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| True! |
| Nervous -- very, very nervous I had been and am! |
| But why will you say that I am mad? |
| The disease had sharpened my senses -- not destroyed them. |
| Above all was the sense of hearing. |
| I heard all things in the heaven and in the earth. |
| I heard many things in the underworld. |
| How, then, am I mad? |
| Observe how healthily -- how calmly I can tell you the whole story. |
| It is impossible to say how first the idea entered my brain. |
| 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 bird, a vulture -- a pale blue eye, with a film over it. |
| Whenever it fell on me, my blood ran cold; and so -- very slowly -- I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and free myself of the eye forever. |
| Now this is the point. |
| You think that I am mad. |
| Madmen know nothing. |
| But you should have seen me. |
| You should have seen how wisely and carefully I went to work! |
| I was never kinder to the old man than during the whole week before I killed him. |
| And every night, late at night, I turned the lock of his door and opened it – oh, so gently! |
| And then, when I had made an opening big enough for my head, I put in a dark lantern, all closed that no light shone out, and then I stuck in my head. |
| I moved it slowly, very slowly, so that I might not interfere with the old mans sleep. |
| And then, when my head was well in the room, I undid the lantern just so much that a single thin ray of light 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 was a problem for me, but his Evil Eye. |
| On the eighth night, I was more than usually careful in opening the door. |
| I had my head in and was about to open the lantern, when my finger slid on a piece of metal and made a noise. |
| The old man sat up in bed, crying out "Whos there?" |
| I kept still and said nothing. |
| I did not move a muscle for a whole hour. |
| During that time, I did not hear him lie down. |
| He was still sitting up in the bed listening -- just as I have done, night after night. |
| Then I heard a noise, and I knew it was the sound of human terror. |
| It was the low sound that arises from the bottom of the soul. |
| I knew the sound well. |
| Many a night, late at night, when all the world slept, it has welled up from deep within my own chest. |
| I say I knew it well. |
| I knew what the old man felt, and felt sorry for him, although I laughed to myself. |
| I knew that he had been lying awake ever since the first noise, when he had turned in the bed. |
| His fears had been ever since growing upon him. |
| When I had waited a long time, without hearing him lie down, I decided to open a little -- a very, very little -- crack in the lantern. |
| So I opened it. |
| You cannot imagine how carefully, carefully. |
| Finally, a single ray of light shot from out and fell full upon the vulture eye. |
| It was open -- wide, wide open -- and I grew angry as I looked at it. |
| I saw it clearly -- all a dull blue, with a horrible veil over it that chilled my bones; but I could see nothing else of the old mans face or person. |
| For I had directed the light exactly upon the damned spot. |
| And have I not told you that what you mistake for madness is but a kind of over-sensitivity? |
| Now, there came to my ears a low, dull, quick sound, such as a watch makes when inside a piece of cotton. |
| I knew that sound well, too. |
| It was the beating of the old mans heart. |
| It increased my anger. |
| But even yet I kept still. |
| I hardly breathed. |
| I held the lantern motionless. |
| I attempted to keep the ray of light upon the eye. |
| But the beating of the heart increased. |
| It grew quicker and quicker, and louder and louder every second. |
| The old mans terror must have been extreme! |
| The beating grew louder, I say, louder every moment! |
| And now at the dead hour of the night, in the horrible silence of that old house, so strange a noise as this excited me to uncontrollable terror. |
| Yet, for some minutes longer I stood still. |
| But the beating grew louder, louder! |
| I thought the heart must burst. |
| And now a new fear seized me -- the sound would be heard by a neighbor! |
| The old mans hour had come! |
| With a loud shout, I threw open the lantern and burst into the room. |
| He cried once -- once only. |
| Without delay, I forced him to the floor, and pulled the heavy bed over him. |
| I then smiled, to find the action so far done. |
| But, for many minutes, the heart beat on with a quiet sound. |
| This, however, did not concern me; it would not be heard through the wall. |
| At length, it stopped. |
| The old man was dead. |
| I removed the bed and examined the body. |
| I placed my hand over his heart and held it there many minutes. |
| There was no movement. |
| 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 steps I took for hiding the body. |
| I worked quickly, but in silence. |
| First of all, I took apart the body. |
| I cut off the head and the arms and the legs. |
| I then took up three pieces of wood from the flooring, and placed his body parts under the room. |
| I then replaced the wooden boards so well that no human eye -- not even his -- could have seen anything wrong. |
| There was nothing to wash out -- no mark of any kind -- no blood whatever. |
| I had been too smart for that. |
| A tub had caught all -- ha! |
| ha! |
| When I had made an end of these labors, it was four oclock in the morning. |
| As a clock sounded the hour, there came a noise 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 said they were officers of the police. |
| A cry had been heard by a neighbor during the night; suspicion of a crime had been aroused; information had been given at the police office, and the officers had been sent to search the building. |
| I smiled -- for what had I to fear? |
| The cry, I said, was my own in a dream. |
| The old man, I said, was not in the country. |
| I took my visitors all over the house. |
| I told them to search -- search well. |
| I led them, at length, to his room. |
| I brought chairs there, and told them to rest. |
| I placed my own seat upon the very place under which lay the body of the victim. |
| The officers were satisfied. |
| I was completely at ease. |
| They sat, and while I answered happily, they talked of common things. |
| But, after a while, I felt myself getting weak and wished them gone. |
| My head hurt, and I had a ringing in my ears; but still they sat and talked. |
| The ringing became more severe. |
| I talked more freely to do away with the feeling. |
| But it continued until, at length, I found that the noise was not within my ears. |
| I talked more and with a heightened voice. |
| Yet the sound increased -- and what could I do? |
| It was a low, dull, quick sound like a watch makes when inside a piece of cotton. |
| I had trouble breathing -- and yet the officers heard it not. |
| I talked more quickly -- more loudly; but the noise increased. |
| I stood up and argued about silly things, in a high voice and with violent hand movements. |
| But the noise kept increasing. |
| Why would they not be gone? |
| I walked across the floor with heavy steps, as if excited to anger by the observations of the men -- but the noise increased. |
| What could I do? |
| I swung my chair and moved it upon the floor, but the noise continually increased. |
| It grew louder -- louder -- louder! |
| And still the men talked pleasantly, and smiled. |
| Was it possible they heard not? |
| No, no! |
| They heard! |
| They suspected! |
| They knew! |
| They were making a joke of my horror! |
| This I thought, and this I think. |
| But anything was better than this pain! |
| I could bear those smiles no longer! |
| I felt that I must scream or die! |
| And now -- again! |
| Louder! |
| Louder! |
| Louder! |
| Villains! |
| I cried, "Pretend no more! |
| I admit the deed! |
| Tear up the floor boards! |
| Here, here! |
| It is the beating of his hideous heart!" |