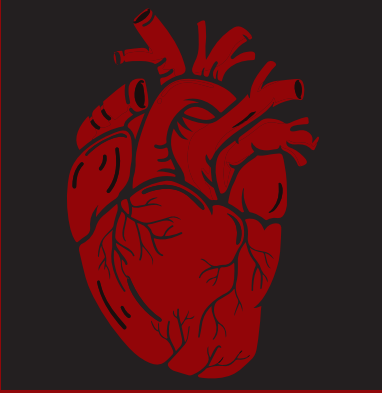


# The Tell-Tale Heart



Pedro Rodríguez



**TRUE!** --nervous --very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am; but why will you say that I am *mad*? The disease had sharpened my senses --not destroyed --not dulled them. Above all was the sense of hearing acute. I heard all things in the heaven and in the earth. I heard many things in hell. How, then, am I mad?

Hearken! and observe how healthily --how calmly I can tell you the whole story.

It is impossible to say how first the idea entered my brain; but once conceived, *it haunted me day and night*. Object there was none. Passion there was none. I loved the old man. He had never wronged me. He had never given me insult. For his gold I had no desire.



I *think it was his eye!* yes, it was this! He had the eye of a vulture --a pale blue eye, with a film over it. Whenever it fell upon me, my blood ran cold; and so by degrees --very gradually --I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and thus rid myself of the eye forever.

Now this is the point. You fancy me mad. *Madmen know nothing.* But you should have seen me. You should have seen how wisely I proceeded --with what caution --with what foresight --with what dissimulation I went to work!

I was never kinder to the old man than during the whole week before I *killed him*. And every night, about midnight, I turned the latch of his door and opened it --*oh so gently!* And then, when I had made an opening sufficient for my head, I put in a *dark lantern*, all closed, closed, that no light shone out, and then I thrust in my head. Oh, you would have laughed to see how cunningly I thrust it in! I moved it slowly --very, very slowly, so that



I might not *disturb the old man's sleep.*

It took me an hour to place my whole head within the opening so far that I could see him as he lay upon his bed. *Ha!* would a *madman* have been so wise as this, And then, when my head was well in the room, I undid the lantern cautiously--oh, so cautiously --cautiously (for the hinges creaked) --I undid it just so much that a single thin ray fell upon the *vulture eye*. And this I did for *seven long nights* --every night just at midnight.



But I found the eye always closed;  
and so it was impossible to do the  
work; for *it was not the old man  
who vexed me, but his Evil Eye.*

And every morning, when the  
day broke, I went boldly into the  
chamber, and spoke courageously  
to him, calling him by name in a  
hearty tone, and inquiring how he  
has passed the night. So you see he  
would have been a very profound  
old man, indeed, to suspect that  
every night, just at twelve, I *looked  
in upon him while he slept.*

Upon the eighth night I was more  
than usually cautious in opening  
the door. A watch's minute hand  
moves more quickly than did  
mine. Never before that night had  
I felt the *extent of my own powers*  
--of my sagacity. I could scarcely  
contain my feelings of triumph.  
To think that there I was, opening  
the door, little by little, and he not  
even to dream of my secret deeds  
or thoughts. I fairly chuckled at  
the idea; and perhaps he heard me;



for he moved on the bed suddenly,  
as if startled. Now you may think  
that I drew back --but no.

His room was as black as pitch  
with the thick darkness, (for  
the shutters were close fastened,  
through fear of robbers,) and so  
I knew that he could not see the  
opening of the door, and I kept  
pushing it on steadily, steadily.

I had my head in, and was about to  
open the lantern, when my thumb  
slipped upon the tin fastening,  
and 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 move a muscle, and in the  
meantime I did not hear him  
lie down. He was still sitting up  
in the bed listening; --just as  
I have done, night after night,  
hearkening to the *death watches*  
*in the wall.*

Presently I heard a slight groan,  
and I knew it was the groan of  
*mortal terror*. It was not a groan of  
pain or of grief --oh, no! --it was  
the low stifled sound that arises  
from the *bottom of the soul* when  
overcharged with awe.

I knew the sound well. Many a  
night, just at midnight, when all  
the world slept, it has welled up  
from my own bosom, deepening,  
with its dreadful echo, *the terrors*  
*that distracted me*. I say I knew it  
well.

I knew what the old man felt, and  
pitied him, although I chuckled at  
heart.

I knew that he had been lying  
awake ever since the first slight  
noise, when he had turned in the  
bed.

His fears had been ever since grow-  
ing upon him. He had been trying  
to fancy them causeless, but could  
not. He had been saying to himself

--"It is nothing but the wind in the chimney --it is only a mouse crossing the floor," or "It is merely a cricket which has made a single chirp."

Yes, he had been trying to comfort himself with these suppositions: but he had found all in vain.

*All in vain; because Death, in approaching him had stalked with his black shadow before him, and*

*enveloped the victim.* And it was the mournful influence of the unperceived shadow that caused him to feel --although he neither saw nor heard --to feel the presence of my head within the room.

When I had waited a long time, very patiently, without hearing him lie down, I resolved to open a little --a very, very little crevice in the lantern. So I opened it --you cannot imagine how stealthily, stealthily --until, at length a simple dim ray, like the thread of the spider, shot from out the crevice and fell full upon the *vul-*



*ture eye.* It was open --wide, wide open --and I *grew furious as I gazed upon it.* I saw it with perfect distinctness --all a *dull blue.*

With a hideous veil over it that chilled the very marrow in my bones; but I could see nothing else of the old man's face or person: for I had directed the ray as if by instinct, precisely upon the damned spot.

And have I not told you that what



you *mistake for madness* is but  
over-acuteness of the sense?  
--now, I say, there came to my ears  
a low, dull, quick sound, such as  
a watch makes when enveloped in  
cotton. I knew that sound well,  
too. *It was the beating of the old  
man's heart.* It increased my fury,  
as the beating of a drum stimu-  
lates the soldier into courage.  
But even yet I refrained and kept  
still. I scarcely breathed. I held the

*been extreme!* It grew louder, I say,  
louder every moment! --do you  
mark me well I have told you that  
I am nervous: so I am.

And now at the dead hour of the  
night, amid the dreadful silence of  
that old house, so strange a noise  
as this excited me to uncontrolla-  
ble terror. Yet, for some minutes  
longer I refrained and stood still.  
But the beating grew louder,



lantern motionless.

I tried how steadily I could main-  
tain the ray upon the eve. Mean-  
time the *hellish tattoo of the heart*  
*increased.* It grew quicker and  
quicker, and louder and louder  
every instant.

*The old man's terror must have*

louder! I thought the heart must  
burst. And now a new anxiety  
seized me --the sound would be  
heard by a neighbour!

*The old man's hour had come!*

With a loud yell, I threw open the  
lantern and leaped into the room.  
*He shrieked once --once only.*

In an instant I dragged him to the

floor, and pulled the heavy bed over him.

*I then smiled gaily, to find the deed so far done.*

But, for many minutes, *the heart beat on with a muffled sound.*

This, however, did not vex me; it would not be heard through the wall. At length it ceased.

He was stone dead. *His eye would trouble me no more.*

If still you think me mad, you will think so no longer when I describe the wise precautions I took for the concealment of the body. The night waned, and I worked hastily, but in silence. First of all I *dismembered the corpse.*



*The old man was dead.* I removed the bed and examined the corpse. Yes, he was stone, *stone dead.* I placed my hand upon the heart and held it there many minutes. There was no pulsation.

I cut off the head and the arms and the legs. I then took up three planks from the flooring of the chamber, and deposited all between the scantlings. I then replaced the boards so cleverly, so cunningly, that no human





eye --not even his --could have detected any thing wrong. There was nothing to wash out --no stain of any kind --no blood-spot whatever. I had been too wary for that. A tub had caught all --*ba! ba!*

When I had made an end of these labors, it was four o'clock --still dark as midnight. As the bell sounded the hour, there came a knocking at the street door. I went down to open it with a light heart, --*for what had I now to fear?*

*There entered three men*, who introduced themselves, with perfect suavity, as officers of the police. A shriek had been heard by a neighbour during the night; suspicion of foul play had been aroused; information had been lodged at the police office, and they (the officers) had been deputed to search the premises.

I smiled, --for what had I to fear? I bade the gentlemen welcome. The shriek, I said, was my own in a dream. The old man, I mentioned, was absent in the country. I took my visitors all over the house. I *bade them search --search well.*

I led them, at length, to his chamber. I showed them his treasures, secure, undisturbed. In the enthusiasm of my confidence, I brought chairs into the room, and desired them here to rest from their fatigues, while I myself, in the wild audacity of my *perfect triumph*, placed my own seat upon the very spot beneath which reposed *the corpse of the victim.*

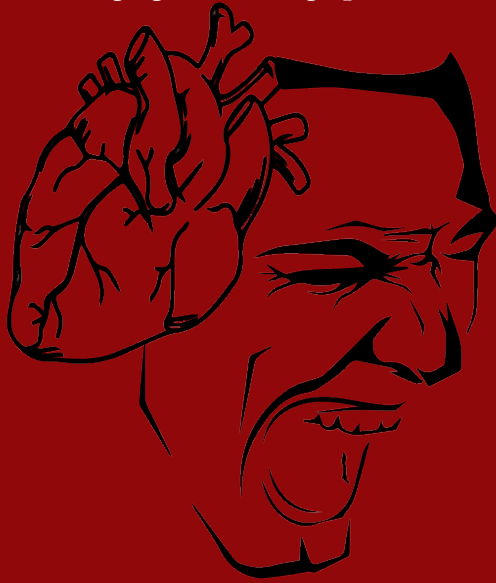
The officers were satisfied. My

manner had convinced them. I was singularly at ease. They sat, and while I answered cheerily, they chatted of familiar things. *But, ere long, I felt myself getting pale and wished them gone.*

My head ached, and I fancied a ringing in my ears: but still they sat and still chatted. The ringing

*No doubt I now grew very pale; --but I talked more fluently, and with a heightened voice. Yet the sound increased --and what could I do?*

It was a low, dull, quick sound --much such a sound as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton. I gasped for breath --and yet the



became more distinct: --It continued and became more distinct: I talked more freely to get rid of the feeling: but it continued and gained definiteness --until, at length, I found that the noise was not within my ears.

officers heard it not. I talked more quickly --more vehemently; but *the noise steadily increased.*

I arose and argued about trifles, in a high key and with violent gesticulations; but *the noise steadily increased.* Why would they not be gone? I

paced the floor to and fro with heavy strides, as if excited to fury by the observations of the men --but *the noise steadily increased.*

*Oh God! what could I do?* I foamed --I raved --I swore! I swung the chair upon which I had been sitting, and grated it upon the boards, but the noise arose over all and continually increased. *It grew louder --louder --louder!*

And still the men chatted pleasantly, and smiled. Was it possible they heard not?

*Almighty God!* --no, no! *They heard!* --*they suspected!* --*they knew!* --they were making a mockery of my horror! --this I thought, and this I think. But anything was better than this agony! Anything was more tolerable than this derision! I could bear those hypocritical smiles no longer! I felt that I must scream or die! and now --again! --hark!

louder! louder! louder! louder!

*“Villains!” I shrieked, “dissemble no more! I admit the deed! --tear up the planks! here, here! --It is the beating of his hideous heart!”*

