

***GOTHIC BOURNES***

**THE CAPTIVE;  
A TRAGIC SCENE IN A PRIVATE  
MADHOUSE.**

**by**

**M. G. Lewis.**

**(First performed in 1803)**

TRANSCRIPTION BY

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(pages 317-320)

THE CAPTIVE;

*A Tragic Scene in a private Madhouse.*

BY THE LATE M. G. LEWIS, ESQ.

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[317][WE are enabled to present to our readers a literary curiosity—a mono-drama (hitherto unpublished), by the late M. G. Lewis, popularly known as *Monk* Lewis. It was written at a time when, by his “Monk,” his “Tales of Wonder,” his “Castle Spectre,” &c.<sup>1</sup> the author had established himself the undisputed sovereign of the realms of terror. It is not our purpose here to enter into the question of the literary merits of Mr. Lewis’s dramatic productions, nor would we have it inferred from our silence upon the subject, that we think slightingly of them ; but as evincing a knowledge of stage effect, and the power, by such means, of exciting interest, surprise, and (chiefly the author’s favourite object) terror, they are scarcely surpassed. In the present instance, however, he has somewhat overstepped the legitimate boundary of his own dominions, and trenched upon the territories of horror. This the mere reader will acknowledge. They, therefore, who have witnessed any of the powerful performances of the representative of the “Captive,” (Mrs. Litchfield,) will readily conceive the impression that must have been produced upon the audience by the *acting* of the piece. ]

The first performance of the “Captive”<sup>2</sup> is thus announced in the Covent Garden play-bills<sup>3</sup> of Tuesday, March 22nd, 1803:—

“After which (i.e., after the comedy of ‘John Bull,’ then to be acted for the 10th time,) “will be performed for the first time,\* a new mono-drama, or tragic scene, called ‘The Captive,’ to be performed by Mrs. Litchfield. The overture and music composed by Dr. Busby.”

The following notice is from the *Biographia Dramatica*:—

“ ‘The Captive,’ mono-drama, by M. G. LEWIS, performed at Covent Garden, March 22nd, 1803. It consisted only of one scene, acted by Mrs. Litchfield; but the author had included, in this scene, all the horrors of a mad-house: imprisonment, chains, starvation, fear, madness, &c.; and many ladies were thrown into fits by the forcible and affecting manner of the actress.” — *Biog. Dram.* 1812.

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\*It was never repeated. (Footnote printed in the source text).

<sup>1</sup> &c. was a more commonly used abbreviation of the Latin words *et cetera*.

<sup>2</sup> Sometimes inconsistently presented without the article when referring to the title ‘The Captive’.

<sup>3</sup> Hyphenated, as opposed to modern ‘*playbill*’.

## THE CAPTIVE

*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<sup>4</sup> 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.

[318] 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 calm, 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.]

“ A 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, will grieve and glad  
To know, though kept a captive here,  
I am not mad! not mad! 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!  
He turns the key!  
He quits the grate!—I knelt in vain!  
Still...still...his glimmering lamp I see.”

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<sup>4</sup> The word ‘*Gaoler*’, old-fashioned for ‘*jailer*’, appears as ‘*gaoler*’, without the capitalised initial sometimes throughout the text.

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

“ ’Tis lost! 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 chained 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 a dream!—some fancy vain!  
(*Proudly.*) I—I, the child of rank and wealth!—  
Am I the wretch who clanks this chain,  
Deprived of freedom, friends, and health?  
Oh! while I count those blessings fled,  
Which never more my hours 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

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

“My child!”

[A few bars of music, after which she repeats, with more energy,]

“My child!  
Ah! hast thou not forgot, by this,  
Thy mother’s face—thy mother’s tongue?  
She’ll ne’er forget your parting kiss,  
(*With a smile.*) Nor round her neck how fast your clung:  
Nor how you sued with her to stay;  
Nor how that suit your sire forbad!<sup>5</sup>  
(*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!

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<sup>5</sup> Although still used nowadays, ‘forbade’ has become the most common past tense form of the verb ‘forbid’.

Was never born 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 this 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.]

“Hark! hark!—what mean those yells—those cries?  
*(The noise grows louder.)*  
 His chain some furious madman breaks!”

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

“He comes!—I see his glaring eyes!”

[The Madman appears at the grate, which he endeavours to force, while she shrinks in an agony of terror.]

“Now!—now! my dungeon bars 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!  
 [320] Yes!—soon! For lo, yon—while I speak—  
 Mark yonder dæmon’s<sup>6</sup> eye-balls glare!  
 He sees me!—now, with a dreadful shriek,  
 He whirls a scorpion high in air!  
 Horror!—The reptile strikes his tooth  
 Deep in my heart, so crushed and sad!  
 Aye!—laugh, ye Fiends!—I feel the truth!  
 ’Tis done! ’Tis done! (*with a loud shriek*)  
 I’m mad!—I’m mad!”  
 (*She dashes herself in frenzy upon the ground.*)

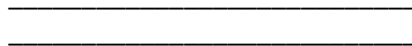
[The two Brothers cross the gallery, dragging Gaoler; then a Servant appears with a torch, conducting Father, who is supported by his youngest Daughter. They are

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<sup>6</sup> Printed as ‘dæmon’ instead of modern spellings ‘daemon’ or ‘demon’, in the original.

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 wild look of terror. They endeavour to make her know them, but in vain. She shuns them, with fear and aversion, and, taking some of the straw, begins to twine it into a crown, when her eye 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 awake 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<sup>7</sup> 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 enters 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.]

THE END.



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<sup>7</sup> Misprinted as ‘ofter’ in the source text.