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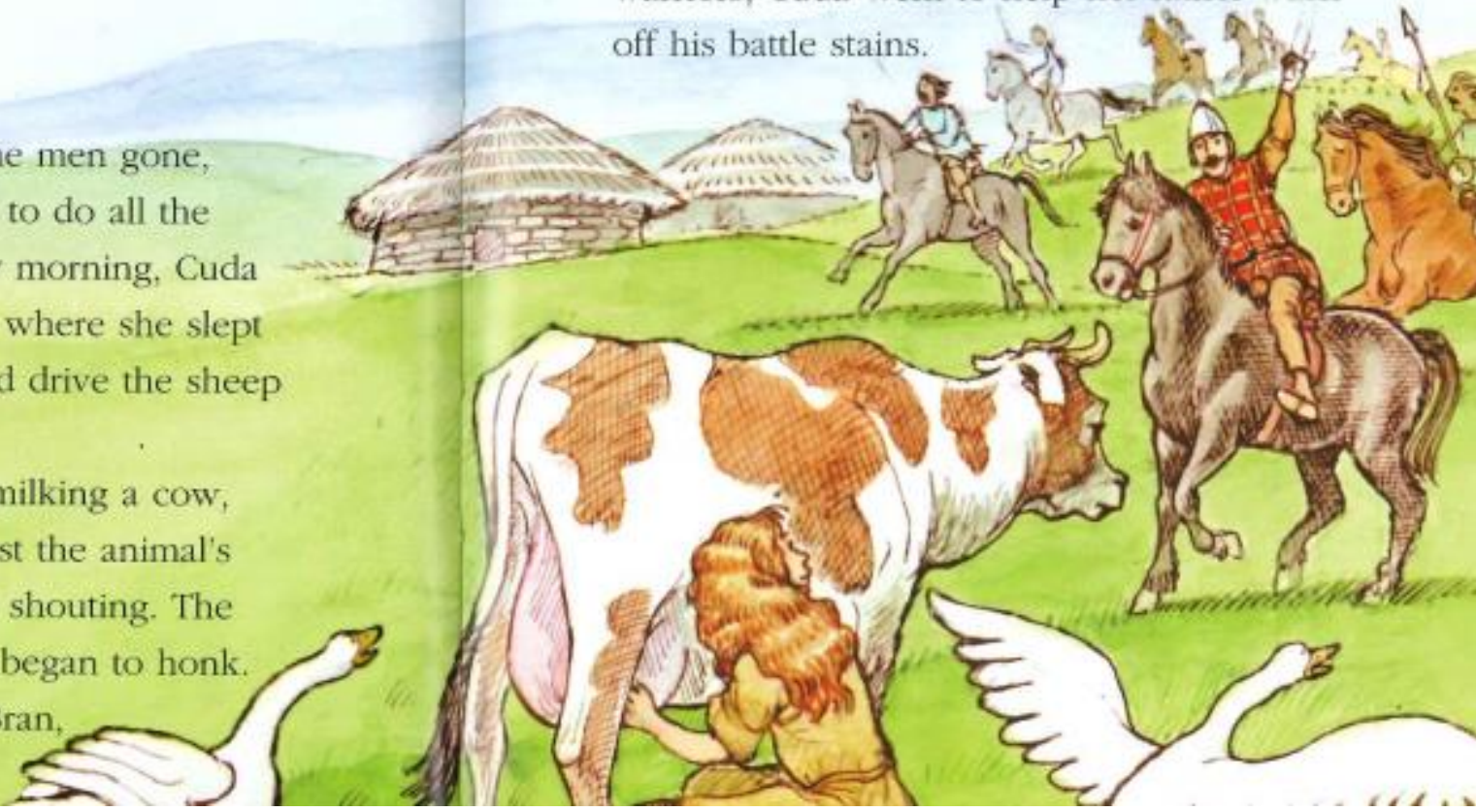
THE MOON WANED. With the men gone, the women and children had to do all the work of the farm. Early every morning, Cuda got up from the pile of skins where she slept and went to feed the pigs and drive the sheep and cows into the meadows.

One morning, as she was milking a cow, resting her sleepy head against the animal's warm belly, she heard a wild shouting. The geese that patrolled the farm began to honk. Then a host of men, led by Bran, galloped into the farmstead.

'Father, what's happened?' Cuda cried, rushing to hold Dubh's halter.

Leaping down, Bran hugged her. 'A great victory, Cuda. As we reached Camulodun, the Roman statue fell on its face. No one knows how it happened, but we knew it meant the gods were with us.'

As the women rushed out to greet the warriors, Cuda went to help her father wash off his battle stains.



'Father, did the Romans 'all run away?' she asked.

'No, child. We killed them.'

'All of them? Even the children?'

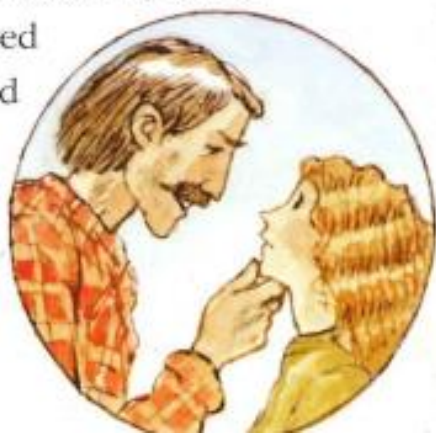
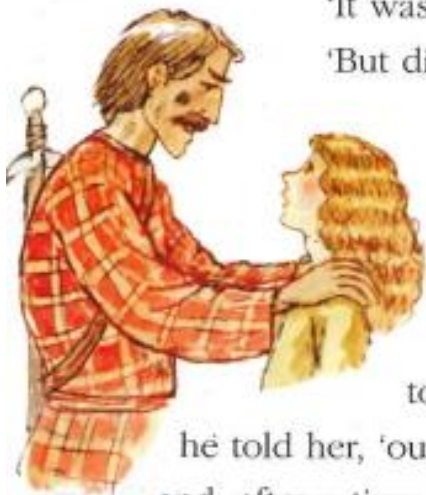
'It was as the gods wanted.'

'But did you kill them?'

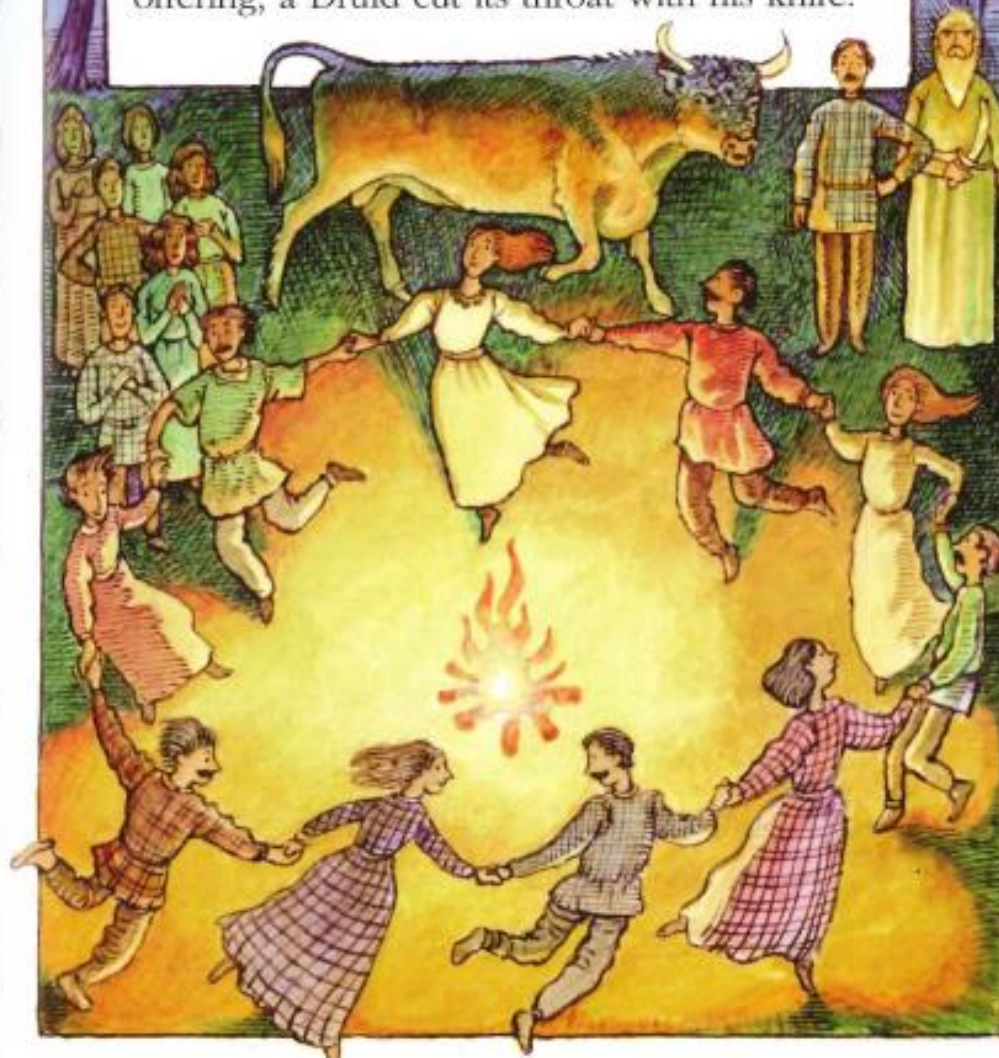
Shaking the drops of water off his hair, Bran bent and put his hands on his daughter's shoulders.

'When the Romans came to our land many seasons ago,'

he told her, 'our king made a pact with them and, after a time, they went away. But when I was a boy, they returned with many legions. They took our lands and carried our people off to be slaves. Now, we must drive them out. But' – and here he lifted her chin with his finger and looked into her eyes – 'the Romans too are people, and I would never kill a child.'



That night all the nearby clans gathered in a sacred grove to celebrate the victory. Decked in their finest clothes and jewellery, the people chanted and danced. A bull was led forward. Calling on the gods to accept the beast as an offering, a Druid cut its throat with his knife.



Again Bran and the warriors rode off to battle. The next morning, Cuda went to fetch water from a spring in the woods. As she bent to fill her bucket, she glimpsed a terrified face peering at her from the undergrowth. Cuda froze; her heart raced. Then a boy staggered out and collapsed at her feet. He wore a Roman tunic and cloak, and she saw that one of his legs oozed blood.



Her fear vanished. Tearing a strip of cloth from her tunic, Cuda tried to remember the Latin words her father had taught her.

'Are you Roman?' she asked, as she bathed the boy's wound.

He clenched his teeth in pain and nodded.

'Camulodun?' Cuda asked. 'From the battle?'

A look of terror crossed the boy's face, but again he nodded.

'Cuda,' the girl said, pointing to herself. Then she pointed at him.



'Marcus,' said the boy, adding something quickly in Latin. When he saw that Cuda did not understand, he made signs to explain what he was saying.

Bit by bit, Cuda understood that all Marcus's family had been killed except his father, who had been away from home.





'Come,' Cuda said. Helping the boy up, she half carried him to an abandoned foxhole and signed to him to wriggle down into it. Then she covered his head with branches.

At supper, as the clan sat round the fire discussing the great battle, Cuda snatched a piece of meat from the cauldron and crept off into the wood.

It was pitch dark. She had to feel her way to the foxhole. 'Marcus?' she whispered.



There was no reply. Pushing some of the branches aside, Cuda felt the boy's face. It was warm. He was alive.

'Eat,' she said, putting the piece of meat in his hand.

Ravenous, Marcus wolfed the food. He wanted to climb out of the hole, but Cuda whispered, 'No, no,' and, groping for Marcus's hand, she drew his finger across her throat to show him what would happen if he were found.



Back at the fire, Cuda sang for the clan. Afterwards, as she lay listening to the howl of wolves and the snorting of wild boar in the woods, she thought of the boy alone in the dark and of what would happen



if her people found out that she had helped him. For his sake and her own, she had to be strong.

Soon Marcus was better. Now when Cuda came, he tried to amuse her by imitating the animals he

saw around him in the forest.

'A badger?' Cuda guessed, as he snuffled and grunted at the food she had smuggled to him.

'Bad-ger,' Marcus repeated.

The two children stifled their giggles.



Then one evening, as Cuda knelt beside the foxhole, Marcus suddenly grabbed her arm.

'Look!' he whispered. Turning, Cuda saw Anu, a girl from the clan, running out of the wood.

'Go,' Cuda told Marcus. 'Run fast.'

There was no time to say goodbye. Wriggling out of the hole, Marcus vanished into the undergrowth.

Moments after, the whole clan burst through the bushes. 'Where is the Roman boy?' one cried.

'Why are you hiding him?' demanded another.

'Show us where he is, Cuda.'

Frightened, but knowing that Marcus's life depended on her, Cuda faced her angry people.

'There is no boy,' she said.

'If Anu had looked closer, she would have seen he was a spirit who came out of the spring from Annwn, the Otherworld.'

