

# The Cruellest Man

*by* Nathaniel Tower

He was arrested for a horrible crime. It took more than three weeks to identify the body. The newspapers were vague so as not to terrify anyone. He hung his head low as he pled guilty.

Mobs showed up at the court house, most demanding his immediate death. He had pled guilty of a capital crime. What was the hold up?

During the sentencing trial, stories unfolded. There was more than one victim, but the others could never be found. He hadn't just killed and mutilated them. He had done things that were unspeakable, yet people spoke about them. The girl's family didn't speak at the trial. Nor did they weep. It was too horrible to weep. No victories could possibly be won through their tears.

He didn't say he was sorry when he confessed, nor did he do it when the judge looked coldly at him and told him he was going to die. What a monster, they said. Word spread about other horrible things he had done. Among other things, he had killed his parents and his wife and his children, disposing of their bodies in ways that made them impossible to trace. No parents or wives or children came forward to dispute these words.

Nightly he sat in the prison cell, the guards tormenting him as they handed him his food—always contaminated with excrement. He ate it without a word.

Through it all, the only thing he said to anyone was that one word “guilty” when they had asked for his plea. He was too evil to say anything else.

For months, people did not let up, crying for his blood, demanding the execution now. The man didn't deserve to live another day. Worst

---

Available online at «<http://fictionaut.com/stories/nathaniel-tower/the-cruellest-man>»

Copyright © 2011 Nathaniel Tower. All rights reserved.

of all, he enjoyed their hateful cries, or at the very least didn't seem to mind them.

The girl's mother and father remained as quiet through it all, mostly just staring. The father went to work early and came home late. The mother never left. There was nothing to say to anyone.

And then the day came. Behind a glass wall, he was placed in a chair while a throng of visitors watched from their own chars. The girl's mother and father were there, staring with eyes blank as the walls behind him.

They asked for his last words. No one expected to hear a thing.

But in a voice so deep and frail, he spoke, the words delicate enough to be torn by the breeze of the still room.

"I am bad enough. It is cruel to make me out to be worse."

The undaunted crowd watched in an eager silence as the guard pulled the black cloth over his head and flipped the switch.

After the thousands of volts had gone through his gyrating body and it became apparent that he was dead, a hushed cheer went up through the crowd seated behind the glass. Although it was faint, they all cheered.

Except for the little girl's mother. She wept.

