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# Strange STORIES


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# Power of the Druid

By  
**ROBERT BLOCH**

*Author of "Pink Elephants,"  
"Death Has Five Guesses," etc.*

**T**IBERIUS CLAUDIUS NERO CÆSAR was bored. His sacred Majesty, Augustus, Protector of the People, Emperor Tiberius stared moodily at the blue Caprian waters and heaved a scented sigh. He was heartily sick of living. Ten years ago he had become sick of Rome and the cares of empire. He abandoned all government at that time and retired here to Capri.

He built the twelve villas in which he lived. He peopled them with his German bodyguard, his staff of Greek professors, his friend Nerva, and the astrologer Thrasyllus—all as a safeguard against further boredom.

But he tired quickly enough of island exile, and so had come to him the loathsome Spintrians, the abominable practitioners of the arts alluded to in the book of Elephantis. And Tiberius built torture chambers in the villas, to amuse himself in still more curious ways. But now, even these strong diversions no longer titillated his aging senses.

*The Mystic Snake Gave Cruel  
Claudius Youth—But Wild  
Debauches Deafened Him  
To His Enemies' Hisses*



His body crashed, cutting off the wild madness  
of his death-cry

Tiberius could no longer escape from himself, from his own aging body and jaded senses. He was growing quite old now. A tall, bony man with a thin, pitted face and a high, bald pate. His physicians were forever at him, cautioning him against his addiction to drugged wine, and myrrh.

He sat, stiff-jointed, on the cliff overlooking the beach at Capri, alternately staring at the waves and fingering the fifth volume of *Elephantis* in his lap. He sat alone, and he cursed under his breath in round, imperial oaths.

"Cæsar!"

The harsh voice echoed from below the cliff at his feet. Tiberius sat up, his bony legs stiffening with apprehension. No strangers came to this, his island. Tiberius feared assassins.

"Cæsar!"

Peering over the edge of the cliff, the Emperor descried a boat, moored to a rock in the waters below. The voice came from the throat of someone clambering up the steep cliff, through the bushes.

Suddenly the bushes parted at one side, and a weird figure appeared. It was a disheveled man, ragged and soaking with sea water that glistened on his tanned skin. He had a wild, bearded face that bled from the scratchings of the thorny bushes, encountered during his climb. His yellow teeth were bared in a grimace of fatigue.

But Tiberius scarcely noticed these details. His eyes were focused on the long knife the stranger carried in one hand. It was a sharp knife, a glittering knife. It was the kind of blade that could be easily plunged into a neck, even an imperial neck.

Tiberius looked wildly to either side for his German guards, who always waited near by. But the man approached, grinning. And now Tiberius perceived that he carried a great sack.

"A gift for you, Majesty," panted the ragged stranger. "I caught it just now, saw you sitting here on the cliff, and wish to present you with my catch."

He smiled through his tangled beard

through his scratched, bleeding face. Opening the sack, the man drew out a great barbel, still squirming in life. The stranger gestured with his knife.

"A gift, oh Cæsar."

Tiberius did not look at the catch. His lean hands fumbled for the golden whistle on the cord about his scrawny throat. He blew frantically.

"Guards! At once!"

**F**ROM either side guards appeared. Great, blond, brawny warriors in armor, with barbs protruding from their iron helmets. They moved in, holding assegais in readiness.

"You would kill me, then, under pretext of presenting me with this object?" Tiberius sneered.

"But, Cæsar, I speak truly. I caught it only a few moments ago and brought it as a present to you, Divinity."

"The knife?" snapped Tiberius, his face set in a cold frown.

"To cut my way through the thorn bushes," wailed the fisherman.

"Rub the barbel in his face," commanded the Emperor.

In a flash, one of the Germans had pinioned the helpless rustic. Another hacked a piece from the fish and rubbed the scaly bits in the squirming man's face.

"Mercy, Cæsar!" gasped the captive.

"See what else is in the sack," Tiberius commanded.

A third German dug into the sack and drew out an enormous lobster, alive, as its great pointed pincers showed.

"Mercy, Tiberius."

"You'd frighten me, you boor?" whispered the Emperor. "Guard, rub his face with this. Rub it well."

The German advanced on the tightly-held fisherman and drew the giant lobster across his contorted face. He drew it forward and back, scrubbing.

Tiberius stood looking on.

"That's it." He smiled. "Again."

The huge pincers tore the flesh from both cheeks.

"Cæsar! Mercy—please—"

"Capital!" Tiberius cackled, his senile laughter rising. "Prove his innocence to his face, guard. Again!"

The struggling fisherman screamed, but the German drew the lobster down, pressed it tightly into the victim's face. The pincers settled into the hollow ridges of the fisherman's eyes. There was a mad shriek of pain, and the lobster came away. But its pincers were no longer empty.

The man's eye-sockets were. From their red, streaming emptiness even the Germans recoiled in horror. But Tiberius still laughed, a bleating laugh which rose even above the screams of the blinded man.

"Release him," commanded the Emperor. "You may go, loyal and faithful subject."

The blind man raced screaming about the edge of the cliff. His clawing hands clutched empty air as he tottered on the brink, then fell forward from the crag to plunge down into the rocks a hundred feet below. His body crashed, cutting off the wild madness of his death-cry. Tiberius squinted over the edge of the cliff and shrugged as he turned away.

"So," he said. "You may go, guards." His eyes lighted on the cut fish at his feet.

"Perhaps one of you will carry this to the villa," he suggested. "Tell the cook to prepare it for this evening's feast. I am fond of fresh barbel, very fond of it, and this one's a beauty. Besides, we should be ungrateful did we not enjoy the fellow's gift. He was put to such pains in the giving."

The Emperor chuckled as the Germans bowed and withdrew. Then Tiberius resumed his place at the edge of the cliff and picked up *Elephantis* once again. After a moment he sighed deeply.

For the Emperor Tiberius was bored.

**T**HE sun was sinking in the center of a cloud that hung over the western sea. It peered out from the round blackness of the cloud like the red eye of a Cyclops swimming away across the waters. And the red eye fell upon Tiberius as he turned the pages of his book, fell upon him and bathed his face with bloody light.

The night breeze was rustling in the bushes, whispering in a chill voice

of mourning that the day was dead. Tiberius felt clammy cold steal over his thin limbs, stepped briskly to the edge of the cliff for a final glance into the waters below.

"Jove's Curse!" exclaimed the emperor.

The boat of the dead fisherman was still anchored there below. But that did not disturb His August Majesty.

It was the sight of what lay beside it in the dusk. Another boat. A long, queer-looking craft was anchored there. And it had no oars, though it was plainly some sort of barbarous shell.

The rustling in the bushes took on a new and menacing meaning.

Tiberius clutched at his whistle.

The rustling was louder. Was it the ghost of the dead fisherman coming for vengeance?

Tiberius blew frantically.

And then the bushes parted.

A ragged man with a tangled beard, his face bleeding in the sunset.

It was the fisherman!

But no, the light alone caused the face to look as though it bled. And this man's beard was white. His rags were white, also, and his skin. Moreover, he had eyes.

Tiberius could not escape those eyes. They burned more redly than the sun, and with a deeper, more compelling fire. They smoldered from that face in the dusk as the man slowly advanced.

Tiberius screamed.

"Guards! *Schnell!*" He babbled frantic German commands, and still the figure approached.

The Germans appeared, running through the trees.

The man did not appear to notice them. He advanced on Tiberius, a slow smile on his face.

"Guards! Over the cliff, quickly!" the Emperor screamed.

They were on the stranger in a rush, bearing him back. He did not struggle. One of the Germans picked up the great lobster that still lay on the sand and ground it into the captive's face. It pressed pincers into his reddened eyes, but no sound came from the victim. And then they hurled him from the cliff, hurled him down

upon the rocks below, as Tiberius screamed in fear and rage.

There was a faint splashing from the beach, then stillness.

**HIS** Imperial Majesty motioned the guards away in silence, then slowly turned and followed them up the path.

The appearance of this second, frightening stranger was too much for him. Henceforth he would entertain no visitors. All would be thrown from the cliff, just as he tossed the favorites of whom he tired. Tiberius could not brook assassination. He was soon to die, and no one should hasten that horrid end.

But who was this man with the disturbing eyes?

Well, no matter. He was dead, and those red eyes were ground out forever. The wind rustled strongly at Tiberius' back. Too strongly.

The Emperor knew suddenly that he was being followed. In a panic, his hands again went to the whistle about his neck.

But other hands reached it first.

Two slim white hands rested on the cord, on the golden whistle. Two slim white hands came over his shoulders. Tiberius, speechless with fear, turned his head.

He stared into the red, burning eyes of the eyeless dead stranger he had thrown over the cliff!

"Hail, Cæsar!"

The deep voice penetrated his being, though it was soft as a whisper.

"Go away! You're dead. I killed you," Tiberius gasped. He felt that he was going mad.

"I would speak with you, Cæsar."

"Stop staring at me! You have no eyes. I killed you."

"Aye, Cæsar. You killed me, and tore out my eyes, and threw me from the cliff, just as you threw that poor fisherman earlier in the day. But I am not a fisherman, Cæsar. I cannot be blinded, or killed."

"You're his ghost," wailed the Emperor.

"Nay, I am not a ghost. But I have powers greater than the supernatural. You saw me die, and now you see me live again. Such powers should be of

interest to you, Cæsar. It was to tell you of them that I came."

"Yes."

"I allowed you to have your will, though I could blast your Germans with a glance—and I could blast you, too, Tiberius, my friend." The red eyes compelled.

"Yes, you are right. Come, be my guest at dinner tonight at the villa. We shall talk then."

**THE** Emperor's couch was soft. The Emperor's table was filled with delicacies. The Emperor's slaves, servants, musicians, and guests were attentive and solicitous.

But the Emperor paid no heed to comfort, food, drink, or entertainment. He sat staring at the white-bearded man, his ears open only to his whispered words.

The stranger sat stiffly at the great board. He did not loll beneath the fannings of slaves, nor did he partake of the viands before him. Instead, he drank wine from the special flagon placed at his side, draught after draught of wine from the great goblet he constantly refilled. Yet never did his even tones falter. The stranger could not get drunk!

Tiberius listened long. At last he ventured a whispered reply above the chattering of the others at the table.

"You say, then, that you are a Druid who came here in a stone boat from Britain."

"Aye. I have been ovate and bard in the great Druidic college you call Stonehenge. And I was archdruid, too, of all Britain."

"I have heard of your cult. It is known throughout Britain, the Celtic isles, and even Gaul. You Druids are wizards, are you not?"

"Not wizards, but students of Nature. We worship Tanarus, the god of primal life, who dwells in the sacred oak. And we accord homage to Mabon, the white bull of the sun, and to Primal Nodens, serpent of waters.

"The true secrets of Druidism are guarded by the initiate. Only a few of the many who pass twenty years in study and trials of endurance ever manage to become admitted to our secret priesthood. One must learn

strange magics and discover the secrets of Nature in order to be worthy.

"I am one of the few true initiates. I rule over the thirteen clans of Druid, and I know the real truths behind Life and Death."

"You boast of such powers?" Tiberius sneered.

"Did I not come from Britain in a stone boat without oars?" the Druid returned with a slow smile. "Primal Nodens guided me here. Did you not kill me and tear out my eyes? Am I not therefore master over Nature and Life and Death?"

Tiberius nodded.

"But then, what would you have of me? Why did you leave your powerful offices in Britain to seek me out?"

"That, oh Cæsar, I shall explain. I tired of my leadership because of its restrictions. I am human! I have never known the love of woman, and all common men feared me for my powers, even my priests. Well, love of woman is denied me now, and friendship too. But I am still human enough to long for wealth and riches and adulation.

"I know magics that bring all riches, but dare not use them in my sacred office. If I desired any pleasures my priests would sacrifice me as a violator of my trust. So I decided to leave my post, before it was too late. And I bethought myself of the greatest man in the world—you, Emperor of Rome. I would come to you. Surely there would be a way to serve you and in return gain reward. So I came."

**A**UGUST TIBERIUS smiled, and under cover of his guests' babblings, he leaned forward to reply.

"There is a way to serve me."

The Druid smiled.

"In the spring the trees blossom and the flowers bud. They die in autumn but next year are reborn. Their life is eternal, but their forms change. And that is the secret of human existence. Life lies in the soul, and the soul moves from body to body without ceasing."

"But what has that to do with me?"

"A great deal, oh Cæsar. We of the true Druids have learned how to govern the soul, and Life. We can take

the vital force before it dies and transplant it. And you, I know, want to escape death. So, Tiberius, I can help you. I will place your soul in another body, transpose the soul of another to your own dying body. Thus you can live again."

Tiberius trembled.

The Druid took a long gulp from his wine glass.

"You cannot make me drunk, you see," he smiled. His red eyes became points. "That ought to prove something." He smiled again, staring straight at Tiberius.

"You can't even kill me."

The Druid drank deliberately again of the wine.

"What do you mean?" Tiberius quavered.

"I told you I knew all things." Again the Druid drank slowly. "And of course I know that this wine you set before me is highly poisoned. A glass of it will kill a man in half an hour. Yet I have been drinking all night." The smile was terrible.

"But Druid, I did not know, I could not suspect! If you can do what you say, if you can give me another lease on life in a new, young body, I shall reward you as richly as you desire."

Druid eyes gleamed.

"You're an evil man, Tiberius. I've never seen worse. As a Druid I should not prostitute my powers to serve you, lest I incur the vengeance of my gods. You must reward me well."

"I shall, I promise! As I love my life."

"That oath is convincing enough. Now, to find you a body."

Tiberius extended a thin finger and pointed at his nephew.

"That is the body," he murmured. "Put me in his place. That young man is to be my heir, the next Emperor of Rome. He is young, healthy. The people love him as much as they hate me. That is the body I desire to inhabit."

The Druid nodded, staring down the table at the thin, serious face of the Emperor's nephew, Gaius Caligula.

It was done!

Tiberius Cæsar returned to the mainland. At Misenum he fell sick, and

called Caligula to his side. The old man, wheezing and gasping in his bed, gave Caligula the Imperial ring.

Caligula put it on gravely, there in the darkness of the bedroom. He was alone with his imperial uncle, and he sobbed with deep emotion at the thought of this terrible old man, for all his power, dying alone and friendless after a final debauch. Where was the Druid?

But he did not sob long. And he did not wonder where the Druid was for long, either, because the white-bearded old man rose in the darkness behind the bed and advanced with blazing eyes. One hand held a staff of yew, with a serpent head.

Caligula rose from the bedside, turned.

The serpent head darted out of the Druid's hand. It hissed.

The wood hissed, and moved. A great snake coiled about the throat of Caligula, strangling his screams. The young man fell across the bed where the Emperor lay, with the snake tight against his neck.

Then, slowly, the tail of the snake rose and coiled in turn about the neck of Tiberius, who did not resist. Both men lay side by side on the bed now, the great green serpent coiled at either end about their throats. Their faces blackened.

And the Druid chanted there in the darkness over the bodies of the two dying men.

"Oh Great Typhon, Great Set, Great Nodens!" whispered the Druid. His voice slurred into Celtic, into ancient Phoenician.

The Druid whispered long, and at his words the candle flames in the chamber sickened and died. The two men died. Only the Druid and the serpent were alive—and the horrid voice, uttering strange words that somehow caused the air to tremble at their utterance.

Now, swiftly, a flame seemed to course through the wriggling coils of the serpent. It came from both ends. The one from the tail about the neck of Tiberius was a dim blue flame. The other, from the head about Caligula's throat, was a strong red flame. They met and mingled in the serpent's

body, seemed to pass and seek opposite ends.

Suddenly the candles flared up, the serpent hissed again and then uncoiled from the young firm throat and the wrinkled old throat.

Both men began to breathe once again. The young throat moved regularly, while the old one wheezed and rattled.

The serpent wriggled from the bed and retreated to the Druid's slim hands, seeming none the worse for its experience. Then, as the Druid caught it, it suddenly became a mere shaft of wood once more. The Druid smiled and turned to the bed.

"It is done," he announced.

"Yes. It is done!"

The triumphant voice of Tiberius rose—from Caligula's lips.

"What have you done?" The feeble quaver of Caligula came from Tiberius in the bed. "What has happened? Where am I?"

With renewed vitality, born of utter dread, the body of aged Tiberius sat up, and Caligula's dazed eyes stared from its face.

Caligula's body caught up a pillow. Gently Tiberius pressed it against his own former mouth, saw his own body sink back on the mattress and struggle feebly as it slowly strangled.

"Ah, it's over." The new Cæsar stood erect.

The Druid chuckled, and they left the room. The black face of Tiberius leered behind them in the darkness, its swollen tongue protruding as though in sardonic derision.

**T**HE new Emperor was announced to the people.

"Caligula! Hail the Young Emperor! Hail to the Little Boot!"

The crowds cheered lustily.

Caligula entered his private chambers while the cries of the mob still echoed from without the palace below. He paced to the windows and shut them against the clamor, then turned to face the smiling Druid.

The Druid wore velvet now, and his beard was curled and scented. Rings adorned his fingers, and the lines of fasting and privation were gone from his face. But his face held new wrin-

kles more unpleasant—wrinkles of evil about his eyes, craftiness etching his lips. His smile was no longer omniscient, merely humanly avaricious.

"Well, Cæsar?" he said. "Satisfied?"

"No." The Cæsar scowled. "This is a ghastly mess, Druid. I've leaped from bad to worse, it seems. As Tiberius, I could do what I willed, since it was expected of me. They hated and feared my every act. Therefore, I was not constrained in following my nature. But as Caligula, I have a part to play. I am a public hero. I must be good, and kind, and merciful. The weight of convention is great, Druid. I cannot escape from doing what is expected."

"Why not be good?" suggested the Druid. "If such elementary concepts as good and evil occupy your philosophy? I am giving you a new chance, a new life to live, so to speak. Why not atone?"

Cæsar laughed.

"What, Druid? Do you then prove craven?"

"Not I. Do as you like." The Druid hastily corrected himself.

"But I can't. I want my Spintrians again. By Neptune's trident, man, I have a young body again. It is fit for pleasures, and for reveling. That is why I desired my youth. But as Caligula I cannot use it without excuse."

"There is a solution," the Druid conceded.

"What? Tell me? I'm going mad with boredom."

"You could perhaps—fall sick."

"Yes."

"And when you become well you accept divinity. Your forebears did. Augustus is worshiped as a god. You can be one too, alive. The common people know that a god has different moral standards, just as Jove had in the myth. And your intimates here in the palace will accept your change as madness resulting from your sickness."

"Druid, you are right! Ah, how fortunate I am in your counsel!"

The Druid smiled.

"Sicken for a month," he advised.

Caligula was ill for a month.

When he rose again, all Rome fell sick.

The god, Caligula, reigned in a hell upon earth. Rome was his hell, and all souls felt the torment of his lordship. As a divine figure, his antics were unquestioned at the first—and then it was too late. He killed his son, and killed the old captain of his guards, substituting a figurehead he could easily command. Once the army was in his power he wantedon unquestioned. He took brides, one after another, in a steady stream, and killed them. In disguise he and his companions roamed the city, rioting and burning at will.

In secret rooms the Spintrians revelled. Magicians and wonderworkers plied their spells for his delight. It was a fresh youth, at the expense of Rome—Rome's fairest women, Rome's finest men, Rome's money, Rome's honor.

**E**VER the Druid was at his side, "You're getting sleek and fat," the Emperor observed one day. "This life agrees with you, too, my friend."

The Druid smiled grimly.

"You're sleek and fat, too, Cæsar. And you're stupid, too."

"What's that?"

In his new-found, intoxicating power, the Emperor was beginning to resent these caustic comments from his servant. The Druid was much too familiar these days, irking in his reminder of superiority. But he had advice to offer. Best to listen.

"What's that?" he repeated, his face growing ugly.

"I say you are stupid, Cæsar. You are supposed to be mad, remember. Here in the palace there are strange rumors, already current, comparing your antics to those of old Tiberius. Quash those rumors, I say. Quash them by diverting attention elsewhere—to your madness. Be mad!"

Then the Druid began to whisper, and as he whispered Cæsar smiled, unpleasantly.

Cæsar went mad the next day.

His favorite horse, Porcellus, was taken from the stable. In the robes of priesthood, Caligula made him a citizen and a senator. With holy oils he



christened the steed anew—"Incitatus" the "swift-speeding."

When the crowd summoned to attend the ceremony at the altar began to grumble uneasily at this strange caprice, Caligula quickly went on with his ceremony. And "Incitatus" became a consul of Rome, one of the three rulers.

Caligula was mad enough for Rome now.

The money was scarce, so he sold public offices and killed the criminals in the prisons to save their keep. Thriftily, he used their bodies in the arena for feeding the wild animals in the shows. He raised more money for his excesses with actors, chariot-eers, and his crew of chosen intimates that attended him on his debauches. The city was openly in revolt by now.

"Madder still," warned the Druid.

Caligula built a bridge of boats across the bay of Baïæ. Four thousand boats were commandeered from merchants. At the head of his guards he rode across the bridge, throwing coins to the populace who appeared at this public festival. Then he charged back, scattering the mob and killing them, pushing hordes to drown into the water as he fought the sea and defied Neptune.

"Madder still," warned the Druid. There was talk of rebellion.

Caligula became a god in person now. He wore the robes of Jove and appeared as high priest in all temple ceremonies. He took the heads from all statues of the other gods and substituted his own.

"Madder still," warned the Druid. Mutinies were breaking out on the borders of the Empire.

Cæsar frowned, this time.

"I'm mad enough right now," he declared. "After all, Druid, there are limits to human endurance."

"Perhaps." The Druid nodded. "But if they ever let their minds wander to your personal life—"

The Emperor's youthful face took on a dreadful darkness, and it hideously resembled the face of the dead Tiberius. Surely the eyes of Tiberius blazed as he roared:

"Eternal damnation to the people! Yes, and to my evilness as well!

Druid, it's no concern of yours what I do. I fulfilled my promise. I gave you money and comforts and power even over me.

"But my life is my own. I've always hated my people, just as they hate me. Now they shall suffer. I find a deal of pleasure in their suffering. You know, at Capri, I had torture chambers, discovering in my old age that there are peculiar pleasures in inflicting pain. Now I profit by that knowledge and inflict pain while young. Let me have my people to play with, Druid, and do not question me in that. Ah, would but that all Rome had a single neck for me to hack!"

**T**HE Druid's fattening face fell with alarm.

"Cæsar, such talk tempts my gods whose gift you bear! Stop such blasphemy, I pray you!"

"Ah!" The Emperor spat. "Think you I care for your gods? All I need fear is the people—the stupid, silly people. As long as I give them plenty of holidays, plenty of shows in the amphitheater, they will not rebel. As long as I import wild beasts for fights they will be satisfied. And I like the shows. I like the blood. I like the fierceness of the combat. Come see our next show tomorrow, Druid. It will be very interesting."

The Emperor smiled at the Druid. There were secrets in his smile as he watched the plump, unsuspecting face of the wizard.

The wizard smiled at the Emperor. There were secrets in his smile as he watched the plump, unsuspecting face of the Emperor.

The Druid knew the plot. Tomorrow, when Cæsar left the arena, he was to be stabbed to death by conspirators in the guards. Men were sick of his tyranny. His smile was knowing, indeed. Well, let Caligula-Tiberius die. He was sick of the cruel master he had taken.

The use he had made of his new life offended the Druidic gods. This the Druid knew from oracle and divination in secret. He longed to return to Britain now and do penance for his sin. Otherwise, it was written in the

stars, there was a vengeance awaiting the Druid—a vengeance coming soon. So the Druid smiled, for tomorrow Caligula would be dead.

Caligula smiled, for tomorrow the Druid would be dead. He was sick of the sly, bearded man's tyranny. Besides, he was the only one who knew his secret, and should be destroyed for safety. Now this soft palace life had fattened him, dulled his senses and powers. He no longer feared treachery, and probably did not guard against it. It would be easy to rid himself of this leech, and rule as he desired.

Caligula smiled that night as he poured the powder in the Druid's wine at table. This time, he knew, the Druid was unprepared. There would be no mystic power against poison, no resistance.

And it was true. After a few minutes the bearded Briton suddenly slumped forward in his place. His eyes were glazed in paralysis.

Quickly the guards carried him out. Caligula had arranged it all.

The next day the Emperor took his place in the box at the arena. It was a public holiday. The pleasure-seeking people of Rome crowded the gigantic amphitheater as the trumpets blew for the gladiatorial bouts. It was a splendid show and the crowd cheered, but Caligula-Tiberius waited, brooding, for the moment of his triumph.

Then the arena was cleared of bodies, the floor was sanded, and the cages at the far end opened. The lions!

Women—vestals who had profaned their office—huddled in the center as the tawny beasts bounded forward with ripping claws and rending fangs.

The Emperor's nostrils flared at the scent of blood.

The bugles blew. He leaned forward in his box. This was the moment!

The bulls entered. The wild bulls, the horned bulls, the great bulls that killed lions and tigers here in pitched battles. The bulls that killed not for hunger, but out of sheer savageness. The gigantic bulls with the slashing horns that gored and gored their victims into bloody rags. The bulls!

The crowd roared acclaim, and the bulls bellowed and snorted, angered by the noise. The smiling Emperor rose and dropped his baton.

**F**ROM the entry-way beneath his box proceeded a lone figure, an unarmed, white-bearded man, pushed into the arena by the guards. It was the Druid. Still weak from the paralyzing potion, he stumbled into the ring.

The Cæsar laughed. What a jest! He'd feed this foe to the bulls, rid himself of an enemy and enjoy the sport at no expense. The Druid was too dazed for tricks.

The unarmed old man faced the bulls at the farther side of the arena—faced one great white bull that saw him now and began to lope purposefully towards him as the crowd cried out. And the Druid shrieked in a voice rising above the crowd's tumult.

"Mabon! It is Great Mabon come to me in vengeance!"

Cæsar heard the words with a chill of recollection. Mabon? Yes, the bull-god of the Druids. One of the gods the Druid had feared to offend with wickedness. Cæsar laughed again. How apt a death!

"You seek vengeance, Mabon?" screamed the Druid. "Ah, I deserve to die. But not this death, Mabon. I'll take the other, awaiting *him*. Let he that defamed his new life take this death in my stead. Let *him* take it!"

Cæsar heard the words above the roaring. And then, he saw the Druid deliberately turn his back to the loping bull—turn his back and face Cæsar in the imperial box. His eyes were on Tiberius-Caligula, and for a moment they gleamed, despite weakness, as red and powerfully as of old. They were redder, stronger. The Emperor felt the gaze press him, gripped his baton of office firmly in his hand to give him strength in resisting the terrible pressure of that stare.

Then the Druid whispered swiftly. Cæsar saw his lips moving. His own brown eyes fell before that glance and he gripped the baton.

But it was not a baton. It was something cold, and alive, and moving, that crawled about his throat like the stick

the Druid had held that day when Tiberius exchanged souls with Caligula.

Red eyes blazed up, and a thing crawled to move with weird swiftness over the Emperor's throat.

Those in boxes near Cæsar saw him clutch his neck once. They gazed into the ring and saw the red eyes of the Druid flicker and go out.

A single scream from the old man, muffled by the crowd's howling. But it was the voice of the Emperor in his throat. And then the form of the Druid seemed to crumple for a moment and rise again.

This time the Druid did not stand still.

He ran, shrieking insanelly, as the great white bull charged down. He ran, yelling for mercy toward the imperial box. And the bull caught him and hurled him high in the air, so that he twisted as he fell to be caught by the cruel, hooking horns. The horns tore and tore, and the

hooves slashed out, and then the bull snorted and stamped on what was left.

All the while the figure of the Emperor remained standing as though whispering a prayer. He no longer clutched his throat, but seemed to smile.

But the Emperor rose suddenly and left his box. He knew where the assassins waited, but did not seek an alternative route. Instead he advanced slowly down the aisle, muttering to himself in a low, strange voice. Onlookers later recalled that he spoke in a peculiar hissing tongue, unknown to men. Others whispered that he murmured over and over, "Thank you great Mabon. Thank you. I shall atone." There is some confusion on this point.

All, however, agree on a strange thing. As the Emperor left the amphitheater they could see that his eyes had changed from their usual dark brown to a *deep, blazing red*.

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