

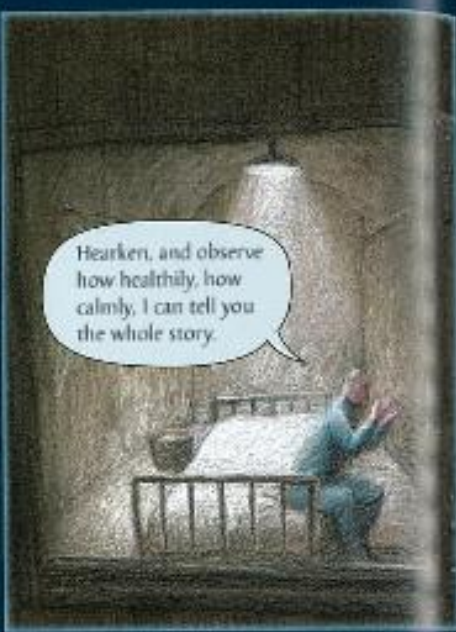
THE TELL-
TALE
HEART
1843

■ DARKNESS 🧠 GUILTY CONSCIENCE 🧠 INSANITY 🩸 MURDER 🦋 SCARY SOUNDS, HYPERSENSITIVITY

It is true that I am nervous. But why will you say that I am 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.



I loved the old man. He had never wronged me.

It was his eye. Yes, his eye!

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 I made up my mind.

Each night, just at midnight, I went silently to his door. I turned the latch and opened it—oh so gently!



When I had made an opening sufficient for my head, I put in a dark lantern, all 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. Could a madman have been so wise?



Then, when my head was well in the room, I undid the lantern cautiously—oh, so 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—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.

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.



I could scarcely contain my feelings of triumph.

I had my head in, and was about to open the lantern, when my thumb slipped upon the tin fastening.



Who's there?!



I kept quite still and silent. 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.



*death watch beetles, which tap their heads against the inside of walls to announce their

I knew that sound. It was not a groan of pain or of grief—oh, no! It was the low stifled sound of mortal terror.



I knew that he had been lying awake ever since the first slight noise, his fears growing upon him,



You cannot imagine how stealthily, stealthily, I opened the lantern shutter, so that it cast a single dim ray, like the thread of the spider, exactly upon the vulture eye.

Thub-dub... Thub-dub...
Thub-dub

I knew that sound well, too. It was the beating of the old man's heart.



THUB-DUB THUB-DUB
THUB-DUB THUB-DUB



THUB-DUB THUB-DUB
THUB-DUB THUB-DUB



I held the lantern motionless.

THUB DUB THUB DUB THUB DUB!



I thought the heart must burst. And now a new anxiety seized me—the sound would be heard by a neighbour! I threw open the lantern and leaped into the room.

THUB DUB! HUB! HUB! HUB!





In an instant I dragged him to the floor, and pulled the heavy bed onto him. I then smiled gaily, to find the deed so far done.

THUB-DUB-THUB-
DUB-THUB-DUB...



I felt for a pulse but there was none.

I waited many minutes.

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 to conceal the body.



First of all I dismembered the corpse.



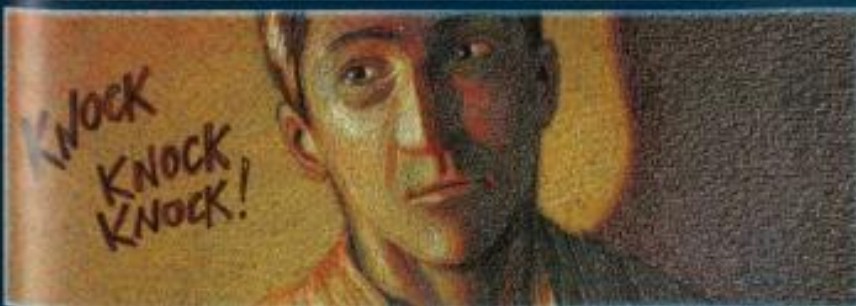
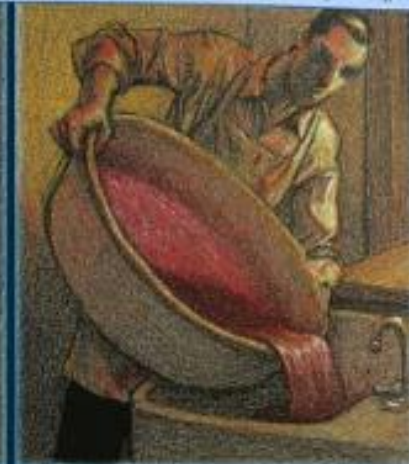
I caught all the blood in a tub. Not one drop did I spill.



I then took up three planks from the flooring of the chamber, and deposited all between the beams.



I then replaced the boards so cleverly, so cunningly, that no human eye (not even his!) could have detected anything wrong.



I went to answer the door with a light heart, for what had I now to fear?



It seems a shriek had been heard by a neighbour during the night; suspicion of foul play had been aroused; information had been lodged with the police, and these men had been deputed to search the premises.



I bade them welcome. I explained that the shriek was my own, in a dream. The old man was absent in the country.

I bade them search the house well.



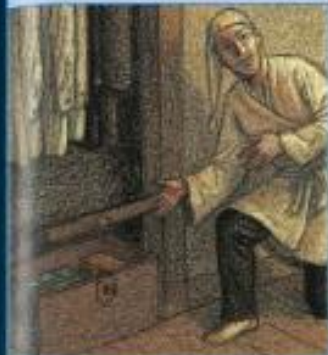
I led them everywhere.



I took them to his chamber.



I showed them his treasure, undisturbed. In my confidence, I brought chairs into the room and desired them to sit. I placed my own seat upon the very spot under which lay the corpse.



The officers were satisfied. My manner had convinced them. I was singularly at ease. We chatted of trivial 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 they chatted!



The ringing continued, and grew more distinct. I talked more freely to get rid of the feeling, but still it grew louder . . . until, at length, I found that the noise was not within my ears,



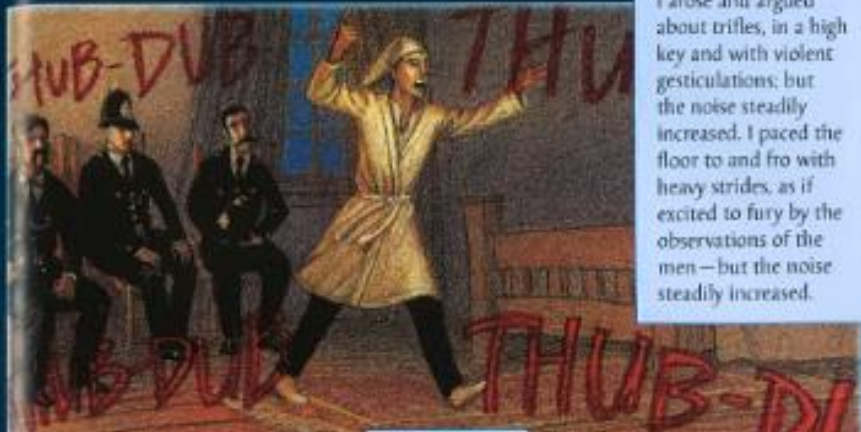
No doubt I now grew very pale. I talked more fluently, and with a heightened voice. Yet the sound increased—and what could I do? I gasped for breath—and yet the officers heard it not.



I talked more quickly—more vehemently; but the noise grew louder and louder!



I arose and argued about trifles, in a high key and with violent gesticulations; but the noise steadily increased. 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?

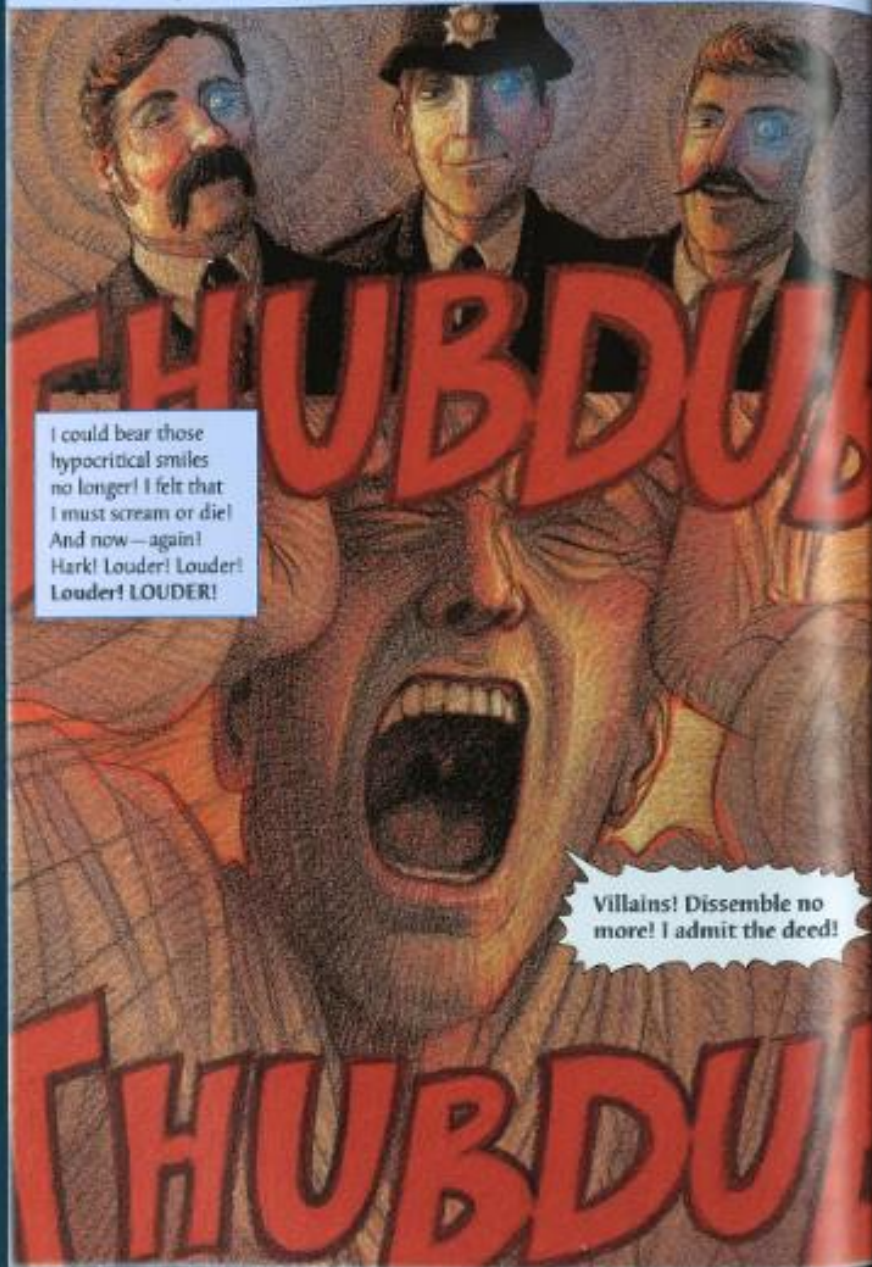
Why would they not be gone?



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!



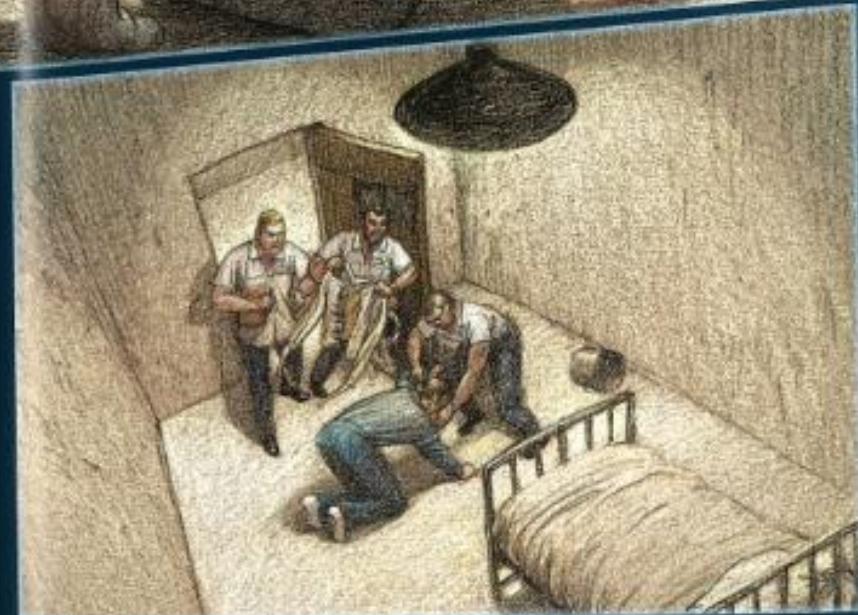
I could bear those hypocritical smiles no longer! I felt that I must scream or die! And now — again! Hark! Louder! Louder! Louder! LOUDER!

Villains! Dissemble no more! I admit the deed!



Tear up the planks! Here, here! —

IT IS THE BEATING OF HIS HIDEOUS HEART!



THE POE CHECKLIST

Poe had some favorite themes he used to achieve his sense of horror. Here's a key to some of the recurring motifs, which you'll find listed at the start of each story.



ANGELS & DEVILS



CONFINEMENT



CREEPY ANIMALS



DARKNESS



DEATH



DISEASE



FIRE, BURNING



GUILTY CONSCIENCE (OR LACK THEREOF)



INSANITY



MURDER



PREMATURE BURIAL



SCARY SOUNDS, HYPERSENSITIVITY