



5 The Tell-Tale Heart

adapted from Edgar Allan Poe

TTrue! Nervous – very, very nervous I had been, and am. But why *must* you say I am mad? The illness had made my senses sharper. Most of all, my sense of hearing had become very sharp. I heard all the things in heaven and on the earth. I heard many things in hell. How then, can I be mad? Listen! And you will see how calmly I can tell you the whole story.

It is impossible to say when the idea first came to me. But as

tell-tale sladderagtige;
'der røbede alt'



soon as I thought of it, the idea followed me, day and night. There was no reason to it, no hate. I loved the old man. He had never hurt me. I did not want his gold. I think it was his eye! Yes, that is what it was. His eye! One of his eyes looked like a vulture's: a pale blue eye, with a film over it. Whenever it fell on me, my blood ran cold. And so, slowly, very slowly, I made up my mind to take the life of the old man. Then I would not see that eye again – ever.

Now this is the point. You think I am mad. Madmen know nothing. But you should have seen *me*! You should have seen how cleverly I started, how carefully I went to work.

I was so kind to the old man in the week before I killed him. And every night, about midnight, I turned the handle of his door and opened it – oh, so softly! And then when it was open enough for my head, I put in a torch, all covered so no light could come from it. Then I put my head in the room. Oh, you would have laughed to see how carefully I did it! I moved it slowly – very, very slowly, so as not to wake the old man up. It took me a whole hour to put my head in enough so that I could see him as he lay upon his bed. Would a madman have been as clever as that?

Then, when my head was in the room, I uncovered the torch carefully – oh, so carefully! – just so much that one small ray of light fell on his vulture eye.

I did this for seven long nights – every night, just at midnight – but the eye was always closed. It was impossible for me to do my work. For it was not the old man that made me angry: it was the Evil Eye. And every morning, when day came, I went into his room, and asked him if he had had a good night. So you see, he would have to have been a very wise old man to have known that every night, just before midnight, I looked in upon him while he slept.

Upon the eighth night, I was more careful than ever when I opened the door. My hand moved more slowly than the minute hand on a watch. I felt full of triumph. To think that there I was, opening the door, little by little, and he did not even dream of my secret thoughts! I almost laughed at the idea. Perhaps he heard me, for he moved suddenly on the bed. Now you may think that I went away quickly – but no. His room was totally dark, and so I knew he could not see the opening of the door. I kept pushing it, steadily, steadily. I had my head in and was about to shine the torch, when I made a small noise. 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

vulture *grib*

film *hinde*

run cold *isne*

torch *lygte*

un'cover *afdække*

evil *ond*

minute hand *minutviser*

steadily *støt, glidende*



move a muscle. And he did not lie down again. He was still sitting up in bed listening. Just as I have done night after night, listening to the small sounds of the night.

After a time I heard a small cry. I knew it was the cry of terrible fear. It was not a cry of pain or sorrow – oh no! It was the low sound that comes from the bottom of the soul when filled with fear. I knew the sound well. Many nights, just at midnight, it has come from my own breast. I say I knew it well. I knew what the old man felt, and I was sorry for him, although I laughed in my heart. I knew that he had been lying awake since the first small noise, when he had turned in his bed. His fear had been growing in him. He had been trying to tell himself that it was nothing. But he could not. He had been saying to himself, "It is nothing but the wind outside" or "It is a mouse crossing the floor." But Death was coming near to him, and Death's shadow had already fallen across him, lying in the bed. And it was the cold touch of this shadow that made him *feel* my head inside the room. But he could not see or hear it.

When I had waited a long time without hearing him lie down, I uncovered my torch: just a little bit. A very thin ray of light came from it, and fell upon his vulture eye.

It was open: wide, wide open. I grew angry as I looked at it. I saw it clearly: all a cold blue, that made my blood run cold. But I could see nothing more of the old man's face or body.

And now have I not told you that what you call madness is just very sharp senses? For now, I tell you, I heard a low quick sound, like a watch hidden away in a pocket. I knew that sound well, too. It was the beating of the old man's heart. It made me more angry, just as the beating of a drum makes a soldier brave.

But I kept quite still. I held my breath. I tried to keep the light on that eye. All the time the hellish beating of his heart grew louder. Quicker and quicker, louder and louder every second! The old man's fear must have been extreme! It grew louder, I say, **louder every minute**. I **have** told you I am nervous: so I am. And **now at that dead hour of night, in the** silence of that old house, this strange noise filled me **with fear**. For some minutes longer I stood still. But the beating grew louder and louder! I thought his heart would burst! Then a new fear came to me. The neighbours would soon hear the noise. With a loud shout, I uncovered the torch and rushed into the room. He screamed once, and once only.

I pulled him to the floor, and turned the heavy bed over on him. I then smiled happily. The job was nearly done. But for



the bottom *bunden*, 'det
inderste'

in that dead hour of
night *i nattens mulm og*
mørke
burst *briste*



many minutes, the heart beat on quietly. This sound could not be heard through the wall. At last it stopped. I moved the bed and looked at the man. Yes, he was dead: stone, cold dead. I placed my hand on his heart and held it there for many minutes. There was nothing to be felt. He was stone dead. His eye would frighten me no more.

If you still think I am mad, you will think so no longer when you hear how clever I was about hiding the body. Day was coming so I worked quickly – but without a sound.

First I cut off the head, arms and legs. Then I took up three floor-boards, put the body under the floor, and put back the boards. No eye – not even his – could have seen anything wrong. There was no sign of blood anywhere.

When I was finished it was four o'clock. It was still as dark as midnight. There was a knocking at the street door. I went down with a light heart. What had I now to fear?

Three police officers then came in. A scream had been heard during the night by a neighbour. I smiled. What had I to fear? The gentlemen were welcome, I said. The scream was my own, from a dream. The old man was away – in the country. I took my visitors all over the house. I asked them to look everywhere. I took them at last to *his* room. I showed them his gold, still

floor-board *gulvbræt*





lying there. I brought chairs into the room, and asked them to rest. I myself sat on a chair right over the place where the dead man lay!

The policemen believed me. They sat, and we talked of everyday things. But soon, I felt I was growing white, and wished them out of the house. I heard a ringing in my head. Still they sat and talked. The ringing became louder. I talked louder, until I found that the ringing was not inside my head.

I had become very white. I talked more and more, but the sound grew louder still. What could I do? It was a low, quick sound, *like that of a watch hidden away in a pocket*. I walked backwards and forwards across the floor and talked more quickly. I shouted – but still they would not leave the house! I banged my chair upon the floor, but the noise grew louder over it all. It grew louder – louder – *louder!* And still the men talked and smiled. Was it possible that they could not hear it?

Almighty God! No, no! They heard! They guessed! They *knew!* They were laughing at my fear. I thought this then, I think it



now. I could not bear those smiles any longer. I felt that I must scream or die! And now – again! Listen! Louder! Louder! Louder! *Louder!*

“Devils!” I screamed, “I have done the deed. Take up the floor-boards! Here, here! It is the beating of his horrible heart!”

done the deed *gjort det;*
begået forbrydelsen

1. How do you see, from the first few lines, that there is something not quite normal about the person telling the story?
2. What made him decide to kill the old man? Try to think of other details in people's looks or habits that could be extremely irritating to you (without making you go so far as to plan to kill them!).
3. “You think I am mad.” The narrator (:jeg-personen) tries, several times, to prove that he is quite normal. Find the relevant places in the text and prove that he is wrong!
4. Why does he watch the old man in the night?
5. On the eighth night, why does he wait for so long after having woken the old man?
6. What makes him kill him?
7. What are your comments on the way he handles the body?
8. “I showed them his gold.” Why?
9. Why do the police officers remain in the house for such a long time after they have heard the man's explanations?
10. Compare this story to ‘The Judge's House’. Which of the two do you like best, and why? What makes a good horror story?

