

TERROR TALES



VOLUME TWELVE MAY, 1940 NUMBER TWO

A LONG NOVEL OF WEIRD TERROR

The Book of Torment.....Harrison Storm **6**

How could anyone have believed me when I said I had not committed those horrible torture-murders? For they had read the gloating admission of the ghastly crimes—and the handwriting was my own!

FOUR MYSTERY-TERROR NOVELETTES

Where Dwell the Living Dead.....Wayne Rogers **28**

Old Jubel Tandy swore that until the end of time I would remain faithful to the spirit of his dead daughter—and now in that cavern of damnation, her corpse was rising up to claim me in the cold, white embrace of death!

Mistress of the Dark Pool.....Russell Gray **56**

I could not help but laugh when that ancient hag told me I would take the place of her dead lover. For had I not my own lovely Cara? Yet there came a night when I promised to kill—that I might have the love of a wrinkled, leathery crone!

Prey for the Daughter of Hell.....Conrad Kimball **78**

Death lay in my lips! I knew this, but some power stronger than myself forced me on to lure men to their destruction. Was I so accused that even the one man I truly loved could not escape my frenzied madness?

Test-Tube Frankenstein.....Wayne Robbins **86**

I wanted to destroy that slimy, protoplasmic horror that fed on the flesh of the humans it sought to imitate, but even as I locked with it in a struggle of death, it changed into the lovely form of—my wife!

A SHORT STORY OF FEARFUL MENACE

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The Blue Lady of the Sierras was the infinitely desirable embodiment of all man's longing and passion. Yet on one forbidden night of the year none could look upon her—and live!

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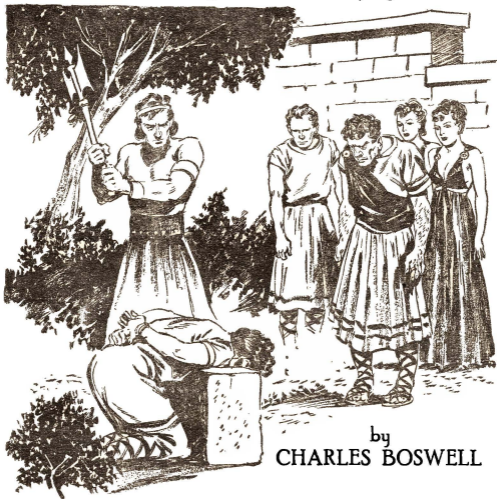
A reader's complaint. . .

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Monsters of Monarchy

No. 3—Egomaniac of Antiquity



by
CHARLES BOSWELL

The Emperor Caligula—the cruelest Roman of them all. . . .

CASSIUS CHAEREA, captain of the Praetorian guard, had the honor post as sentry at the Palatine, Roman palace of the Caesars. Born of a noble, patrician family, war-worn and decorated for bravery in battle under the beloved Emperor Tiberius, Cassius was proudest of the proud—a fit man to wear the plumes and helmet and carry the shield and sword of empire.

But now, in the year A. D. 37, the pride of Cassius was tinged with sorrows, for Tiberius was dead and another was about to ascend the throne. Woe be it, this other was not Germanicus, the appointed of Tiberius, for Germanicus, alas, was dead as well. Both fell gallantly before the Gauls—so ran the public announcements. But the sorrow of Cassius was of a more morbid turn, not the right-

ous, almost joyous weeping of a soldier for an honorably slain hero. For rumors reached Cassius, well founded rumors from the lips of those who'd talked with the victors recovering the two immortal bodies, that the death wounds suffered by Tiberius and Germanicus were wounds in the back and the arrows inflicting them were not Gallic but of Roman manufacture.

Caligula! Caligula now in ascendancy to the laurel crown! As son of Germanicus, this individual was naming himself Emperor of all Rome and there were none to stop him.

And Cassius was right, for Caligula, of Tiberius could but know, he would twist in his tomb!"

And Cassius was right, for Caligula, of all the heirs of Tiberius, was the most hated, the most despised—the most feared. It was for this reason that the youth now coming into power had spent the major portion of his life far from Rome. Repulsive in appearance, indecent in his talk, not to be trusted with arms that were the right of every citizen, Caligula had hitherto resided in practical confinement at Capri, the summer palace of the Caesars.

"He killed them!" the guard captain muttered to himself. "Assassins in his employ murdered the Emperor—murdered his own father! From what I've heard it is an act typical of his spleen, so cruel is he, so greedy for the grasp of power!"

At that moment a trumpet sounded and in the distance the guard captain saw the first few units of an approaching procession. At its head was a prancing white charger and astride the massive animal could be made out the stooped, huddled figure of a man.

CALIGULA! Caligula come to claim the palace of the Caesars as his own! Cassius Chaerea had never seen the new

emperor but he recognized the twisted legs, hunched figure, and prematurely bald pate from description. Snapping to attention, resolving to serve his new master with the best that was in him despite his prejudices, the veteran guard officer saluted smartly. Such an attitude, he believed, was the duty of a soldier, such was for the good of Rome.

"Hail Caesar!" Cassius Chaerea cried.

But from Caligula there was no returning hail. Rushing his charger up the palace steps, he slid his horse's hooves to a stop dangerously close to Cassius Chaerea. Surly, frowning, Caligula ordered: "Off with your helmet!"

Obediently the guard captain removed his plume-festooned headgear and stood bewildered before the Emperor.

"Bah!" Caligula squealed and, pursing his lips, spat into Cassius Chaerea's unflinching face. "Hair! Hair on your head! You have hair on your head and the Emperor has none! No man shall have that which the Emperor hasn't!"

Caligula paused and with squinting, glaring eyes, watched for what effect his words would produce. Then he went on: "The next time I see you, if you still have hair, it may be that you will shortly no longer have a head on which to wear it!"

NOR was Cassius Chaerea the only one affected by the shaved head order. Such was Caligula's vanity that each and every male brought into any contact with him was forced, on penalty of death, to be shorn of his locks. The command did not stop with living persons. Rather, the great hallways of the Palatine being decorated with marble statues of the Olympian gods and likenesses of former Caesars, these were broken, chipped, and beheaded before the new Emperor had occupied the royal mansion a week.

So began Caligula's reign, his egotricity taking turns for the worse by the minute. At a banquet given following his

coronation there was seated near him a young bride and groom, a couple of noble family married that very morning.

Eyeing the beautiful Livia Orestilla and becoming insanely envious of the possession her husband was soon to have of her virgin body, Caligula shouted across the table: "Stop hugging my wife!"

A dead silence followed the mad command. Caligula arose from where he was sitting, crossed around the table, and grabbed the shrinking bride by her wrist. "By imperial decree," he hissed, "your marriage is annulled! From this moment on you are married to me!"

So saying, Caligula, the woman over his shoulder, her husband still sitting dazed and dumbfounded and fearful of his life to protest, carried Livia Orestilla off to a nearby bedchamber. The next morning he declared himself divorced from her and banished her into exile. "I do not want her to return to her husband," he laughed to his intimates. "If she did, my prowess at the marriage bed might suffer by comparison!"

It was for this same reason that the Emperor, a month or so later, committed one of the first acts of barbaric and inhuman cruelty to later characterize his reign. Banquets nightly on the most expensive of foods, week long orgies in which all the courtiers of Rome had gotten and stayed drunk, were fast exhausting the imperial exchequer and it was up to Caligula to impose a new tax to raise additional funds. He levied on prostitutes, not even excepting his favorite, a flattering wench named Pyralis. But she complained, claiming she couldn't pay her rent and the tax as well. Whereupon Caligula insisted that she pay the tax but dishonored the Palatine by supplying the woman with free, royal quarters.

At the time there was visiting Caligula a suzerain prince named Ptolemy. Allowed the run of the palace, he was likewise accorded the privileges of the glam-

orous Pyralis. All was good and well until the ladies of the court began tittering that Pyralis had expressed a preference for the company of the stalwart, muscular Ptolemy as opposed to shrivelled, bandy-legged Caligula.

The gossip reached the ears of the Emperor. He was infuriated. Condemning Ptolemy to the arena, he was forced to fight a professional gladiator. Much to Caligula's chagrin, Ptolemy won, slaying his adversary. Now the Emperor's despair was complete, and brooding, searching in the dark regions of his mind for what he thought a fitting, properly humiliating torture, he hit upon emasculation.

Nude and so mutilated, Ptolemy was paraded before the assembled beauties of the empire. "What good would he be to you now?" Caligula chortled. Afterwards he had Ptolemy led to the execution block, commanding the headsman to "strike so that he will feel himself dying!"

CASSIUS CHAEREA, captain of the guard, watched these incidents, woe-fully shaking his head. Such dissipation, such cruelties, he knew, were fast contributing to the fall of Rome. Still, there was little that could be done about it. The populace of Rome held the Emperor in a kind of veneration that was tied up with their deep-seated religion. The Emperor's will was the will of the Olympian Gods; the Emperor's actions were privileged and divine. As far as civic revolt was concerned, Cassius knew that it would never come about. The people, as a mass, would never rise up and overthrow their brutal and insane sovereign. But one man, Cassius reflected . . . one brave man might . . . might be able to do something. . . .

In the meantime Caligula carried on with his inanities and his insanities. He married Lollina Paulina but shortly divorced and exiled her because she was

just like any other man's wife—only a woman. Casting about for something special as the fit mate for the mighty Caligula, he found the nearest thing to himself that might have been produced—his sister Drusilla.

This incestuous relationship, Caligula declared, was only legal for the Emperor—for Caligula! But it appears that the Gods frowned on the union for it was fruitless and within a year Drusilla died.

Suspecting that she had been poisoned, Caligula arrested every baker, butcher, fruiterer, and vintner that served the palace, together with their entire business staffs and the whole households of each principal and employee. These, lined up on the palace grounds, were inspected personally by the Emperor. There was no judge, no trial, no jury. "Each one of the dogs, from that cross-eyed fellow there to that cross-eyed fellow there," ordered the fuming Caligula, his hand sweeping down the line, indicating some two score quaking, fearful persons, "will be thrown to the lions and torn to bits! . . . As for the rest—they will be imprisoned!"

And Caligula's imprisonment meant the most frightful kind of torture. Cells, the size of coffins, occupied a dungeon beneath the Palatine. Cramped, barely able to move a muscle, in utter darkness, with hardly enough air to breathe, and fed barely enough bread and water to sustain life, the condemned were left to go out of their minds and die, perhaps in six months, perhaps in six years.

The Emperor married again, now to Junia Claudilla. On his wedding trip, a sea voyage, he invited his father-in-law, Silanus. The old man, a sufferer from sea-sickness, declined the invitation and thereby wrote his own death warrant.

"He wanted to stay home to wrest the controls of government away from me while I was absent," was Caligula's explanation of this killing. Disgraced, Junia

Claudilla was exiled and Caesonia, a woman of the streets, taken to wife in her stead.

This woman was the only one who utterly pleased Caligula. She was bawdy, lewd, and, what was more important, always eager to flatter him. During the course of stag entertainments which Caligula frequently gave, Caesonia was in the habit of dropping in and suddenly exhibiting herself naked and in lascivious poses to the Emperor's male guests. Arousing their desires, she would refuse to let them touch her. "I am for Caligula alone!" she would cry. "Caligula," she would go on, rather forgetting her past public history, "is the only man worthy of having the right to me!"

THOUGH such things amused and puffed up the Emperor in his lighter moods, black depressions fostered by a subconscious realization of physical and intellectual inferiority sometimes caused him to resort to direr means of asserting his ego.

The arena sacrifice of slaves to ravaging, starved lions, tigers, and leopards were daily amusements. Public executions of the disobedient, the insolent, and those for one paltry reason or another out of imperial favor, took place frequently. Actually, and beneath a surface attitude of self-adulation, Caligula hated himself—and all the rest of the world as well.

Once at a banquet, attended by visiting ambassadors, he was laughing. Inquiring why, the Emperor told the emissaries: "It amuses me to think that if I should give the word your heads would be cut off."

Another time he remarked to a senator: "I would that all Rome had, but one throat—it would be so much simpler to cut!"

In the last year of his reign, with a view to mass murder, he conceived the most abominable plot it has ever be-

hooved the mind of man to create. His wife, Caesonia, had recently been delivered of child. Caligula knew it was his, he said, because the infant when placed in the same crib with one of its baby cousins, tried to claw out the other child's eyes.

In honor of his paternity, Caligula threw a bridge across the bay of Baiae. It was a pontoon affair, 3,600 double paces in length. As soon as it was completed, Caligula, astride his horse, rode across and back alone and then invited the public to try out the span.

Several thousand started across the water. As soon as the bridge was filled, Caligula sprang to a lever device which opened sea-cocks in the pontoons and the bridge, with all its frantic, screaming visitors, sank.

"I crossed!" the Emperor cried, laugh-

ing madly. "I—I—I, Caligula—crossed without harm! Why couldn't they?"

It was that night, January 14th, A. D. 41, that Cassius Chaerea took action. Despite the horror enacted before their eyes, the Roman people were still submissive and the guard captain realized that if something was to be done, he alone would have to do it.

Caligula was in his bath, relaxing after a day of tense and gratifying excitement. Cassius Chaerea, creeping past special attendants, plunged into the colored tile pool with the Emperor, his dagger unsheathed.

"I live!" the Emperor cried as the steel struck into his vitals. "I live! Caligula—Caesar lives!"

But he didn't. He died, ego and all, just like any other man.

THE END