



THE MERCURY

THE STUDENT ART & LITERARY MAGAZINE OF GETTYSBURG COLLEGE

Year 2013

Article 4

1-1-2013

The Chamber

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Class of 2016

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Mason, Kira J. (2013) "The Chamber," *The Mercury*: Year 2013, Article 4.

Available at: <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/mercury/vol2013/iss1/4>

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The Chamber

Author Bio

Kira is a first-year from Glastonbury, Connecticut. She is a double major in Psychology and Studio Art, and plans to minor in Spanish. She loves the arts and is a member of the Dance Ensemble and B.O.M.B. Squad on campus.

The Chamber

Kira Mason

inspired by Edgar Allen Poe

Do not blame me for a crime I did not commit, for it is not a crime when deathly blows are struck in self-defense. Listen to my story of unspeakable affliction, and you will marvel at my triumphs in the midst of such misfortune. You will marvel at my cleverness and ability, and you will agree that my untainted memory has kept my sanity intact. For it is not I who has wandered down the dark tunnel of delirium, it is them; they are the ones who have lost all hope of reality! Listen to my tale of woe, which I pen on a mere scrap of parchment as I crouch in this iron-barred cell, waiting out the last hours of my time, and you will pity me for the finality of my inequitable sentence. You will know the injustice of this world, delivering to the gallows the one man who has not, I tell you, *has not*, fallen to madness.

I awoke in that dreadful enclosure with the taste of blood and bile on my tongue, a sharp ring in my ears, and a certain suspended feeling, one that only comes from the world between dreams and reality. My mind had almost entirely escaped me and would have been lost in the thickening mist if not for a single quivering strand of reason, which shook as if in anticipation. Slowly, ever so slowly, with that comatose feeling one only gets upon leaving such a state, the strand of reason swelled to draw my wandering mind back within the secure boundaries of my human flesh.

As I came nearer to attention, I began exploring the full sensations of my body. I rested on my back and began to take in my surroundings using every aspect, save for my eyes. Those I kept sealed shut, not wanting to know the very thing that was entirely unavoidable.

I strained every muscle in my body, every nerve in my ear, and every breath I took was solely for the purpose of assessing my surroundings. Upon an initial attempt to discern just how I had come to be in this place, my memory locked its gates and would only conjure a blank void. As I racked my thoughts for an answer, I tried to ascertain my whereabouts without the use of sight. But one can only wait so long to acquire such knowledge, as fear grows quickly, like a virus, feeding off the unknown. Then—much too soon!—I could stand it no longer and my eyes flew open. Nothing. For what seemed like hours I lay there, searching the blackness for any sliver of light, when at last the faintest glimmer gave way to the terror of my predicament, leaving me completely at a loss.

My straining eyes frantically focused upon their surroundings only to shrink back and hastily shut in rejection of the images displayed. With their courage regained, they timidly continued the investigation, and I beheld above me an arch of solid granite. Rough rock walls stretched their suffocating arms toward the damp ground, welding together above, encasing me in a sarcophagus of stone. The looming edifice crushed the air above me down upon my chest and created a frightening image to my claustrophobic inclination. Shadows lengthened in the presence of a ghost-like flame and outlined the monsters that silently crept across the low-level ceiling. Out of the corner of my eye I saw a portrait of the Virgin Mary, her eyes gleaming in the ominous light, condemning me to some sin I had no knowledge of committing. Sharp grey teeth of stone extended up from the floor beside her, lengthening down from above. In the midst of the shadows my eyes strained to make out the full extensions of my chamber. Darkness enveloped the rock just beyond my trembling feet, and the tooth-filled walls faded around a narrow corner, leading their hunt for flesh away from my misery. And I—oh, what terror was I in!—found myself strapped down against dank, splintering wood, my bare body deprived of any shred of warmth that clothing would have offered. Coarse ropes coiled around each quaking wrist and ankle, attached to moveable anchors at head and foot, stretching each appendage to its full expanse. They were positioned—yes, I admit, quite cleverly—to render any victim completely and miserably inert in the smothering chamber.

Frozen as I was, immersed in the treacherous sound of silence, I became entirely petrified when a sharp click resounded suddenly from below me, splitting the silence. My memory does not falter in recalling my sensations upon hearing that dreadful sound. The bristly cords about my fragile wrists and ankles seemed to move as one, and in a sudden motion following the click they gave a sharp tug and stretched me lengthwise, but by only a very small amount, so small as to not cause pain at first, only discomfort. My limbs were stiff from the hours I had lain motionless in the cave; however, they had not yet succumbed to the rigidity of arthritis, and this I was able to bear. The gears of my mind whirred around, trying to make sense of my quandary. There had to be some reason I was here, some explanation for such misfortune! It sounded again—not more than a minute had passed—a single click emanating from beneath. And again came the minuscule tightening of my bonds, accompanied by the stinging stretch of all four appendages. A minute later came a third click. Suddenly it was all so dreadfully clear, and I plunged perilously into terror.

The seed of an idea had taken root in the innermost recesses of my mind. As if embodied by the power of Zeus, it grew and swelled to encompass every breath of a thought. Its permeating tendrils gripped me with

such fear that, had my binds released at that very moment, I would have remained motionless. With my mind trapped in panic, I struggled to compose rational thoughts, to find a way to survive. I knew this machine and what would become of me in the subsequent days. Such a cruel device was designed for the sole purpose of delivering a slow and excruciating death. Minute by minute, tear by tear, each limb would be ripped from its socket, taking hours to fully detach flesh and bone. The victim of such a demonic device as this would experience a most agonizing execution. The apparatus caused one to retain awareness throughout the torture, only falling unconscious after a sufficient loss of blood. Was this to be my demise? The very thought left me in despair. How was I to escape with no friend but the surrounding darkness?

Click. That sound became my master as I passed many long, dreary hours inside the stone enclosure, under the unnerving gaze of the Virgin. She watched with scrutiny as I drew nearer to my doom. A short while after the beginnings of my desolation, another noise came to accompany the first. This tormentor was a slow creak that pierced the silence, each decibel hurled back at me by the walls of the granite tomb. Seconds following each painful click, the contraption would emit a creak as the board upon which I lay shifted underneath me. Constricting binds dug into my flesh and secured my body as the wooden slab tilted backwards, only a few centimeters, to lower my sweat-drenched head and raise my shuddering legs toward the looming ceiling above.

Oh, I dreaded the moment when my toes would make contact with the slimy coldness. Would the machine simply cease tilting or crush my appendages between wood and rock? I could not lie there and wait for the outcome, like a blind cow on the march to slaughter. I devoted myself to the search for a way out, each click and each creak hastening the hunt.

My desperate eyes pierced the gloom and scoured for a clue to liberation, only to encounter smooth walls and floors devoid of any tool or weapon. Panic rose in my throat, further constricting the airways already gasping for breath in my narrow chamber. With each passing minute, each click and each creak, my head lowered, blood straining to maintain its steady flow as gravity took hold. My feet continued to close the distance to the ceiling, and my limbs—my poor limbs—were subject to perpetual pulling, my muscles lengthened beyond what I thought possible. Another click, another creak, and I was sufficiently tilted to see the source of the dim light: a single burning lantern amongst the haunting shadows behind my head.

As I lay there, time brought more stretching and tilting until my hands were very near to the ground. Blood began collecting in my head and fingertips as gravity slowed the blood's ascent through my veins.

Throbbing temples and my aching head clouded my mind and dulled every sense but pain. Under the condemning gaze of the Virgin my left arm was fully and excruciatingly removed from its socket by the vicious ropes and my hips were stretched even further with the force of my weight pulling me down. I gasped for air, but my lungs, performing minimally in my elongated position, only inhaled smothering vapors devoid of precious oxygen. I closed my eyes in an attempt to block out my suffering and was lost in a void of terror for events that would soon come.

From within my mental oblivion I heard boot-clad footsteps marching along the passageway leading to my chamber and opened my eyes for further investigation. Suddenly there appeared in the corner of my vision a large, hooded figure claspng a gleaming knife as long as my forearm. I howled in terror and thrashed against my bonds until the figure bent down to clamp a cold hand against my mouth, muffling the cries for help. Terror raged inside me as the glint of steel neared my right wrist—this man had come to sever my hand! I twisted my arm away from danger as silver sliced through where my flesh had been and watched as the figure brought the deadly weapon near my other hand. The very thought of the impending pain filled me with paralyzing alarm, and from its depths arose a moment of clarity, showing me the way out of this mess. Coherent thoughts pried open my muzzled jaws and allowed me to seize the man's hand with my teeth and bite down with strength only given by the will to survive. Warm blood gushed on my tongue but still I held my grip, determined to delay this phantom's deadly plans. Bone met bone, and the figure unleashed a terrifying scream as if to wake the dead from their tombs as the sound of the steel clattering to the floor reached my grateful ears. I released my hold and the cloaked frame jerked back toward the corner beneath the portrait, knocking his head on a granite tooth protruding from the wall and slumping to the floor, stunned. As he fell, I snatched the knife from the ground beside my head, barely noticing that my wrist was no longer fixed by rope.

With one eye on the perpetrator I struggled to hack through the bindings wrapped around my limbs. The last bind on my right ankle refused to give, but my efforts made it loose enough to let my foot slip through. I slid backwards off the wooden board to the floor as blood rushed to my toes after hours of elevation. I did not have long to relish my liberation, however, for the hooded man was advancing once more. As I hunched over and tried to force my numb legs beneath me, I clutched my weapon in fear. My ears recognized pleading sounds, but his words were so jumbled it seemed as though he were an animal trying to speak. I did not have time to pause and unscramble the meaning of these sounds; my sole concern was to prevent further harm to myself. The shadow walked

toward me, one hand inside his cloak, screaming some incoherent thought, the human eyes ravenous as if possessed by an evil spirit. It would be impossible to reason with such a creature and I knew what must be done to save myself from whatever horrible fate this man had planned for me. As he looked to the cloak and began drawing an arm from beneath the dark fabric, no doubt to extract another weapon, panic clutched me once more. Knowing I only had the strength for a single lunge, I cleverly waited crouched on the floor for the perfect moment to strike. When he was an arm's length away, I rolled toward the hooded figure and kneeled to thrust the knife up into his chest. A low groan of defeat escaped my attacker's lips as he fell to the ground, tormenting me no more.

With the deed done, I recovered the knife, wrapped my bare body in his blood-stained cloak, and turned to exit the chamber, feeling Her eyes boring into my back. At last I would be free from the torture of this place! Excitement to see daylight again, to smell the fresh air, and to feel the wind on my face gave new life to my aching legs. My pace quickened, and I cradled my injured arm as I traveled faster and faster, following the dimly lit granite paths, searching for the exit. I rounded a hundredth corner and my heart leapt at the sight of pure sunlight streaming through the cave mouth. I faintly heard shouts of men speaking in the same garbled language as the man who first approached me, growing closer and closer, their boots stomping against the ground behind me, but it was all drowned in the beautiful color of golden sun. Just steps from the exit, I felt something long and hard collide with my back, knocking the knife from my blood-caked hand and crashing my face into the dirt. Rough shouts sounded from above, and strong hands and feet held my body down as those same rough and bloody ropes, which had held me so captive before, were coiled around my squirming hands. I desperately stared into the light outside, feeling the air of freedom waft over me, when a fist smashed against my head and sent me shrinking into a void of blackness.