

FAMOUS SHORT STORIES

The
Telltale
Heart

and Other Short Stories

by Edgar Allan Poe

retold by

Helen Sillett and Jerry Stemach

Don Johnston Incorporated
Volo, Illinois

The Telltale Heart

Part One



It's true! I *am* nervous as I tell you this. But I have always been a nervous person. Am I insane? A madman? Never!

You may think that I am mad, but I can promise you that I am not. The disease did not destroy my sense of touch, or my senses of sight and hearing. If anything, the disease only made my senses

sharper. I hear all things in heaven and on the earth. I can even hear things from hell. How then, can you think of me as some kind of madman? My head is clear, and I understand what I am doing. Listen to how calmly I can tell you the story of what happened to me.

I cannot be sure how the idea first entered my brain, but once it was in my mind, the idea haunted me day and night.

I never had any interest in the old man's riches, so it was not about his gold. I did not hate him either. In fact, I loved the old man. He had never wronged me in any way, never given me any insult. No, he had done nothing to deserve what I did to him.

If you asked me to name a single cause of what happened that night, I would tell you it was his eye. Yes, it was this! One of the old man's eyes was like the eye of a vulture — a pale blue eye, with a film over it. Whenever that eye fell upon me, my blood ran cold.

And so it was, little by little, that I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and rid myself of his hideous eye forever.

I know you think that I am a madman, but madmen act foolishly. A madman would have rushed in without a plan and tripped himself up with some silly mistake. *I* proceeded carefully, making sure at every step that the old man suspected nothing. I was never kinder to the old man than during the whole week before I killed him.

“Good morning! I trust that you slept well,” I would say in a hearty way when he rose each morning.

“Are you enjoying the sunshine?” I asked when he took his tea in the garden each afternoon.

“Good night and pleasant dreams,” I told him as he went to bed each night.

Then, every night at midnight, I turned the latch and opened his chamber door — oh, so gently! I spent a whole hour opening that door. I carried a lantern with me. The lantern was lit, but I kept the shade on it tightly closed so that no light shone from it.

I held the lantern out ahead of me, putting it into the dark room. Then I put my head into the room — slowly, slowly — so that I did not disturb the old man's sleep.

Ha! If you could have seen me on those nights, you would not be thinking that I have lost my mind. What madman would have moved as wisely and carefully as I did?

When my head was inside the room, I opened the shade on the lantern — oh so slowly, until a single dim ray of light fell on the vulture eye.



I repeated these movements for seven nights, but for seven nights the eye was closed. How could I kill the man when his eye was closed? After all, it was not the old man who troubled me, but the Evil Eye.

On the eighth night I moved even more slowly in opening the chamber door. He had no idea of my secret thoughts. I chuckled at this and perhaps he heard me because suddenly he moved on the bed. You might think I'd have stopped then, but no! The room was as black as ink, and I knew he could not see that the door was open.

I was about to open the lantern to let out one thin ray of light when my thumb slipped on the tin shade of the lantern. The old man sprang up in his bed, crying out — "Who's there?"

I kept quite still and said nothing. I knew that he could not see me, because the shutters on his windows were tightly closed and the room was completely dark. For one whole hour *I* did not move a muscle, and *he* did not lie down. He was still sitting up in the bed listening and waiting for some sign that Death was near.

I knew what the old man was feeling, and I took pity on him. He was probably trying to find some reason to explain the noise. No doubt he was thinking, "*It is nothing but the wind in the chimney,*" or "*It is a mouse crossing the floor.*" Yes, he was trying to comfort himself in this way, but it was useless. Death was in the room now, and the old man knew it. He could not see my head in the darkness, but surely he felt my presence. I must confess that I chuckled in my heart at his helplessness.

Now! I thought to myself. *But careful, careful!*

I placed my thumb on the shade again and opened it a tiny crack until a single dim ray of light, as thin as a spider's thread, shot out from the lantern and fell upon the vulture eye.

It was open! — wide, wide open — and I grew furious as I gazed upon it. It was a dull, hideous blue that chilled me to the bone as I gazed upon it.

From across the silent bedroom, there came to my ears a dull, quick sound, like the sound of a watch that had been wrapped in cotton. I knew *that* sound well. It was the beating of the old man's heart. I stood still and hardly took a breath. I held the lantern so that its single ray fell upon the eye. In the meantime, the beating heart grew louder, louder every moment! *Surely his heart will burst!* I thought to myself.



Then I was seized by a new terror. Surely the sound would be heard by a neighbor!

I knew that I must act quickly to stop the beating heart and to rid myself of the vulture eye forever. The old man's hour had come.

With a loud yell, I threw open the lantern and leaped into the room.

Part Two



The old man shrieked once — only once. In an instant I dragged him to the floor, and pulled the heavy bed on top of his frail old body. I smiled, for the deed was at last done.

For many minutes the heart beat on with a muffled sound until finally, it stopped. The old man was dead.



I pulled the bed away and studied his corpse. I placed my hand upon his heart and held it there. There was no pulse, no sound. Yes, he was stone, stone dead. His eye would trouble me no more.

If you still think I am mad, you will change your mind as soon as I tell you how careful I was to hide the body.

First I cut off the head from the corpse, then the arms and the legs.

I lifted up three planks from the floor in the bedroom, and placed the remains of the old man in the space beneath the floor. I replaced the boards so carefully that no human eye — not even *his* eye — could have found anything wrong. There was nothing to wash out, no spots or stains of any kind. I had been careful to catch all the blood in a tub — ha! ha!

I had worked deep into the night, without a noise. It was four o'clock in the

morning when my task was at last completed.

Just as I finished, there came a knocking at the front door. With a light heart, I went to see who was there. What did I have to fear? Nothing. I had not left a single trace of the killing.

I opened the door, and three policemen stepped inside.

A neighbor had heard a shriek and the police had been sent to search the house. I smiled, for what did I have to fear? "Oh, I must confess that the shriek was my own," I told them. "You see, I was having a bad dream."

I took my visitors into every room. I invited them to search — search *well*. The old man was away in the country, I explained.

At last we arrived at *his* chamber. I was confident they would find no trace of what I had done. I was so confident, in fact, that I carried chairs into the old man's room and invited the officers to sit *there* to relax from their night's work.

As for myself, I placed my own chair upon the very spot where the old man's corpse was hidden. The officers clearly did not suspect me. My calm and easy manner convinced them that I had committed no crime. We talked about all sorts of things.

But before long, I felt myself getting pale, and I wished that the officers would leave. My head ached, and I heard a faint ringing in my ears. Still, the officers sat and chatted.

The ringing in my ears became more distinct. I kept talking with the officers, hoping that the noise would go away, but it only grew louder. Soon I realized that

the sound was not in my ears, but all around me. I raised my voice to drown it out. The officers seemed not to hear the sound at all.

No doubt I now grew *very* pale. I spoke more loudly and more quickly until I gasped for breath. The beating went on — louder, louder, *louder!* What could I do? It was *a low, dull, quick sound — much like the sound a watch makes that has been wrapped in cotton.* I gasped for breath. But still the officers heard nothing. They only smiled and chatted pleasantly.

Oh God! What could I do? I stood up and paced the floor. I gestured wildly with my arms, hoping to distract the men from the sound. I raged. I swore. I scraped my chair back and forth, back and forth on the boards above the old man's remains, but the noise only grew louder — louder — *louder!*



Was it possible they did not hear it?
Almighty God! — no, no! They heard!
— they suspected! — they knew! They
were mocking me. This is what I thought
then, and this is what I think now.

I could not stand the noise a moment
longer! I could not endure their smiles!
I felt that I must scream or die! — and
now — again! — louder! louder! louder!
louder!

Throwing the chair aside, I shrieked.

“Villains, stop pretending! I admit it!
I admit the deed! Tear up the planks
— here, here! — it is the beating of his
hideous heart!”

The End