

FROM THE BESTSELLING
AUTHOR OF **HORRIBLE HISTORIES**
TERRY DEARY



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BLOOMSBURY EDUCATION
LONDON OXFORD NEW YORK NEW DELHI SYDNEY

BLOOMSBURY EDUCATION
Bloomsbury Publishing Plc
50 Bedford Square, London, WC1B 3DP, UK
29 Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin 2, Ireland

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Roman Tales: The Captive Celt, Roman Tales: The Fatal Fire, Roman Tales: The Grim Ghost and *Roman Tales: The Goose Guards* all first published in Great Britain 2008 by A&C Black an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

This edition published in Great Britain 2024 by Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

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A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: PB: 978-1-8019-9500-9; ePDF: 978-1-8019-9501-6; ePub: 978-1-8019-9502-3

2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1 (paperback)

Cover design by James Fraser

Printed and bound in the UK by CPI Group (UK) Ltd., Croydon, CR0 4YY



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THE CAPTIVE CELT



CHAPTER 1

Rome, AD 51

I am a slave. A pitiful, helpless boy, bullied by my master the senator's daughter, the cruel Livia.

I am a prisoner of Rome.



There is no winter in Rome... not real winter like in Britannia, my home. And it was winter that defeated us five years ago, not just the Roman army. Winter and the shortest day of the year.



I remember what my father said. “The days are getting shorter – the sun is getting weaker. It happens every year. The grass will not grow and we will starve.”

“How can we make the sun stronger?” I asked.

“Give the gods a gift.”

“A gift?”

“A life.”

“A goat?” I had seen a goat sacrificed to the gods. The druids took their knives and cut its throat. They roasted the meat and ate it. I was given some of the scraps.



But this year, it would not be a goat.

“A man,” my father said.

“The Roman soldier? The one we captured?”



Father nodded.

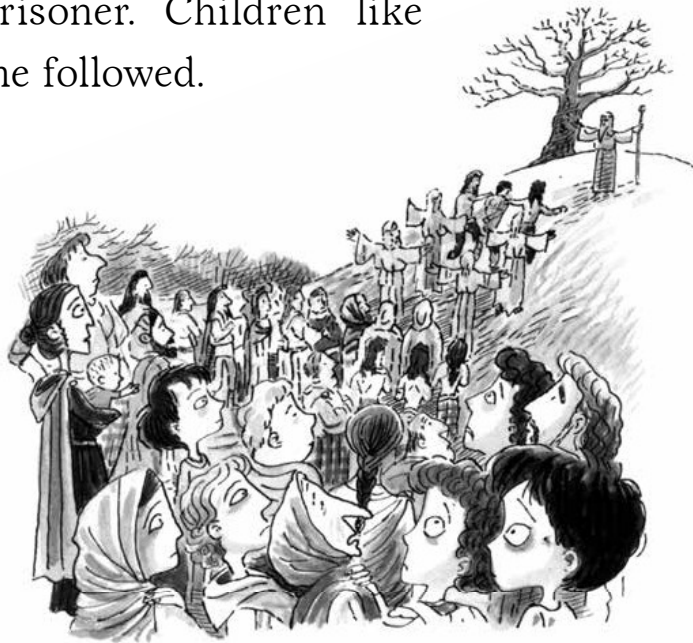
The druids *would* never roast or eat a man. But they would kill him and give his life to our gods.

The whole village gathered on the path that led to the woods. The five druid priests in their white robes stood silent and still, though a wicked wind whipped at their hoods and blew through their beards.

The dark-skinned Roman soldier looked at us with scorn. He was not afraid to die.

CHAPTER 2

The druids turned and walked slowly up the hill to the dark, bare trees. Our warriors led the way, guarding the prisoner. Children like me followed.



I tried to march like a warrior, but my little feet slipped in the muddy puddles. The only sound was the sighing of the wind in the trees and the crying of some of the babies the women carried.



“Why are you wearing your black war dress, Ma?” I asked.

“For luck,” she said. “This was the dress I was wearing when we attacked the Roman supply wagon.”

“Was that when we stole their corn?” I asked.

My mother nodded. “We ate well that night,” she said with a grim smile.

The druids stopped beneath a huge oak tree. The soldier was tied to a rough table raised on a bank of earth – the druid altar.



I watched wide-eyed and dry-mouthed for the knives to slice and the guts to spill. They said the druids could see the future from the way the guts fell to the ground.



But they hadn't seen the future that day. They hadn't seen what would happen next. They hadn't even guessed there would be Roman revenge.

As the druids raised their knives, there was a single cry in a strange tongue. Then came a crashing of branches and ferns as a troop of Roman soldiers rose from their hiding places and raced towards us. They carried no shields, only throwing spears and short swords.



Our warriors carried no weapons – they would never do that on holy ground. One of the first spears struck my mother. She fell and dropped my baby sister to the ground.



Smiling, she said, “I will see you again, son, when I am reborn.”

Then the light of this life went out of her eyes and she slipped into the next.

My mother was not afraid to die.

I pulled the spear from her chest and tried to fling it back, but the point had snapped off... the Romans made them that way.

Sweeping swords spilled blood as our warriors died bravely. The women who tried to fight were cut down without mercy. Children who tried to run were beaten back.

I didn't see my father die, but all the men were killed. The white druid robes were stained red.

In moments, the clearing in the woods was almost silent again. A few of the dying groaned. Some children sobbed. I watched as the prisoner was cut free and hugged his fellow Romans.

A soldier grabbed me roughly by the shoulder and raised his sword.



I waited to die. He spoke the foreign tongue to a friend. They looked at me, shrugged and the Roman said, "Servus."

I soon learned that meant slave.

I was chained to the few children who were left. The ones who were old enough to fight were killed. The ones who were too young to walk were killed.