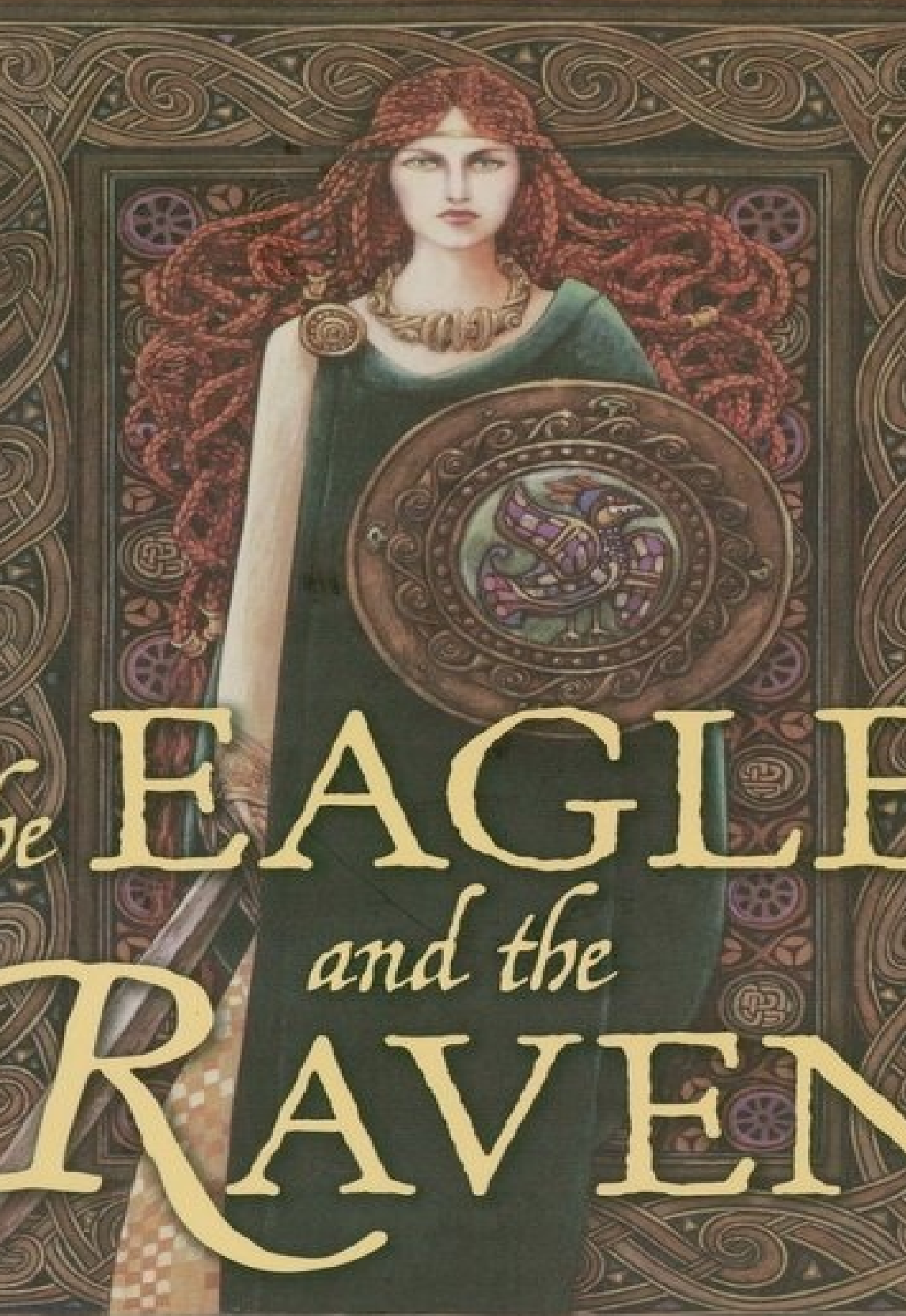


"[Gedge] gives us the daily life and landscapes of Celtic Britain
with an almost psychic immediacy." —*Toronto Star*

PAULINE GEDGE



the EAGLE
and the
RAVEN

FOREWORD BY DONNA GILLESPIE



the EAGLE
and the
RAVEN

PAULINE GEDGE



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*This book is for Sylvie, who turned
a little patch of garden into an estate,
and cut the flowers beautifully.*

FOREWORD

THE FIRST CENTURY A.D. was a tumultuous time for barbarian tribes in the path of the expanding Roman Empire. As Rome muscled its way into territories occupied by others—humbling, occupying, displacing—worlds came to an end. History gives us the testimony of those who could write, leaving those with oral traditions cloaked in mystery, so we can only imagine the grand and noble stories that remain untold. This is what Pauline Gedge has accomplished masterfully in *The Eagle and the Raven*, a sprawling epic that dramatizes the full story of the British resistance to the coming of Rome, taking us through the reigns of Caligula, Claudius, and Nero. Lifting a veil as obscuring as an Albion mist, she shows us the people of Britannia in those catastrophic moments that must have been, as ordinary men and women made the desperate decision to capitulate or fight. It would have been bitter for the proudest among them to see how numerous were the pragmatists poised to collaborate, to discover that foreign gods were stronger than your own. When the legions came, the Britons couldn't have known the future; it must have been as though the sun were no longer to rise. In Gedge's novel we feel intimately their terror as disciplined, better-armed soldiers landed on their beaches. And the humiliation as ancient tribal centers were torn down to be replaced with Roman towns, and free people became tenant farmers harried with harsh taxes and the brutal means of collecting them. "All we wanted was to be left alone," are the words spoken by Gedge's protagonist Caradoc (history's Caratacus), the British chief who leads the resistance. "Such a little word, freedom, such a small request, and yet the asking of it has consumed the soul of a nation."

In 1978, when *The Eagle and the Raven* was first published, historical novels set in Roman times were not so common as they are today; even more uncommon was the Roman novel that revealed empire building from the perspective of the conquered tribes who left no record. In this pioneering book, Albion's struggle is told through the story of Caradoc, the war leader who for a decade managed a brilliant guerrilla campaign against the new overlords—and then ultimately through the better-known Boudicca, the warrior queen who leads the resistance into its titanic final act. In the novel these two embody the passion for freedom. Their homegrown antagonist, personifying those who believed the imperial occupation would bring a better way of life, is realized in the character of Arica (history's Queen Cartimandua) who sets in motion a ruthless plot to make certain her own vision for the island is carried out. Of these three figures the ancient historians give us maddeningly little—Boudicca is of "terrifying" appearance; we are told that "a great mass of tawniest hair fell to her hips." Of Caratacus and Cartimandua we are given even less. From tantalizing scraps Gedge evokes living individuals; she shows us the darker workings of their minds, probes their psyches with thoroughness that brings out their common humanity. She illustrates well how ambiguous the daily choices would have appeared to a first-century Briton. For the benefits Rome brought must have been apparent to some: Improved farming techniques. Fabulous trade goods from afar. Paved roads linking towns. Relative peace among the tribes. Literacy (at a rate not to be equaled until the nineteenth century). Britannia's transformation from misty redoubt to cosmopolitan island. Almost immediately occupiers became neighbors, then relatives, as Briton intermarried with retired veteran soldier. But then, this was a warrior culture. Personal honor and tribal pride, meticulously maintained for the next generation, was the most treasured possession. In the person of Queen Boudicca the empire builder

collided with a pride too implacable for them to understand, and it nearly cost them their province.

It's intriguing to note that on the British side, two of the three most powerful principals in the political drama are women. The Roman historian Tacitus, describing Boudicca's revolt in *The Agricola*, states, "The whole of the island rose under the leadership of Boudicca, a lady of royal descent—for the Britons make no distinction of sex when they choose their leaders." To the Romans this must have seemed a striking cultural trait. In the *Annals* Tacitus states that when Caratacus was finally brought before the emperor Claudius, the famous British freedom fighter gave to the empress Agrippina "the same homage and gratitude as he had given the emperor." That Tacitus would mention this at all reveals his surprise. But Caratacus was only acting in accordance with the ways of his tribe. Gedge illustrates this rare equality well; her women are forces to be reckoned with. This too sets *The Eagle and the Raven* apart—at first publication it was one of very few novels set in classical times that featured women as unfettered political agents. Robert Graves had depicted a politically potent Livia in *I Claudius*, but she was an anomaly; supreme power could never have been hers by right. In fact, Romans tended to count "legitimized" female power—equal inheritance, matrilineal descent—as a sign of barbarism. Gedge shows us that contemporary with imperial Rome was a nearby island where women assumed every role in society—they might be warriors, healers, druids, poets, tribal leaders—and this was legitimized by custom. It is difficult for us to imagine, but Gedge does so with startling veracity. She presents us with adolescent girls training with the sword, women debating in war councils, a hereditary queen receiving the unquestioned obeisance of her subjects—and she skillfully makes these interludes appear as natural as all others in this complex story.

Despite her tale's solid grounding in history, Gedge never forgets that a novel is foremost a work of art. With her lyrical descriptions of place, she splashes colors onto the page that rouse the senses, bring the moist forest close, allow us to feel the lonely spaces between settlements, in the character's hearts. The action surges across a broad canvas with an attention to composition that for me recalls nineteenth-century classical painting, for the story has a powerful symmetry, a strong frame. In tales spun from history's scattered remains, a novelist must know what to select if she's to craft a story that feels like a living whole. *The Eagle and the Raven* ends where it begins—in the soul of Caradoc, who birthed the resistance.

It is difficult to believe this landmark book was ever out of print. I'd like to think that the muse of history watched over it, shepherding it into the hands of a new generation of readers. It's a tome to retreat with for a week, to immerse yourself in, a novel that no one infatuated with Roman history—with grand stories passionately told—should miss.

Donna Gillespie

Part One

CHAPTER ONE

Autumn, A.D. 32

CARADOC PUSHED HIS WAY through the dense thicket of briars and found himself out in the open at last, free of the forest's somber shadows. With a sense of weak relief, he sheathed his sword, hugged his cloak more firmly about him, and squatted for a moment on the gentle slope of the bank, watching the sullen flow of the river as he recovered his breath and his bearings. For a while he had believed himself lost and had thrashed about in the pathless halls, knowing full well the panic that had seized him. For this was Samain, and even his father's best warriors, men who feared nothing and no one, were afraid on this day and were not ashamed. The sky had been gray all day, and now a bitter driving wind had sprung up. It would bring rain, but he lingered, unwilling to rise from the damp grass, yet anxious from the swift coming of night and from the trees at his back which spoke of dark secrets he could not understand. He shivered, but not from the cold, and, morose, he huddled deep into his cloak, thinking of all the Samains he had seen come and go.

His earliest memories were full of the same fear that had gripped him in the forest, of his father Cunobelin, sitting like a great bulk of shadow, gazing into the fire, of Togodumnus his brother, and Gladys his sister, silent and uncomprehending, clinging together at his father's feet, while his mother lay on the bed and held him close, her arms stiff. The eerie autumn wind would whisper round the doorskins, and the fingers of night would rustle above in the thatching. They would sit thus through the dark, slow-moving hours, the children dozing and waking again to see the fire burned low and Cunobelin leaning over to lay more wood upon it, and only when the pale, reluctant dawn crept shamefacedly into the room would any of them dare to speak. Later, after porridge and bread and a piece of honeycomb, they would gather in the Great Hall, anxiously counting the chiefs and freemen as they straggled in, afraid to ask if any had been taken, afraid to ask who had been spared. Then, the late cold morning, the cattle slaughter would begin, and for days the reek of blood would hang over the town. Samain. How he hated it. Another night of terror, another day of killing, another year almost over.

A sudden splash of color caught his eye and he turned. His brother had emerged from the trees where the path wound down to the riverbank. Togodumnus was not alone. Aricia walked beside him, her black hair streaming out behind her and the long folds of her tunic pressed tightly to her little body, her blue cloak and Tog's crimson flapping against each other. They seemed to be arguing, and they stopped and faced one another, their voices rising vehemently, but they were still too far away for Caradoc to catch any words. All at once they burst out laughing, and Aricia's hands, her long white fingers, fluttered in the fading light. The pale butterflies of spring. For a moment Caradoc was dazzled by their flight, but soon he rose, and, at the movement, Togodumnus saw him, waved, and began to run down the path. Aricia caught at her cloak and vainly tried to wrap it around her as Caradoc slowly went to meet them.

"We lost you!" Togodumnus shouted, coming up panting. "Did you make a kill?"

"No. He bolted into a thicket, but by the time the dogs had found a way in, he had vanished. Where is my horse?"

"Aricia tethered him and then we looked for you. She was angry because the gate will be closed

soon, and it looks as though the night will be stormy. She wanted to leave you to your fate.” He grinned. “She didn’t want to spend Samain Eve in the woods.”

“You were the one who cast fearful glances over your shoulder, Tog, and I was the one who had to lead Caradoc’s horse,” Aricia protested hotly. “I am afraid of nothing,” she said, smiling at Caradoc in mute complicity.

It was late afternoon and the light was failing rapidly. In the north, the clouds billowed ominously, piled one on top of the other by the force of the wind, and the three hunters hurried toward the horses and mounted quickly. Togodumnus led the way, cantering easily beside the water; Aricia swung into a gallop beside him, and Caradoc brought up the rear. Once the first gate was past, they would still have to go six miles, through straggling clusters of huts, beside farmsteads, skirting meadows. In an hour they would be drinking warm wine beside their own fires, their feet to the friendly flames.

Caradoc suddenly thundered past Aricia and motioned Togodumnus to rein in. “The dogs!” He shouted, waving his arms furiously. “We forgot the dogs!”

“You fool!” Togodumnus swore at him. “Where did they go after they lost the boar?”

“They went charging off into the underbrush on some other scent. I whistled them and they came back and then I started back for the path. Why call me a fool? You two are the greater idiots for not following when they were hot for a kill!”

“You are both fools and idiots,” Aricia broke in, her voice betraying a verge of panic. “Cunobelin forbade you to take out the dogs because they are bound for Rome the day after tomorrow. But what did that mean to you? Just another admonition to be ignored.” She gathered up the reins and kned her horse. “Well, you can go back into the woods and hunt for them, if you dare. I am cold and tired. I’m going.” She trotted past them and then picked up speed. In a moment the dusk swallowed her and the young men were alone. They eyed one another, aware of the growing dimness and the unnameable things that waited in the trees beyond.

“What shall we do?” Togodumnus said. “That vixen——It was her idea to hunt today and well she knows it. Some night I shall catch her and tie her to a tree, let the Raven of Nightmares have her.”

“Hush,” Caradoc hissed. “She’ll hear you and She’ll come. We must get home. Tomorrow we cannot tell father and take our punishment.”

Togodumnus shook his head, but Caradoc had already started for the gate, and Togodumnus followed. The wind had risen to a shriek, clawing at their hair and their heels, and the horses snorted and stretched into a wild gallop. When they reached the first gate, they fell off their horses and ran across the dyke, dragging the reins in their sweaty hands. As they tumbled headlong toward the gate, the gateguard came running out, his torch held high.

“I was not going to wait for you another moment, Lords,” he grumbled as he slammed the big wooden gates closed behind their horses. “Such foolishness, to keep me sitting by a naked gate on the night of all nights!”

The man’s sword was in his other hand. But what could a sword do against the demons of Samain? Caradoc wondered. “Has Aricia been through?” he asked. The man nodded. “And dogs? Have any dogs been through?”

“Yes, indeed. A pack of them an hour ago, lathered up and worn out.”

Togodumnus clapped his brother on the back. “There! The hounds have more sense than we! Thank you, freeman. Go back to your hearth.” The man sheathed his sword and turned away.

“Now for bed,” Caradoc sighed as they mounted. “And not even a rabbit to show for a wasted day. Father will surely notice Brutus’s ripped ear.”

“Of course he’ll notice, and he’ll take a heifer from each of us for the price of the hound. What bad luck!”

“How could Samain Eve bring anything but bad luck? And just when my honor-price has been going

up.”

“It’s a good thing that your honor-price depends on more than your cattle. What surety did Shol offer you for the loan of your two bulls?”

“He has pledged himself and his kin to me. He is a good man to retain. I told him that if he oathed to me instead of to you I would give him one of the bulls and buy his wife a Roman drinking cup, silver.”

“Caradoc! No freeman’s loyalty is worth a whole bull! Besides, I offered him a bull and a heifer.”

“Then why did he decide to oath to me?”

“Because you never make your freemen do anything but count your precious cows! Oh, a curse, it’s beginning to rain. Perhaps it will turn to snow.”

“Too early in the year,” Caradoc answered shortly, and they finished the ride in silence, their shoulders hunched into their cloaks, water dripping from their elbows and heels and driving cold into their faces.

The way was dark as they followed the rough, winding path across the little fields. The peasants would be huddling together in their hovels, the chiefs and freemen in their wooden huts, and they passed no one. Occasionally they heard the restless lowing of cattle, brought in from summer pastures and herded together within the wooden palisades, but even the wild animals had gone to ground and seemed to the two youths that they were the only living things left on earth. Caradoc and Togodumnus plodded on, their horses’ hoofs falling quietly on the sodden, leaf-strewn path. Beside them, they could see Aricia’s track in the wet grass, the horse’s prints already filling with black water, but soon the night was fully dark and they could see nothing but the thin ribbon of road that wound slowly and hypnotically beneath them. Togodumnus began to sing quietly under his breath but Caradoc hushed him once more, ashamed of the fear that welled up inside him. Already seventeen, he had killed his first man and raided for cattle; he had hunted deer and boar and wild wolf. These things he could face and understand, but the nebulous, drifting spirits of Samain, the demons who waited this night to drag their victims to the woods, these he could not turn to best with a slash of his sword. He felt them now standing just within the cover of the gaunt, leafless branches meeting over his head, watching him with hatred, wanting to do harm. He gripped the wet reins ever tighter and spoke quietly to his horse. Togodumnus began to hum but this time Caradoc left him alone. One more bend, and they would be home.

They finally dismounted inside the second gate, their thighs wet and chafed and their hands blue with cold. The stable servant ran out to meet them; he took the reins from their stiff fingers and led the tired horses away without a word.

Togodumnus took off his cloak and watched the water trickle between his fingers as he wrung it out. “Will you sleep tonight?” he asked his brother.

Caradoc shook his head. “I don’t think so. Hot wine and dry clothes for me, and then perhaps a score or two from Caelte to keep the vengeful ones from my door.” His voice echoed against the darkened huts. “Tomorrow we can breathe again, but in the meantime you can go to the kennels and check the dogs. It was your idea to take them out.”

“No, it was not! Aricia and I got into a fight. She said I was too much of a coward to disobey Cunobelin, she said I had no guts! Besides, you lost them, not me.”

“Oh Tog, why do you listen to her? You know she will get you into trouble.”

Togodumnus’s eyes glistened. “Not as much trouble as she will make for you, my brother, if Cunobelin ever hears what you and she are about all the time.”

“What do you know about that?” Caradoc asked him sharply, grinning.

“Nothing. Only rumors. Well, a good night to you Caradoc, and good hunting.”

“Tog! Come back!” Caradoc shouted, but Togodumnus was already striding between the silent

homes on the steep hill to his own little hut. Caradoc resignedly moved west into the deeper shadow of the tall earthwall, his footfalls sounding fatally loud in his ears. He soon came to his father's stables, where a gush of warm, sweet-smelling air engulfed him for the moment, but then he turned, passing the blacksmith's forge and the harness maker's shop, and so came to the kennels.

He counted the cages carefully and stopped at last, squatting, calling softly. The hounds ran to the fence and quietly pushed their cold noses into his hand. He quickly ran his eye over them once, twice. There was one missing. Caradoc groaned to himself as he started to count again, not certain which one was gone. Brutus, half his ear hanging over his nose, watched him reproachfully. Finally Caradoc cursed out loud. It was Caesar. The one dog prized above all others of this litter, the one that had been especially trained for Tiberius himself. It would be that one, Caradoc swore, remembering when Cunobelin, with his sly humor, had given the beast such a name. It was not for Tiberius's sake that the dog was so blessed, but for that of Julius Caesar, who had come to Albion twice and gone away twice never to return. Cunobelin had remarked to his sons that Julius had not, after all, been a very good hunter.

Caradoc stood irresolutely, his hair sticking to his forehead and his cloak, heavy with water, hanging from his shoulders. He did not doubt that Caesar had led the dogs back home. Putting himself in Caesar's place, he suddenly realized where the dog would be——somewhere warm. Caradoc turned to begin his search, starting with the blacksmith's, then the harness maker's, the stinking tanneries, the stables. Determined he left the fourth circle and walked slowly up to where the freemen and commoners lived, an area of squalor and confusion. He knocked on walls and pushed aside doorskin, frightening the tribesmen who at first saw in this dark, sopping figure a cunningly disguised spirit. Minute after minute passed, and at last he had to admit defeat.

He swung abruptly into the climb to his own house, but when he came out above the building, perched on the slope, the wind caught him and he staggered and almost fell. All at once the sky opened further, releasing a black wall of ice-tipped, stinging rain. He began to run, and, as if at the awkward movements of his body, his pent-up panic was unleashed and pushed him on.

What am I doing out here on this night when time stands still and the earth is poised on the brink of a terrible nothingness? he thought, horrified. Some fey spirit has entered into Caesar so that I will search for him, and when I find him he will take me in his mighty jaws and drag me back to the forest.

He struggled on into the teeth of the gale, blinded, vaguely aware that he was passing the Great Hall, instinctively and mindlessly veering away from the shrine of Camulos until at last his numb fingers felt the heavy skins of his own door. He thrust them aside and tumbled within, standing panting, his eyes closed, while water ran from his body and pooled under his feet. He was stunned for a moment by the sudden cessation of noise, the storm now only a steady shushing on the thatching of his roof, the wind an impatient prowler, throwing itself against his walls, to no avail.

Soon he relaxed and opened his eyes. A solitary oil lamp burned on a little table opposite the door. Soft hangings covered the walls, and, at one end, curtains were drawn back, revealing a low bed with a blue and red cloak trailing across it. But this was not his hut. Beside the bed was another table, a mirror lying on it, and with it a gold head circlet, a pile of bronze arm bands, and a brightly enamelled girdle that snaked to the floor. With a whine of welcome Caesar rose from his place before the smoking fire and padded across the room toward him.

Aricia spun round in shock. "Caradoc! You gave me a fright! What do you want?"

He hesitated, torn between an embarrassed confusion and overwhelming relief that he had found the dog. There was no demon here, only a dog, and a girl. She was standing barefooted on the skins that covered the hard clay floor, and her white sleeping tunic fell around her like drifting snow. She held a large comb in one hand, and her black hair fell straight and thick to her knees, spreading over her pale arms and gleaming in the firelight as she stepped toward him. He mumbled an apology and turned

go, an irrational anger rising in him, but she spoke again and he paused.

~~“How wet you are! Have you been looking for the dogs all this time? Take off your cloak or you will catch cold.”~~

“Not tonight, Aricia,” he said firmly. “I am soaked and tired, and angry with you for keeping Caesar here. And I am angry with Tog for leaving me to seek on my own. I am going to find my own hearth.”

She laughed. “What a sight you are, with that black scowl on your face and your hair hanging down your back in strings! I didn’t find Caesar and keep him here. He ran to me not half an hour ago. I was about to call for someone to take him to the kennels when you fell in. As for Tog, you know you have to take him by the scruff of his neck and shake him if you want anything done: Why are you annoyed?” She went to him swiftly, tugged the cloak from his shoulders, and, gingerly holding it out, walked to the fire and laid it down. “Warm wine from the land of the sun,” she said gently, picking up a jug that sat in the embers. “Have a cup before you brave the night again, Caradoc. And talk to me. I am lonely. I am Samain, and I am lonely.”

He sensed Caesar’s brown eyes upon him. Go now, he told himself. Go before once again your honor lies around you like pieces of smashed pottery. But she had poured the wine and as she held the cup under his nose, the spicy fumes steamed in his nostrils. He took the cup and warmed his hands around it, feeling his fingers tingle with new life. Then, he stepped further into the room and turned at the fire to let the heat penetrate his stiff legs.

“I thought you did not fear Samain,” he remarked.

She looked at him swiftly and went to sit on the edge of her bed. “I said that I was lonely, not that I was afraid. But you are afraid,” she mocked.

“I have good cause to be,” he retorted, swallowing a great gulp of wine, feeling it burn its way in his stomach and spread its glow throughout his chest. “I am a chieftain. The demons delight in attacking royalty on this night.”

“So am I of royal blood,” she said tartly, sitting straighter. “Have you forgotten? Have I been in Camulodunon so long that I seem just one more of Cunobelin’s spawn? I have not forgotten,” she finished softly, looking down at her hands, entwined softly in her white lap.

He emptied his cup and reached down to pour himself another. “I’m sorry, Aricia,” he said. “Sometimes I do forget. You have been here for so long and we have all grown up together—you, me, Tog, Eurgain, Gladys, Adminius. How many years has it been since father began to call us the Royal War Band?”

She closed her eyes as if some memory pained her, and he watched her covertly over the rim of his cup. She is so beautiful, he thought in growing resignation, looking at the pale complexion that never tanned with the summer sun, the delicate chin, the long black lashes lying on such high cheekbones. He wondered just when he had ceased to think of her as a hunting companion and begun to see her as a stranger. When she opened her eyes he recognized the enticing mysteries hidden there, intriguing confusions that he was too young to recognize as insecurities. For a while they scanned each other, but he was too tired to look away, mesmerized by her black eyes, she not seeing him, feeling back into the past.

Suddenly she giggled. “Caradoc, you are steaming.”

“What?”

“Your breeches are drying out and the steam is rising in clouds! You look like some river god emerging on a winter morning. Do take off your clothes or go away and stop making my little nest a little damp.”

“I suppose I had better take Caesar to the kennel,” he said reluctantly, feeling the wine swell his tongue and turn his limbs to lead.

Shaking her head, Aricia stood up quickly. “Do not tempt your luck! We have already had more than we deserve tonight. Leave him here with me, or take him to your own hearth.” She glided to him

her tunic rustling, bringing with her a whiff of Roman perfume. "I am truly sorry for the trouble I've caused today. Tog only insisted on hunting because of a dare I made. If Cunobelin is very angry I will help you both pay Brutus's price. I don't suppose the traders will want him."

"No, I don't suppose so." He felt his legs trembling loosely with fatigue and he saw her mistle through a haze of wine fumes. Seeing his hesitation she began to smile. Ah, not now, not tonight, he thought to himself unsteadily. But it was too late. Already his hand was reaching out, lifting a lock of her hair, running it through his fingers to feel its thick, smooth texture. He raised it to his face, breathing in its perfume and its warmth, and she did not move until he had finished.

"Stay with me, Caradoc," she said slowly, looking at him enquiringly. "You want to stay, don't you? I am a Samain demon tonight. Do you feel the spell that I am placing on you?"

She spoke half in jest but he felt the bewitchment stealing over him like a sweet, familiar song. He knew that he should rush to the door with a protecting spell on his lips, but, as always, he only looked at her with hot stupefaction. He and Tog had often joked about this black witch of whom they were so dangerously fond, and they teased her unmercifully about the paleness of her northern skin in the same way that they teased Eurgain about her long silences, or Adminius about his precious collection of boars' teeth, but they did it without malice and without forethought, the unthinking words of friends long standing. If she irritated him lately he put it down to the coming of winter, the time when men looked to the months ahead with tight belts and empty bellies, a time of year when he merely existed. And, if he sometimes wanted to slap her for her superior airs and her fiery will in an argument, well, she was, after all, just a girl, only a fourteen-year-old girl struggling to become a woman.

As she brought a handful of her own hair to her face, and closed her eyes, he felt a rush of heat from his loins. "You have no choice, spoiled Caradoc," she said quietly. "My bed is far more comfortable than the damp forest floor."

Outside, the rain drummed down. The wind had dropped to a low, persistent moan and inside the room the untended fire was dying, hissing now and then as stray raindrops found it. She reached up to his neck, removed the golden torc, and laid it carefully on the floor. She reached up to unbuckle her heavy belt, and as she did so the sword slid onto the skins. Still he made no move.

A weakening struggle went on within him and his eyes followed her every motion, but when the tips of her fingers touched his face he surrendered, grabbing her by her arms and pulling her sharply against him.

After all, he told himself, it is Samain. Raven of Panic, you will not find me here, he called silently.

A moment later she pulled away from his grasp. "You are making me wet," she said evenly. "Take off your tunic, and your breeches. No, I will do it for you. You are standing there as if I have put a holding spell upon you."

"You always do. Aricia . . ."

She put a finger to his lips. "No, Caradoc. Don't speak, please." Her voice shook. Stooping, she drew the short tunic over his head, and as she did so, he saw a flare of mockery in her eyes.

How strange, he thought. I never noticed before that her eyes are flecked with gold. He grasped her again, kissing her roughly, clumsily, feeling her hands warm on his naked back, losing himself in the softness of her mouth. Her magnificent hair fell tangling over his arms, and as he felt her press against him he caught her up and threw her on the bed, twitching the curtains closed behind them and cutting off the light of the lamp. He looked at her in the dimness as she lay waiting, arms outstretched, her hair spread wide upon the pillow, her thin-lipped smile both enraging him and inviting him to pain.

"Tog knows," he whispered.

Her smile widened. "I don't care. Do you?"

"No," he said softly.

"Then stop talking."

In his wine-befuddled eagerness he tugged at her sleeping tunic and heard it tear, and then he

breasts were under his fumbling fingers, his greedy mouth. She drew in her breath sharply and hissed and the rain continued to fall, monotonously and dreamily.

He could not restrain himself and it was over very quickly, but tonight she did not complain. It was always like this, an uncontrollable surge, the desperate, compulsive hunt for her, then the sharp, painful satiation. He rolled onto his back, his head on one arm, and gazed at the dim roof above him wondering how and why as the little needles of shame began to prick. I have done it again, he thought despairingly. It was one thing to tumble a slave in the fields, or even the willing daughter of a freeman, a commoner, but this was Aricia his friend, Aricia who had shared in every escapade he and Tog had devised, Aricia, daughter of a ricon whose lineage stretched back much farther than his own. He wanted the earth to swallow him. He wanted the demons of Samain to come and take him to the caves. He wanted to die.

She turned on her side, propped herself on one elbow and, not bothering to cover herself, pushed her hair back impatiently. Incredulous, he felt desire stir in him again.

“Caradoc?”

“Yes?”

“Marry me.”

He thought for a moment that he had not heard her right, but then realizing, he sat bolt upright.

She wrapped her arms about her knees. “Yes, you heard me. I want you to marry me. I beg you, implore you, Caradoc. Marry me!”

“What are you asking of me?” he said sharply, his mind temporarily freed from its drugged preoccupation with her.

She put a hot hand on his arm. “Are we not old friends?” she whispered. “Would it not be so easy, so very easy, to take the next step and become pledged to one another?” Her grip tightened on his arm. “It’s not such a great thing that I ask. After all, you can take other wives.”

He laughed then, clearheaded. “You mean Eurgain, I suppose. Oh, no, Aricia. We have had great pleasure together, but I do not think we should speak of marriage. Now I must go.” He hurriedly swung his feet onto the cold floor but she restrained him with a force he had not known she possessed.

“Why not? Don’t you think that I have a claim on you, Caradoc?”

“What claim? Do you mean this?” He bent to kiss her but she squirmed away from him and flung open the curtains. The dim lamplight showed him a face shadowed with emotion, lips barely controlled, eyes brimming with tears.

“I will play no more games with you, Caradoc. Where are the words of love you whisper to me in the darkness?”

“Love has nothing to do with you and me, Aricia, and you know it.” He left the bed and dressed quickly, stepping into breeches that were still damp, pulling his wet tunic over his head. “I have made no promises to you.”

She reached out and clung to the curtain as if her muscles had melted with her hope. “Caradoc, I am desperate. Do you know how old I am?”

He buckled on his sword belt. “Of course I know. You are fourteen.”

“The age of betrothal.”

His busy fingers paused and he glanced at her, sensing the truth.

“Very soon an embassy will come from my father, to take me home.” The tears overflowed and splashed onto her hands and she shook them off angrily. “Home! I can scarcely remember the barren moorlands and poverty-stricken huts of my birthplace. Oh, Caradoc, I do not want to go. I do not want to leave you and Tog and Eurgain, and Cunobelin who is like a father to me. I do not want to go away to a place I fear, among fierce, uncouth men!” Her voice faltered, and, sobbing, she slipped to the floor. “I, too, hate Samain and the rains of winter, the loneliness that will come. Must this night go by

with no demon come to claim me and no man to wed me?"

He went to her then and knelt beside her, and took her awkwardly into his arms, feeling sympathy rise within him for the first time. "Aricia, I didn't think, I didn't know. Have you spoken to Cunobelin?"

She shook her head violently, her face hidden in his neck. "He cannot keep me. My father will want me in Brigantia, for there are no other children to rule after him and the chiefs will certainly elect me." She looked up then, her eyelids swollen, her skin whiter than he had ever seen it. "If you care for me at all, do not allow this thing to happen to me. I will bring you the greatest dowry the Catuvellauni have ever seen. All of Brigantia! All of it, to share with me. You and I, ruling there together."

"But what of my own tuath? What of my own kin, and the freemen who depend on me? I don't want to go to Brigantia any more than you. Can't you refuse to go, Aricia?" He disengaged himself firmly and stood up. "Forgive me, but I cannot interfere in a matter between foreign kin. I . . ."

"You what? You are content to use me, and now you pity me? Keep your pity! I want no man's anxious looks." She brushed the tears from her cheeks and faced him. "I could make trouble for you, Caradoc, for dishonoring me and yourself, but I will not. I know my father will send for me soon, and I have begun to dream about it, but when I go you will be sorry. There will be a hole in your life that will not be filled. I will remember. I swear by Brigantia the High One, goddess of my tribe."

He looked at the defiant face, the widely gesticulating hands. "We have used each other," he reminded her quickly. "How has this thing happened, Aricia? How have we ceased to be what we were?"

"Because we have been growing, and you have been too stupid to see it!" she shouted. "You must have known that I love you, you must have seen it, but you stand there with your jaw hanging down like an ignorant Trinovantian peasant! Leave me alone!" She flung herself onto her bed and did not move. For a few seconds he looked at her miserably, wondering whether he was seeing the real Aricia or another one of the masks she slipped on so easily, but he could not linger and he snatched up his cloak and pushed past the doorskins, out once more into the darkness and the rain.

A few steps took him to his own door, and once inside he dropped the still-sodden cloak onto the ground. Fearachar must have come to stoke the fire, for it was blazing brightly and the room was comfortably warm. He quickly stripped and wrapped himself in a blanket, then sat with his legs stretched out to the red flames, his head in a whirl, wishing for the first time in his life that he could live Samain Eve over again.

He had touched more than Aricia's body tonight. Somehow he had flayed a raw nerve, a part of her that lay exposed, not yet covered by the droll, whimsical, often hard veneer she showed to the rest of them all too often, and he did not like what he had seen. He had not believed her capable of either tears or pleadings, and he wondered if she was lying in the dimness, caught in surprise at herself.

But marriage! His feet were too hot and he sat up, drawing them in under his chair and reaching for the wine placed ready for him. He had no wish to even consider the prospect with her. She was not the kind of woman to bear the sons of a Catuvellaunian chieftain, and his immediate refusal had come from a deep part of him, a part that he, too, did not know existed. He did not deny the spell she exerted on him. They knew each other too well. At least he had thought that they did. He remembered the day she had come to Camulodunon, all big frightened eyes and pathetic, childish haughtiness. Even then, though he himself had been but a child, his heart had gone out to her. For ten years they had hunted, feasted, and fought together, terrorized the peasants, infuriated the freemen, lied and cheated for each other, and suddenly, between one dawn and the next, it was all over.

It had always been understood that he would marry Eurgain. She was a noble, the daughter of his father's chief tribesman, and even before she and he and the others had formed Cunobelin's War Band they had held a great affection for one another. She was tall, also, but more slender than Aricia,

fragile girl, silent, not beautiful but with an aura of peace and assurance that had begun to lure man to her. She had the deep, honey-colored hair and cornflower blue eyes of the best of his people, and she seemed to know his thoughts even before he spoke them.

Eurgain.

A vision of Aricia immediately arose in his mind, naked, black-eyed, shameless, hair falling to her hips and beyond, and he squirmed in his chair. If she loved him as she said she did, how cleverly she had concealed it! Did she, then, hate Eurgain? She had given no sign of that either. Or was she putting on a last, desperate pose, faced with the prospect of the long, lonely ride back to her birthplace? How could it be that he had lived beside her day after day and did not really know her at all? He put a hand over his eyes, overcome with the desire to take those few steps back to her room, to walk in, to say . . . what? I lust after you, I am eaten away with desire for you, but I do not love you? What am I, of what price my honor if my father and my friends were to see me now!

He left the fire and went and lay on his bed, his eyes closed, still ashamed of himself, still wondering what would have happened if he had behaved as a freeman ought to behave. If he had walked out the door before she wound those soft arms about his neck. But it was weeks, months too late, and already his will had been weakened. He was vaguely aware that the rain had stopped, though the wind still muttered fitfully beyond the thin walls. He fell asleep, but even in his dreams she snarled at him like a rutting, netted boar.

He slept late the next morning, waking sluggishly to the sound of his servant whistling as he raked over the ashes of the dead fire and began to set a new one. A shaft of pale sunlight flowed under the doorskins, bringing with it cold, crisp air that blew the last of the night from Caradoc's head. As he sat up, Fearachar glanced toward him.

"A good morning to you, Lord. How pleased I am to see that you have been preserved and that no demons saw fit to disturb your slumbers."

"And a good morning to you, Fearachar," Caradoc responded automatically. "I'm hungry." Feeling clearheaded, he stood, pulled on his breeches and a clean tunic, strapped on his sword, but suddenly the night came back to him. His tunic did not lie on the table by his bed. With a shiver he realized he had left it on the floor of Aricia's hut. Fearachar glanced up to see the dismay on his master's face, but then rose, dusted off his hands, and produced something from the folds of his short red cloak.

"The Lady Aricia asked me to give you this and to tell you that though it is the badge of a freeman to her it sometimes seems more like a yoke of slavery." Caradoc snatched at the tunic and slipped it about his neck. "The Lady also said that she has taken Caesar to his kennel. It was foolish of you, Lord, to borrow the dogs. Your father will be angry."

"Perhaps. But what is that to you?" Caradoc said rudely. Yoke of slavery! How dare she!

"I am a freeman, the servant said, hurt. "I may have lost my honor-price but not my honor. I may not speak my mind."

"Fearachar, when you have found your mind you may indeed speak it, but please find it first." Caradoc slung his red-and-yellow striped cloak around his shoulders and fastened it with a silver brooch. He put on plain bronze arm bands, and slipped his feet into leather sandals, then combed his hair, flung down the comb, and strode out into the morning.

He paused outside his house to sniff the clean air. The storm had moved on to trouble the north, and the valley lay before him, beyond the motley cluster of huts where smoke spiraled from the roofs and children romped in the thin, pale sun of winter. From where he stood he thought he could just make out a haze that was the river, and farther toward the horizon the dark blur of the forest, its plumes smoking with mist. The sky was washed blue, dressed in shreds of white cloud. More clouds, gray and hung in the north. It would be fine until the evening.

He strode down the winding path, calling for Cinnamus and Caelte as he went, not waiting for them as they ran, but the three of them reached the entrance of the Great Hall together and went inside, on their way greeting the chiefs who hung about, waiting for Cunobelin.

A smell of hot broth and pork fat met them as they entered the darkness and they went immediately to the great black cauldron that hung from iron chains over the massive fire at the center of the Hall. They ladled the steaming broth into wooden bowls, took cold pork and bread from the slave who stood behind platters heaped high with both, then found a corner and sat, drinking their broth with the utmost concentration, their eyes still unaccustomed to the gloom.

The Great Hall had been built five years before Caradoc's birth, when his father had swept upon the Trinovantes and taken their tribal territory for his own, setting up his new capital and his mint here, Camulodunon. Caradoc's grandfather, Tasciovanus, had also conquered the territory but had not held it for long, withdrawing tactfully back to Verulamium when Caesar Augustus had come hurrying to Gaul. But Cunobelin had bided his time, waiting to strike at the Trinovantes once more, when Rome was smarting and demoralized by the loss of three legions in Germania. This time Rome had shrugged her imperial shoulders and Cunobelin had settled down to rule one of the greatest gatherings of tribes in the country. He called himself *ricon* now, a king, and though he was old his ambitions still consumed him. Caradoc well remembered his father and his uncle going off to war when he was ten and now his uncle, Eppaticus, ruled the northern Atrebates, and Verica, their true chieftain, was left with nothing but a strip of coastline. He had protested to Rome on numerous occasions, but Rome had better things to do than send good men to die in Albion for one insignificant chief. And besides, Cunobelin controlled the southern trade with Rome. He kept that city supplied with dogs, hides, slaves, cattle, grain, and, once in a while, raw metals—gold and silver—from the inland territories of the tribes who traded respectfully with him. In return, Rome sent wine, and silver tableware and drinking cups, bronze-plated furniture, pottery, ivory, but most of all, jewelry for the chiefs, the horses, and their women. The river was always busy. Ships plied up and down, traders swarmed all over Catuvellaunian territory, news went back and forth, and Cunobelin watched it all, silent and unblinking like an old, wily spider, weaving webs of deceit and successfully holding Rome in one hand and his dark policies of expansion in the other.

He trod a narrow, dangerous path and he knew it. To make war was to invite Roman intervention for Rome would allow nothing to interfere with her precious trade. But to rely too heavily on the goodwill of Tiberius was as foolish a move as to trust one's life to the shifting sands of the marshy estuary of his river, and, besides, a great deal of his power depended on his keeping the chieftains happy. He let them raid sometimes, to give them something to do, and though there had often been formal protests from Caesar, it was a tribute to Cunobelin's statecraft that no more concrete objections ever materialized. He was content, for the time being, to hold the land that he had, but his glance ever strayed—northeast, to the rich Icenian lands, and west, to the hills of the Dobunni. He left the Durotriges of the southwest alone. They were a warlike, fierce people, thoroughly intractable. He could only conquer them with a full-scale assault, which would mean irreparable damage to his trading connections. They kept to themselves, following the ways of their deep ancestors, and he knew he would have to wait for a more favorable time to lead his war band against them.

Now Dubnovellaunus, chieftain of the Trinovantes, nursed his wounded pride in Rome and his people farmed for the Catuvellauni. Cunobelin had built the Great Hall in the first flush of his new conquest. It was of wood, spacious and airy, its roof vaulting high above, its wooden pillars carved tortuously by the native Trinovantian craftsmen into curling, sinuous leaves, plant tendrils that wrapped dreamily around one another, and half-hidden faces of men and beasts that peered out, sleepy and mysterious. Cunobelin and his family did not particularly like the native art. They preferred the honest, open faces and designs of the Roman potters and silversmiths, for sometimes, of a lone

winter evening, the complex, secretive work of the native artists seemed to come alive and move softly, speaking of a time when the Catuvellauni had been nothing but a dim prescient warning carried on the night breezes.

The roof was vented so that the smoke from the fire could escape, and all around the walls hung shields and iron swords, javelins and thrusting spears. Hanging on the central pillar was the wizened, wrinkled head of one of Tasciovanus's fallen foes, held there by a knife through his hair. No one could remember who he was, but he was carried into every battle, and hung in Cunobelin's tent whenever the tricon was away from Camulodunon. Caradoc and the others had ceased to notice him years ago, and now he swung above the company, his sunken eyes watching the comings and goings, his gray locks stirring in the constant draft.

"No hunting today," Caradoc said to his friends. "I suppose you both want to go and watch the slaughtering."

Cinnamus wiped his generous mouth on his sleeve and put down his bowl. "I had better watch," he said. "My freemen tell me some of my herd is missing, and I have a feeling Togodumnus will be rubbing his hands this day. If he has touched my breeding stock he had better look to his weapons."

Caelte leaned his back against the wall. "We have guests," he said softly, "and here is Cunobelin."

The Hall was almost empty, for the morning was advancing and already the autumn slaughtering had begun on the flat land by the river. Caradoc turned his head to watch his father come striding in the dimness, surrounded by his chiefs. With him came a short, fat man whose braided hair hung over his cloaked shoulders, and a little girl. They went immediately to the cauldron, and Cunobelin himself served the guests broth and bread, then looked about for a place to sit. The chiefs served themselves noisily, already quarreling over the pieces of meat that floated so appetizingly in the brown soup, and Cunobelin steered his guests toward the three young men. They stood up, as Cunobelin approached, and Caradoc tried to divine his father's mood. He wondered if Cunobelin already knew about Brutus.

"Ah, Caradoc," Cunobelin boomed. "This is the Lord Subidasto, chieftain of the Iceni, and this is his daughter, Boudicca." Caradoc nodded to the man and smiled briefly at the girl, then he presented Cinnamus and Caelte.

"Lord, this is Cinnamus, my shield-bearer and charioteer, and this Caelte, my bard. You are welcome in our Hall."

They all clasped wrists and then sat down, Caelte immediately talking to little Boudicca. Cinnamus excused himself and went out, and Caradoc turned to Subidasto, feeling his father's calculating gaze upon him.

"You have come far, Lord," he said. "I hope your stay with us will be one of rest and peace." These were the words of formal greeting, but Subidasto laughed harshly. How rude he is, Caradoc thought. I am only trying to repeat the words of formal greeting as I'm sure father has done.

"That depends on your father and our talks together," he said. "We have much to discuss."

Caradoc looked at him closely. He had been wrong about the fat. Subidasto was enormous, yes, but his girth was not loose or flabby. His arms were full of tight muscle, his mouth firm and unyielding, and he had the pale blue, piercing eyes of a man who spends all his time out-of-doors, looking into far distances. Is there trouble here? Caradoc wondered. Is that why Subidasto has claimed the immunity of Samain? What is my father plotting this time? He glanced at Cunobelin but read only merriment in the close-set eyes, in the heavily wrinkled face.

"Peace, Lord!" Cunobelin said. "First there must be good eating and drinking tonight, and plenty of music, and of course the rites of Samain. Then we will talk." He scrambled to his feet. "But if you've eaten for the morning, let me show you Camulodunon."

Subidasto's mouth set in a hard line of disapproval but he rose also, nodding reluctantly.

Caradoc suddenly found Boudicca's round eyes staring at his face, and it made him uncomfortably

“Father,” he said. “Will you excuse me? I must go and see to my herd today.”

Cunobelin dismissed him, but said quietly, “There is also the matter of my dogs, Caradoc. Brutus has a ripped ear and cannot now be sold. How did that happen, I ask myself, when the guards at the kennel have had orders not to let those dogs out of their sight? There must be a settling here.”

“You know everything, father,” Caradoc said, grinning. “Have you spoken to Tog?”

“Yes, and to Aricia. The three of you owe me two heifers. Breeding stock.” Cunobelin was smiling back.

“Now father!” Caradoc protested. “Take a carcass. I cannot afford a live heifer.”

“I’ll fight you for it if you like,” Cunobelin said indifferently.

“No, father, no.” Caradoc shouted with laughter. “I have no wish for more scars, but a breeder gone will be a sore loss.”

“Then take Cinnamus and Fearachar and go raiding,” Cunobelin said. “How do you think I got rich, Caradoc?”

Caradoc saluted him ruefully and turned on his heel, but he felt a small hand steal into his own and hold him back. He looked down to see those brown eyes still fixed solemnly on him.

“Can I come with you?” she whispered.

His heart sank, but before he could refuse, Cunobelin said, “Take the child down to the slaughtering, Caradoc, and amuse her for a while. Do you object, Subidasto?”

Subidasto hesitated. He was evidently torn from moment to moment by the wish on the one hand to be as objectionable as possible and on the other not to offend these most powerful people, but finally he shook his head, and so Caradoc left the Hall with Boudicca trailing behind him. They walked in the sun and took the path that led straight down to the gate. It stood wide, and beyond it Fearachar waited, sitting on the ground, a sour look on his face, the reins of Caradoc’s horse held loosely in his hands.

“I have been waiting for you for a long time, Lord,” Fearachar said reproachfully as he handed the horse over to Caradoc. “I am cold and hungry.”

“Then go and get warm and have something to eat—but I don’t think we have left you much,” Caradoc retorted. “Boudicca, can you ride?”

The chin came up. “Of course!” she said. “But not . . . not horses like him, only chariot ponies. There are not many horses as big as that in our country,” she finished, blushing.

Caradoc lifted her and set her on his mount’s back, jumping up behind her and gathering up the reins. “Shall we go fast?” he asked her, and she nodded vigorously, winding her fingers into the horse’s mane as he dug in his heels and swept down the gentle slope into the meadows beyond.

In an hour they came to the river flat, and even before they rounded the bend that would reveal the water and the marshes and the tall, leafless willows, they could smell the slaughtering—the sickly, sweet, wet smell of freshly spilled blood—and they could hear the high, panic-stricken bellowing of a thousand cattle who were about to die. As they cantered around the bend, all the ground from forest to water became a thick mass of pushing, jostling people and closely herded beasts. The din was tremendous. A little way up the bank Caradoc picked out Togodumnus, and with a shock of remembered shame and excitement spotted Aricia next to him. They were sitting close together on cloaks on the grass, their steaming breath mingling as they talked. As he drew rein and got down, Aricia and Boudicca slid off the horse’s back to stand beside him, Adminius came striding up the slope.

“Caradoc, where have you been? I’ve had my people running all over the place, looking for you,” Adminius said. He came to a halt, panting, his handsome face flushed. “There’s trouble down there. The freemen are fighting. Sholto says you offered him a bull and a heifer from your breeding stock, but Alan says not. You offered only one bull, and that for slaughter for his family’s meat. And Cinnamus is down among his cattle, screaming and swearing, for it seems that he is short twelve beasts.”

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