

THE TELL-TALE HEART

a monologue by
Peter M. Floyd

adapted from the short story by
Edgar Allen Poe

PARK STREET ANGEL

At lights up, the NARRATOR (hereafter N) stands in front of the chair. She is dressed in clothes reflective of the mid-19th Century. She speaks as if in mid-conversation.

N

TRUE! I had been nervous, very, very dreadfully nervous, but not mad. Why do you say that I am mad? The disease had sharpened my senses, not dulled them. Above all was my sense of hearing acute. I heard all things in the heaven and in the earth. I heard many things in hell. Listen and observe how healthily, how calmly, I can tell you the whole story.

N sits in the chair with a show of being calm.

I cannot say how the idea first entered my brain, but, once conceived, it haunted me day and night. Object there was none. Passion there was none. I loved the old woman. She had never wronged me or given me insult. For her gold I had no desire. I think it was her eye! Yes, it was this! One of her eyes resembled that 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 woman, and thus rid myself of the eye forever.

N leans forward, urging her point.

Now this is the point. You think me mad. But you should have seen me. You should have seen how wisely I proceeded -- with what caution, I went to work! I was never kinder to the old woman than during the whole week before I killed her. And every night about midnight I turned the latch of her 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 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 woman's sleep. It took me an hour to place my whole head within the opening so far that I could see her as she lay upon her bed. Would a madwoman 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 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

PARK STREET ANGEL

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 woman who vexed me but his Evil Eye. And every morning, when the day broke, I went boldly into the chamber and spoke courageously to her, calling him by name in a pleasant tone, and inquiring how she had passed the night. So you see she would have been a very profound old woman, indeed, to suspect that every night, just at twelve, I looked in upon her while she slept.

N is now engrossed in her story, almost forgetting her audience.

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. Her room was as black as pitch with the thick darkness and so I knew that she 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 woman sprang up in the bed, crying out, "Who's there?"

Pause.

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 her lie down. She was still sitting up in the bed, listening. At last 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 what the old woman felt, and pitied her, although I chuckled at heart. I knew that she had been lying awake ever since the first slight noise when she had turned in the bed. Her fears had been ever since growing upon her. She had been trying to fancy them causeless, but could not. She had been saying to herself, "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 she had been trying to comfort herself with these suppositions but all in vain. All in vain, because Death in approaching her had stalked with her black shadow before her and enveloped the victim.

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