

The Tell-Tale Heart

A retelling of the story

BY EDGAR ALLAN POE

I can't say how the idea first entered my brain, but once it was there, it haunted me day and night. There wasn't any reason for it. I liked the old man. He never did anything to hurt me, and I wasn't after his money.

I think it was his eyes! Yes, that was it! One of his eyes looked like the eye of a vulture—pale gray with a film over it. Whenever it looked at me, my blood ran cold. I made up my mind to kill the old man and get rid of that eye forever.

I made my move slowly. Every night at midnight, I opened his door very gently, poked my head in, and shined a lantern on his vulture eye.

I did this for seven nights—every night just at



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midnight. But his eye was always closed, so I could not bring myself to do what I had to do. It was not the old man who bothered me. It was his evil eye.

On the eighth night, I was even more careful than usual. I thought about the fact that I was opening the door and that he wasn't even dreaming of my secret thought. I had to laugh.

Perhaps he heard me. He moved suddenly. His room was dark, so I knew he couldn't see the door opening.

I had my head in and was about to turn the lantern on, but my thumb slipped on the tin switch. The old man sat up in bed, crying, "Who's there?"

I kept still, not moving an inch. Finally, I heard a slight groan, and I knew it was a groan of terror—terror in the face of death.

I knew the terror the old man felt and I felt sorry for him, although I laughed inside. I knew he had been lying awake ever since the first slight noise. His fears had grown ever since. He tried to tell himself, "It is nothing but the wind in the chimney... It is only a mouse crossing the floor... It is just a cricket.

I waited a long time, and I turned the lantern up a little bit. I was careful. Only a single ray shot out and fell on his vulture eye.

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The eye was wide open! I grew angry as I looked at it. I could see it perfectly—that dull gray eye with an ugly film over it chilled my bones.

Then I heard it, a low, dull, quick sound. It was like the sound a watch makes when it's wrapped in cotton. It was the beating of the old man's heart. It made my anger grow, but even then I kept still. I hardly breathed at all. I kept the ray of light shining on his eye. The beating of his heart grew quicker and quicker, and louder and louder.

In the dead hour of the night, in the awful silence of that old house, that noise terrified me. Yet for a few minutes longer, I stood still.

The beating grew louder, louder! Then a new fear grabbed me. The sound so loud that a neighbor might hear it!

With a loud yell, I turned the lantern up and leaped into the room. He screamed once, only once, before I dragged him to the floor and lay the heavy mattress over him.

I smiled. The deed was almost done. For many minutes his heart beat on with a muffled sound.

This didn't bother me. The sound would not be heard through the wall.

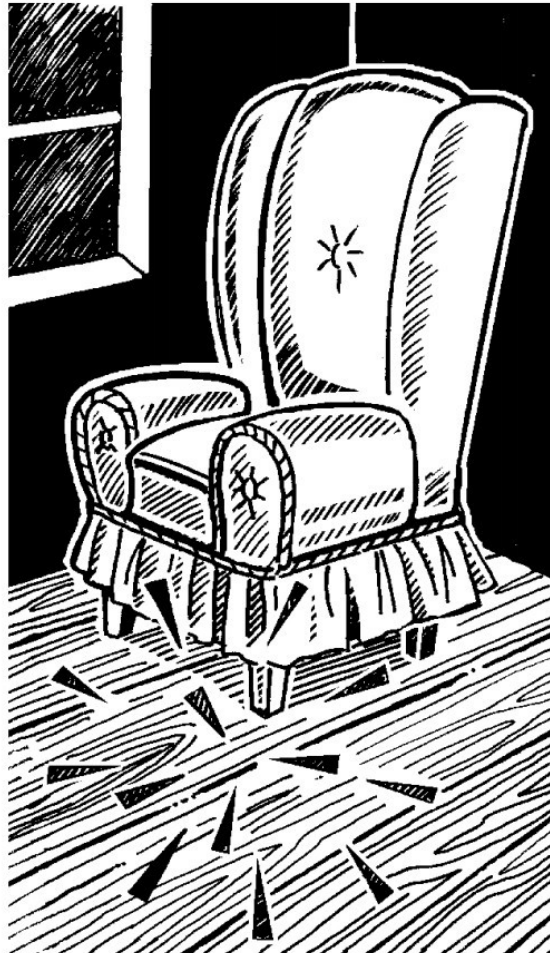
Finally it stopped, and the old man was dead. I

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removed the bed and looked at the body. I put my hand on his heart and held it there many minutes—no heartbeat. His eye would not trouble me ever again.

I worked quickly but silently as I pulled up three boards from the floor. Then I slipped the old man's body into the space below and replaced the boards so well that no human eye could have found anything wrong. Ha! Ha!

Soon after I'd finished, someone knocked at the door. It was three policemen who said that a neighbor had heard a scream. I smiled and invited them in. The scream, I said, was my own. I'd had a nightmare. I told them the old man was away in the country. I told



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them to search the house—search it well.

Finally, I took them into his room and asked them to sit down. I placed my chair on the floorboards above his body.

The policemen were satisfied since I seemed very much at ease. But then I felt myself getting pale. My head hurt and I imagined a pounding in my ears, but the policemen just sat there, talking and talking. The pounding in my ears grew louder. Finally, I decided that the terrible noise was not just in my head.

I tried talking more quickly and in a louder voice, but the sound got louder too. What could I do? It was a low, dull, quick sound. It was like the sound a watch makes when it is wrapped in cotton.

The police didn't seem to hear it, so I kept talking, even more quickly. The noise got louder.

The men kept talking. Was it possible that they did not hear it? No, they heard, and they knew! They were making fun of my terror.

Anything was better than this. I couldn't stand their smiles any longer. I had to scream—or I'd die. The noise got louder, louder, louder!

“Enough!” I screamed. “I admit it! Tear up the floor! Here, here! It is the beating of his hideous heart.”