

The Captive

By Matthew G. Lewis

The scene represents a dungeon, in which is a grated door, guarded by strong bars and chains. In the upper part is an open gallery, leading to the cells above. Slow and melancholy music. The Captive is discovered in the attitude of hopeless grief—she is in chains;—her eyes are fixed, with a vacant stare, and her hands are folded.

After a pause, the Gaoler is seen passing through the upper gallery with a lamp: he appears at the grate, and opens the door. The noise of the bars falling rouses the Captive. She looks round eagerly; but on seeing the Gaoler enter, she waves her hand mournfully, and relapses into her former stupor.

The Gaoler replenishes a jug with water, and places a loaf of bread by her side. He then prepares to leave the dungeon, when the Captive seems to resolve on making an attempt to excite his compassion: she rises from her bed of straw, clasps his hand, and sinks at his feet. The music ceases, and she speaks.

Stay, Gaoler, stay, and hear my woe!
She is not mad who kneels to thee,
For what I'm now too well I know,
And what I was, and what should be.
I'll rave no more in proud despair;
My language shall be mild, though sad:
But yet I'll firmly, truly swear,
I am not mad! (*Then kissing his hand.*) I am not mad!

He offers to leave her; she detains him, and continues, in a tone of eager persuasion,

My tyrant husband forged the tale,
Which chains me in this dreary cell:
My fate unknown my Friends bewail—
Oh! Gaoler, haste that fate to tell!
Oh! haste my Father's heart to cheer:
His heart at once 'twill grieve and glad
To know, though kept a Captive here,
I am not mad! I am not mad!

Harsh music, while the Gaoler, with a look of contempt and disbelief, forces his hand from her grasp, and leaves her. The bars are heard replacing.

He smiles in scorn, and turns the key!
He quits the grate! I knelt in vain!—
His glimmering Lamp still . . . still I see!—

Music expressing the light growing fainter, as the Gaoler retires through the gallery, and the Captive watches his departure with eager looks.

'Tis gone. . . . and all is gloom again!

She shivers, and wraps her garment more closely round her.

Cold, bitter cold!—no warmth!—no light!—
Life, all thy comforts once I had;
Yet here I'm chain'd this freezing night,
(*Eagerly,*) Although not mad! No, [no, no,] no! not mad!

A few bars of melancholy music, which she interrupts, by exclaiming suddenly,

'Tis sure some dream! some vision vain!—
(*Proudly.*) What? *I*, the child of rank and wealth,
Am I the wretch who clanks this chain,
Bereft of freedom, friends and health?
Ah! While I dwell on blessings fled,
Which never more my heart must glad,
How aches my heart! how burns my head!—

Interrupting herself hastily, and pressing her hands forcibly against her forehead. But 'tis not mad!—no! 'Tis not mad!

She remains fixed in this attitude, with a look of fear, till the music, changing, expresses that some tender, melancholy reflection has passed her mind.

[My child!—My child!]
Hast thou, my Child, forgot ere this
A mother's face, a mother's tongue?
She'll ne'er forget your parting kiss,
(*With a smile.*) Nor round her neck how fast you clung:
Nor how you with me you sued to stay,
Nor how that suit your Sire forbad;
(*With agony.*) Nor how. . . . (*With a look of terror.*) I'll drive such
thoughts away;

In a hollow hurried voice.

They'll make me mad! They'll make me mad!

A pause—she then proceeds with a melancholy smile,

His rosy lips, how sweet They smiled!
His mild blue eyes, how bright They shone!
None ever bore a lovelier child!—

With a sudden burst of passionate grief, approaching to frenzy.

And art Thou now for ever gone,
And must I never see thee more,
My pretty, pretty, pretty Lad!
(*With energy.*) I will be free! (*Endeavouring to force the grate.*)
Unbar the door!
I am not mad! I am not mad!

She falls, exhausted, against the grate, by the bars of which she supports herself. She is roused from her stupor by loud shrieks, rattling of chains, &c.

Oh! Hark!—what mean those yells and cries?

The noise grows louder.

His chain some furious madman breaks!—

The Madman is seen to rush along the gallery with a blazing firebrand in his hand.

He comes!—I see his glaring eyes!—

The madman appears at the grate, which he endeavors to force, while she shrinks in an agony of terror.

Now, now my dungeon-grate He shakes!
Help, help!

Scared by her cries, the madman quits the grate.

The madman again appears above, is seized by his keepers, with torches; and after some resistance, is dragged away.

He's gone!—
Oh! fearful woe,
Such screams to hear, such sights to see!
My brain, my brain!—I know, I know,
I *am* not mad. ... but soon *shall* be!
Yes! Soon!—For Lo yon' while I speak. . . .
Mark, how yon Daemon's eye-balls glare!—
He sees me!—Now with dreadful shriek
He whirls a serpent high in air!—
Horror!—The Reptile strikes his tooth
Deep in my heart so crush'd and sad!—
Aye, laugh, ye Fiends!—I feel the truth!
Your task is done!—(*With a loud shriek.*) I'm mad! mad!

[My Child!—My Child!—]

She dashes herself in frenzy upon the ground. The two Brothers cross the gallery, dragging the Gaoler; then a Servant appears with a torch, conducting the Father, who is supported by his Youngest Daughter. They are followed by Servants with torches, part of whom remain in the gallery. The Brothers appear at the grate, which they force the Gaoler to open; they enter, and on seeing the Captive, one is struck with sorrow, while the other expresses violent anger against the Gaoler, who endeavours to excuse himself the Father and Sister enter, and approach the Captive, offering to raise her, when she starts up suddenly, and eyes them with a look of terror; they endeavour to make themselves known to her, but in vain; she shuns them, with fear and aversion, and taking some straw, begins to twine it into a crown, when her eyes falling on the Gaoler, she shrieks in terror, and hides her face; the Gaoler is ordered to retire, and obeys; the Father again endeavours to awaken her attention, but in vain. He covers his face with his handkerchief, which the Captive draws away with a look of surprise. Their hopes are excited, and they watch her with eagerness. She wipes the old man's eyes with her hair, which she afterwards touches, and finding it wet with tears, bursts into a delirious laugh, resumes her crown of straw, and after working at it eagerly for a moment, suddenly drops it, and remains motionless with a vacant stare. The Father, &c., express their despair of her recovery—the music ceases. An Old Servant enters, leading her Child, who advances with a careless look; but on seeing his mother, breaks from the servant, runs to her, and clasps her hand. She looks at him with a vacant stare, then, with an expression of excessive joy, exclaims "My child!" sinks on her knees, and clasps him to her bosom. The Father, &c., raise their hands to heaven in gratitude for the return of her reason, and the curtain falls slowly to solemn music.