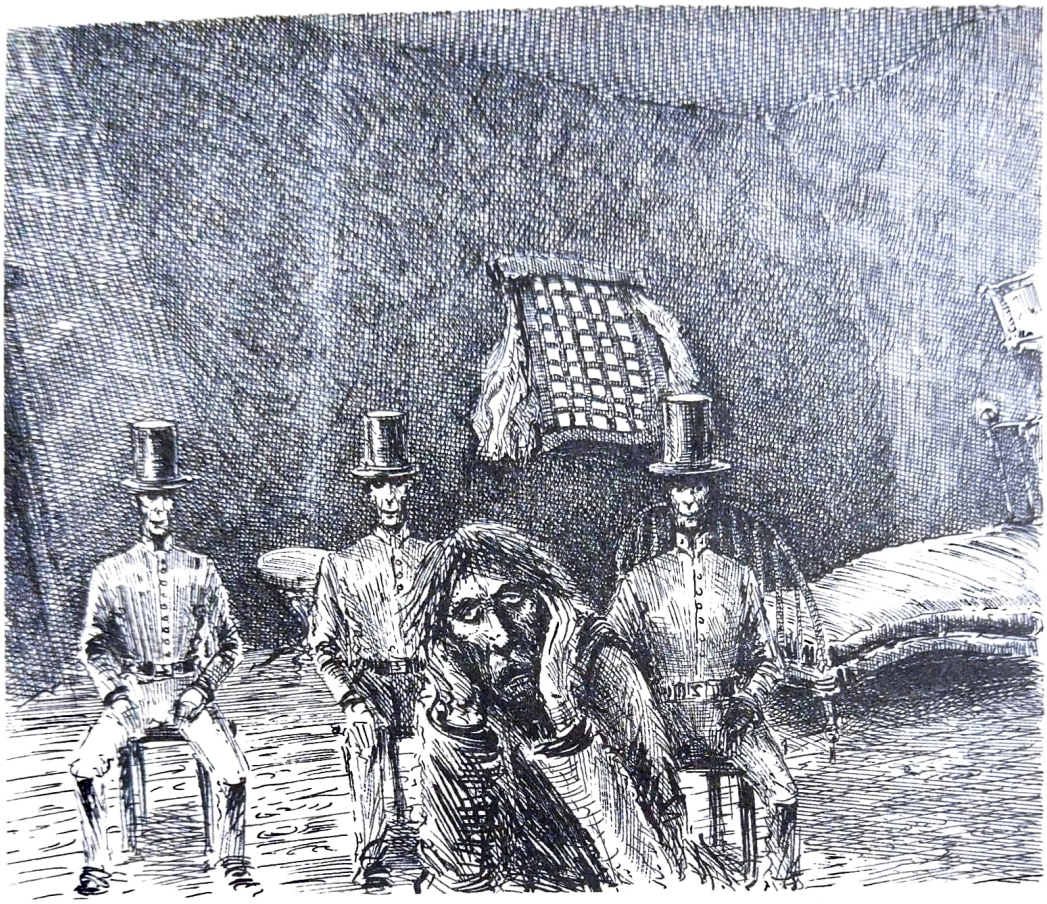
I cut it into pieces. I cut off the head and the arms and the legs. I then took up three boards from the wooden floor, and hid the body underneath. Finally, I replaced the wooden boards with great care. Now no human eye – not even *his* – would see anything wrong. There was nothing to see – not even any blood. A bowl had caught it all – ha! ha!

When I finished, it was four o'clock and it was still dark. There was a knock at the front door. Calmly, because I knew I had nothing to fear, I opened the door. Three policemen came in. They had come because a neighbour had reported a loud shout coming from the house.

I welcomed the policemen and asked them to come in. I explained that it was I who had shouted, in a dream. The old man, I said, was away in the country. I took them round the house and asked them to search it well. Then I took them to the old man's room and showed them all his things. I brought chairs into the room and invited them to sit down and rest a while. Calmly, I put my own chair on the place where I had hidden his body.

The policemen seemed happy. They could see from the way I spoke that all was well. They continued talking, but I began to get tired. My head ached, and there was a ringing noise in my ears. I wanted the men to go away, but they continued to talk. The ringing became louder and clearer. And then I realized that the noise was *not* in my ears.

I became very pale, and starting talking more loudly. But the noise became louder too. What could I do? It was a low, soft sound, like the sound made by a watch when it is covered in cotton. I spoke more loudly. The noise became louder too. Why, oh why, didn't the men go away? I walked up



And now the noise was louder, louder, LOUDER!

and down the room. I became angry, I argued, I threw the chair onto the floor. But the noise continued to grow louder, louder than every noise I made. And the men went on talking and smiling. Was it possible that they hadn't heard the terrible noise? No! no! They heard! *They knew!* They were only pretending that they hadn't heard the noise! I was sure of this – I still am – and I hated their smiling faces. I felt that I must scream or die! And now, again, the noise was louder, louder, *louder*!

'Stop!' I shouted. 'Stop pretending that you cannot hear it! Yes, I did it! Pull up the floorboards here! here, here! – it is the beating of his horrible heart!'