

The Tell-Tale Heart – Pre-Intermediate English Version

Nervous! I was and continue to be a very, very nervous person. But why would you say that I am mad? The sickness had made my senses stronger, not weakened them. Above all my sense of hearing was much better. I could hear things that other men could not hear. How, then, am I mad? Listen and see how healthily, how calmly, I can tell you the whole story.

It is impossible to say how the idea first entered my mind. But once it did, I thought about it day and night. I loved the old man. He had never done anything bad to me. I did not want his gold or anything else in his house. I think it was his eye! Yes, that is what it was! He had the eye of a vulture. The eye was light blue with a cloudy film over it. Whenever it looked at me, I felt very scared. I had to make the eye go away. So slowly, day by day, week by week, I made up my mind to kill the old man. Now this is the point. You think that I am mad. Mad people don't think clearly. But you should have seen me. You should have seen how carefully, how cleverly I did it.

I was never kinder to the old man than during the week before I killed him. And every night, about midnight, I quietly opened his bedroom door and I put in a dark lantern. It was burning, but covered so that no light shone out. And then I put in my head. Oh, you would have laughed to see how slowly I put it in so that I might not wake the old man. It took me an hour to get my head far enough into the room to be able to see him as he lay upon his bed. Ha! Would a madman have been as clever as this. And then, when my head was fully inside the room, I carefully opened a small part the lantern cover. I did this in such a way that a single, thin ray of light fell upon the vulture eye. And I did this for seven long nights. Every night I found the eye closed, which made it impossible to complete the work. It was not the old man who stopped me, but his Evil Eye. And every morning, as the sun came up, I went happily into the room, calling him by name in a friendly voice, and asking how he had slept. There is no way he could have known that every night, just at twelve, I looked in upon him while he was sleeping.

Upon the eighth night I was more than usually careful in opening the door. The minute hand of a watch moves more quickly than mine did. Never before that night had I felt the great power of my mind. It was hard to control my excitement. To think that there I was, opening the door, little by little, and he had no idea of my plan. I almost laughed at the thought. Perhaps I did, because he moved on the bed suddenly, as if frightened by something. Now you may think that I pulled back - but no. The thick curtains were closed and his room was in total darkness. I knew that he could not see the opening of the door and kept opening it. I did it very slowly, a little at a time, until I had my head in. As I began to open the lantern, my thumb made a small noise on the metal. The old man quickly sat up in bed. "Who's there?" he cried out. I kept very still and said nothing. For a whole hour I did not move a muscle. I did not hear him lie down, and knew that he was still sitting up in the bed listening. Just as I have done, night after night, listening to insects moving about in the walls.

After a long wait I heard a soft cry. It was not the cry of someone who is badly hurt or experiencing great sadness. It was the soft, low sound one makes when they are so frightened that they don't know what to do. I knew the sound well. Many a night, just at midnight, when all the world slept, it had come up from deep inside me. I knew what the old man felt, and was sorry for him, but was also laughing to myself. I knew he had not slept ever since he heard that first small noise which made him turn in the bed. His fears had been growing upon him ever since. He had been trying to tell himself there was nothing wrong, but could not. "It is nothing but the wind," he might have said to himself. "It is only the sound of an insect in the wall or a mouse crossing the floor," he might have added. Yes, he had been trying to stop himself worrying with these thoughts. But he knew that all were wrong. He knew that Death was near. It was hiding in the darkness all around him. And it was the fear of death that caused him to feel - for he could not see or hear - that there was someone looking in through the opening in the door.

I waited a long time. When I did not hear him lie down, I decided to open the lantern. I carefully opened it until a single, thin ray shot from out the opening and fell full upon the vulture eye. It was open! Wide, wide open! I grew more and more angry as I looked at it. I saw it very clearly. A grayish blue, with that frightening film over it. I could see nothing else of the old man's face or body. I had directed the ray, as if by some hidden power, straight upon the eye. And have I not told you that what you wrongly think is madness is nothing but my highly developed senses? Now, I say, there came to my ears a soft, low, fast sound, such as a watch makes when wrapped in cotton. I knew that sound well, too. It was the beating of the old man's heart. It increased my anger, as the beating of a drum makes soldiers feel braver as they go into battle.

But I still did not move. I breathed slowly, so as not to make a sound. I held the lantern very still. I kept the ray pointed at the eye. As time went by the beating of the heart increased. It beat faster and faster, and louder and louder every moment. The old man must have been very, very scared! It grew louder, I say, louder and louder! I have told you that I am nervous. And now, at the dead hour of the night, in the terrible quietness of that old house, this strange noise has excited me to uncontrollable fear. But for some minutes longer I did not move. The beating grew louder, louder! I thought the heart must explode. And then a new fear came over me - the sound would be heard by a neighbour!

The old man's hour had come! With a loud cry, I threw open the lantern and ran into the room. He screamed once - once only. I quickly pulled him to the floor, and pushed the heavy bed over him. I then smiled happily, to have finally done it. The heart continued to beat for many minutes, but this did not worry me. He was covered by the bed and I was sure it would not be heard through the wall. Soon it stopped. The old man was dead. I lifted up the bed and examined the body. Yes, he was stone, stone dead. I placed my hand upon the heart and held it there many minutes. There was no beat. He was stone dead. His eye would trouble me no more.

If still you think me mad, you will change your mind when I describe the clever way that I hid the body. Morning was coming and I worked quickly, but quietly. First of all I cut up the body. I cut off the head and the arms and the legs. I then took up three wooden boards from the bedroom floor and put the pieces under them. I then put back the boards so carefully that no human eye - not even his - could have noticed anything wrong. There was nothing to wash out - no marks or blood anywhere. I had been careful of that. The bath had caught all - ha! ha! When I had finished, it was four o'clock and still dark as midnight.

As the clock sounded the hour, there came a knocking at the street door. I went down to open it. There were three men, who politely introduced themselves as officers of the police. A neighbour had heard a scream during the night and thought someone may be in trouble. The neighbour called the police and they (the officers) had been sent to search the house. I smiled, for I had nothing to fear. I made them welcome. The scream, I said, was my own in a dream. The old man, I told them, was away in the country. I took my visitors all over the house. I said that they were welcome to search - search everywhere. I finally led them to his bedroom. I showed them his gold and other riches, safe and untouched. I felt so sure that they would find nothing wrong that I brought chairs into the room and asked them to rest there. In my wild excitement at having fooled them so completely, I placed my own seat upon the very place under which lay the body.

The officers were happy with my explanation. I had shown them that nothing was wrong. I was totally relaxed. They sat, and we talked pleasantly about every day things. But, after a short time I began to feel that ill and wished they would go. My head hurt, and I thought I heard a ringing in my ears. Still they sat and talked. The ringing continued and became clearer. I talked more freely to make the feeling go away. But it continued and got stronger. Finally I knew that the noise was not coming from inside my ears. It made me feel worse. I talked faster and faster, and with a louder voice. Yet the sound increased. What could I do? It was a soft, low, fast sound, such as a watch

makes when wrapped in cotton. I found it hard to breathe, and yet the officers did not hear it. I talked more quickly, more loudly. But the noise slowly increased. I stood up and argued about unimportant things, in a high voice and with wild movements of my arms. But the noise slowly increased. Why wouldn't they go? I began to walk from one side of the room to the other with heavy steps, as if the men being there made me very angry. But the noise slowly increased. Oh God! What could I do? I began to speak like a madman! I threw the chair upon which I had been sitting and broke it upon the floor. But the noise could be heard over all this and continually increased. It grew louder - louder - louder! And still the men talked pleasantly, and smiled. Was it possible they did not hear it? Dear God! No, no! They heard! They had seen that something was wrong! They knew! They were making a joke of my fear! I could see this clearly. Anything was better than this feeling! Anything was better than being treated like a fool! I could not bear their false smiles any longer! I felt that I must scream or die! And now - again! Listen! Louder! Louder! Louder! Louder!

"Cruel men!" I screamed, "stop acting as if you don't know! I did it! Tear up the floor boards! Here, here! It is the beating of his hideous heart!"