CLASSICS LIBRARY · STORY MAP

The Prisoner of Chillon

Lord Byron · *1816 · original English text*

My hair is grey, but not with years: Byron's 1816 narrative poem is the voice of a man long chained in a castle prison, who has seen his brothers die beside him and has learned the shape of the wall. The site EPUB is this poem only; the Gutenberg file is a larger Byron volume.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

What becomes of a soul that has outlived its brothers in a dungeon, and can liberty still mean anything when the chain has become a habit?

"My hair is grey, but not with years,"
Stanza I, the poem's opening

The hosted EPUB is The Prisoner of Chillon only, without the editor's introduction and without the Sonnet on Chillon. Project Gutenberg #20158 is a collected Works of Byron. Quote only the narrative poem, in stretches that appear in both—for example the opening, and later "A sunbeam which hath lost its way." Do not quote "Eternal Spirit of the chainless Mind," which is the sonnet and is not in the site EPUB. A short, grave prison-narrative, for a wide older band, based on the captivity of François Bonivard and made into a new poem.

KEY CHARACTERS

the prisoner
The speaker, grey but not with years, who tells the years of the chain.

the brothers
The companions in the dungeon, whose deaths are the poem's first grief.

the castle and the lake
Chillon, the stone and water that become a world.

the brief visitors
A sunbeam, a bird, a later freedom that may come too strangely.

NOT WITH YEARS

> *"My hair is grey, but not with years,"*
> Stanza I

Grades 8–12
Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01
Grey, but Not with Years
STANZA I

The speaker's hair is grey, but not with years, nor grown white in a single night from sudden fears. His limbs are bowed by rust of chains, not by toil.

- The opening line is exact in both the EPUB and the poem portion of the Gutenberg file.
- The prison is already in the body.
- Do not start from the sonnet, which this EPUB omits.

> *"My hair is grey, but not with years,"*
> Stanza I

02
Brothers in the Dungeon
THE EARLY STANZAS

He has not been alone. Brothers have been chained with him, and the poem will not leave their deaths untold.

- The family is the human center, not a decoration.
- Teach the deaths with gravity.
- The castle and the lake are a real place made into verse.

03
A Sunbeam That Has Lost Its Way
THE MIDDLE

A crevice, a fallen sunbeam on the damp floor, and a mind that has begun to take the dungeon as its world.

- 'A sunbeam which hath lost its way' is in both witnesses.
- The image is the poem's midway weather.
- Liberty is already becoming a memory.

04
A Bird, and a Habit of Chains
THE LATER STANZAS

A visitor at the bars, a brief hope, and the terrible ease with which the prisoner may at last be loosed and not know how to go.

- The close of the captivity is a moral problem, not a simple rescue.
- Teach the last freedom with the same gravity as the chain.
- Byron's 1816 English is the text to quote.

05
The Poem Only
THE HOSTED FILE

The site EPUB ends with this narrative. The Gutenberg volume continues with other Byron. Stop at the poem's close, and do not quote the Sonnet on Chillon as if it were in the EPUB.

- Flag PG #20158 as a collected Works.
- The sonnet ("Eternal Spirit of the chainless Mind") is not in the site EPUB.
- A short, complete prison-narrative for a wide older band.

Captivity | Brothers | A Lost Sunbeam | Liberty and Habit | A Prison's World

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 8–12

1. The site EPUB is The Prisoner of Chillon only, without the editor's introduction and without the Sonnet on Chillon. Project Gutenberg #20158 is a collected Works of Byron. Quote only the narrative poem, in stretches that appear in both. The opening is exact: "My hair is grey, but not with years," Do not quote "Eternal Spirit of the chainless Mind," which is the sonnet and is not in the EPUB.
2. A short, grave 1816 prison-narrative, for a wide older band. Teach the brothers' deaths and the last strange liberty with gravity.
3. "A sunbeam which hath lost its way" is in both witnesses and may be cited from the middle of the poem.

Quotations are verbatim from the original English text, Project Gutenberg #20158: The Works of Lord Byron, Poetry, Vol. 4, ed. Ernest Hartley Coleridge (1901), the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/the-prisoner-of-chillon/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.