Still, It Beats:

Yes, I'm nervous – still very nervous – but why does everyone keep saying that I'm mad? Isn't it the sharpness of my senses – the way I notice everything around me – that proves I'm sane? The sharpness of my senses, the flicker of a shadow, the faintest breath in the dark. Of course, that is not madness! That is *awareness.* Let me tell you what happened after… after the floorboards, after the beating, after the truth came out.

They said I confessed; that I shouted and showed them where the body was hidden. Perhaps, I did. But no, not of guilt! No, it was the sound… that dreadful sound! The heart! Beating, beating beneath the floor, growing louder until I couldn't take it anymore!

They took me to a place of isolation with cold stone and iron bars – a hospital, they said. But I know what it really is: a prison for minds like mine. People here moan and cry, but I am not like them. I see everything clearly. I remember everything.

And I still hear it.

At first, I thought it was only in my head. At first, I thought it was only a hallucination – a delusional trick of one's mind. But the sound comes again – soft, slow, steady. Thump-thump. Thump-thump. Just like before. It's his heart. The old man's heart. Still beating.

You think that's impossible? You believe the body is gone, the heart long dead? That I buried it deep and there's nothing left to hear?

No. Something stayed behind.

A soul, perhaps. Or a curse. Something that won't rest. And it follows me.

The doctors ask me questions. "Do you still hear it?" they say. I smile at them now. I've learned not to speak of it. Let them think I'm better. Let them think I'm healed.

But at night, when the others sleep and the moon shines through my window, I listen. The sound is always there. Sometimes under the floor. Sometimes in the walls. Sometimes – oh, God – inside my own chest! As if his heart were put inside my body!

They don't believe me. But I know what I hear.

I've started digging, scratching at the walls, trying to find the source. I've made small tools from whatever I could find – a spoon, a broken bone, a nail. I will find the heart, or whatever it is. I will silence it.

The guards watch me now. I can feel their eyes. They think I'm quiet. That I've calmed down. But I'm just waiting.

The sound grows louder each night. It fills the whole room now. I can barely think over it. It laughs at me. Yes, it laughs!

But I'll show it.

Soon, I'll dig deep enough. I'll find it. And this time, I won't just bury it – I'll destroy it. Smash it. Burn it. Whatever it takes. And if you ever hear a soft beating under your floor – or in the walls – or in your chest – don't ignore it.

I now see that what's buried may never truly rest.