





## **The Tell-Tale Heart**

**Edgar Allan Poe**

**Published:** 1843

**Categorie(s):** Fiction, Horror, Short Stories

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## **About Poe:**

Edgar Allan Poe was an American poet, short story writer, playwright, editor, critic, essayist and one of the leaders of the American Romantic Movement. Best known for his tales of the macabre and mystery, Poe was one of the early American practitioners of the short story and a progenitor of detective fiction and crime fiction. He is also credited with contributing to the emergent science fiction genre. Poe died at the age of 40. The cause of his death is undetermined and has been attributed to alcohol, drugs, cholera, rabies, suicide (although likely to be mistaken with his suicide attempt in the previous year), tuberculosis, heart disease, brain congestion and other agents. Source: Wikipedia

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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, so 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 growing 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 single dim ray, like the thread of the spider, shot from out the crevice and fell full upon the vulture 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 senses? –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 stimulates the soldier into courage.

But even yet I refrained and kept still. I scarcely breathed. I held the lantern motionless. I tried how steadily I could maintain the ray upon the eye. Meantime 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 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 uncontrollable terror. Yet, for some minutes longer I refrained and stood still. But the beating grew louder, louder! I thought the heart must burst. And now a new anxiety seized me –the

sound would be heard by a neighbor! 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. 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. 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. 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 –ha! ha!

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 neighbor 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 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.

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 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!”

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#### Edgar Allan Poe

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##### *The Pit and the Pendulum*

“The Pit and the Pendulum” is a short story written by Edgar Allan Poe and first published in 1842. The story is about the torments endured by a prisoner of the Spanish Inquisition, though Poe skews historical facts. The narrator of the story is deemed guilty for an unnamed crime and put into a completely dark room. He passes out while trying to determine the size of the room. When he wakes up, he realizes there is a large, deep pit in the middle of the room. He loses consciousness again and awakens strapped on his back, unable to move more than his head. He soon realizes there is a large blade-like pendulum hanging above him, slowly getting closer to cutting through his chest. He finds a way to escape but the walls of his prison start to move and close in on him, pushing him closer and closer to falling into the pit.

The story is especially effective at inspiring fear in the reader because of its heavy focus on the senses, such as sound, emphasizing its reality, unlike many of Poe’s stories which are aided by the supernatural. The traditional elements established in popular horror tales at the time are followed but critical reception has been mixed.

#### Edgar Allan Poe

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##### *The Raven*

“The Raven” is a narrative poem by the American writer and poet Edgar Allan Poe. It was published for the first time on January 29, 1845, in the New York Evening Mirror. Noted for its musicality, stylized language and supernatural atmosphere, it tells of the mysterious visit of a talking raven to a distraught lover, tracing his slow descent into madness.

#### Edgar Allan Poe

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##### *The Fall of the House of Usher*

The tale opens with the unnamed narrator arriving at the house of his friend, Roderick Usher, having received a letter from him in a distant part of the country complaining of an illness and asking for his comfort.

#### Edgar Allan Poe

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##### *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*

“The Murders in the Rue Morgue” is a short story by Edgar Allan Poe published in Graham’s Magazine in 1841. It has been claimed as the first detective story; Poe referred to it as one of his “tales of ratiocination”. Similar works predate Poe’s stories, including *Das Fräulein von Scuderi* (1819) by E.T.A. Hoffmann and *Zadig* (1748) by Voltaire.

C. Auguste Dupin is a man in Paris who solves the mysterious brutal murder of two women. Numerous witnesses heard a suspect, though no one agrees on what language was spoken. At the murder scene, Dupin finds a hair that does not appear to be human.

As the first true detective in fiction, the Dupin character established many literary devices which would be used in future fictional detectives including Sherlock Holmes and Hercule Poirot. Many later characters, for example, follow Poe's model of the brilliant detective, his personal friend who serves as narrator, and the final revelation being presented before the reasoning that leads up to it. Dupin himself reappears in "The Mystery of Marie Roget" and "The Purloined Letter".

## **Edgar Allan Poe**

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### *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*

Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque is a collection of previously-published short stories by Edgar Allan Poe, first published in 1840.

## **Edgar Allan Poe**

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### *The Masque of the Red Death*

"The Masque of the Red Death", originally published as "The Mask of the Red Death", is a short story written by Edgar Allan Poe and first published in 1842. The story follows Prince Prospero's attempts to avoid a dangerous plague known as the Red Death by hiding in his abbey. He, along with many other wealthy nobles, has a masquerade ball within seven rooms of his abbey, each decorated with a different color. In the midst of their revelry, a mysterious figure enters and makes his way through each of the rooms. When Prospero confronts this stranger, he falls dead. The story follows many traditions of Gothic fiction and is often analyzed as an allegory about the inevitability of death, though some critics advise against an allegorical reading. Many different interpretations have been presented, as well as attempts to identify the true nature of the disease of the "Red Death."

## **Edgar Allan Poe**

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### *The Cask of Amontillado*

"The Cask of Amontillado" (sometimes spelled "The Casque of Amontillado") is a short story, written by Edgar Allan Poe and first published in the November 1846 issue of Godey's Lady's Book.

The story is set in a nameless Italian city in an unspecified year (possibly sometime during the eighteenth century) and concerns the deadly revenge taken by the narrator on a friend who he claims has insulted him. Like several of Poe's stories, and in keeping with the 19th-century fascination with the subject, the narrative revolves around a person being buried alive – in this case, by immurement.

## **Edgar Allan Poe**

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### *The Black Cat*

“The Black Cat” is a short story by Edgar Allan Poe. It was first published in the August 19, 1843, edition of *The Saturday Evening Post*. It is a study of the psychology of guilt, often paired in analysis with Poe’s “The Tell-Tale Heart”. In both, a murderer carefully conceals his crime and believes himself unassailable, but eventually breaks down and reveals himself, impelled by a nagging reminder of his guilt.

## **Edgar Allan Poe**

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### *The Purloined Letter*

“The Purloined Letter” is a short story by American author Edgar Allan Poe. It is the third of his three detective stories featuring the fictional C. Auguste Dupin, the other two being “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” and “The Mystery of Marie Rogêt”. These stories are considered to be important early forerunners of the modern detective story. It first appeared in *The Gift* for 1845 (1844) and was soon reprinted in numerous journals and newspapers.

## **Nathaniel Hawthorne**

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### *The Scarlet Letter*

*The Scarlet Letter*, published in 1850, is an American novel written by Nathaniel Hawthorne and is generally considered to be his magnum opus. Set in 17th-century Puritan Boston, it tells the story of Hester Prynne, who gives birth after committing adultery, refuses to name the father, and struggles to create a new life of repentance and dignity.

Throughout the novel, Hawthorne explores questions of grace, legalism, sin and guilt.



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