

From 'The Feast of Blood'

James Malcolm Rymer

The ruins covered a considerable extent, of ground, but the only part which seemed successfully to have resisted the encroaches of time, at least to a considerable extent, was a long hall ... Adjoining to this hall, were the walls of other parts of the building, and at several places there were small, low, mysterious-looking doors that led, heaven knows where, into some intricacies and labyrinths beneath the building, which no one had, within the memory of man, been content to run the risk of losing himself in. It was related that among these subterranean passages and arches there were pitfalls and pools of water ... The place is as silent as the tomb ...

There is a dungeon--damp and full of the most unwholesome exhalations--deep underground it seems, and, in its excavations, it would appear as if some small land springs had been liberated, for the earthen floor was one continued extent of moisture.

From the roof, too, came perpetually the dripping of water, which fell with sullen, startling splashes in the pool below.

At one end, and near to the roof,--so near that to reach it, without the most efficient means from the inside, was a matter of positive impossibility--is a small iron grating, and not much larger than might be entirely obscured by any human face that might be close to it from the outside of the dungeon.

That dreadful abode is tenanted. In one corner, on a heap of straw, which appears freshly to have been cast into the place, lies a hopeless prisoner.

It is no great stretch of fancy to suppose, that it is from his lips came the sound of terror and of woe that had disturbed the repose of that lonely spot.

The prisoner is lying on his back; a rude bandage round his head, on which were numerous spots of blood, would seem to indicate that he had suffered personal injury in some recent struggle. His eyes were open. They were fixed despairingly, perhaps unconsciously, upon that small grating which looked into the upper world.

That grating slants upwards, and looks to the west, so that any one confined in that dreary dungeon might be tantalized, on a sweet summer's day, by seeing the sweet blue sky, and occasionally the white clouds flitting by in that freedom which he cannot hope for.

The carol of a bird, too, might reach him there. Alas! sad remembrance of life, and joy, and liberty.

But now all is deepening gloom. The prisoner sees nothing--hears nothing; and the sky is not quite dark. That small grating looks like a strange light-patch in the dungeon wall.

Hark! some footstep sounds upon his ear. The creaking of a door follows--a gleam of light shines into the dungeon, and the tall mysterious-looking figure in the cloak stands before the occupant of that wretched place.