

# 4

FOR THE CELTIC children, tied together with iron hoops round their necks, the march to the Roman camp was hard and terrifying. When the soldiers shouted at them, the captives did not understand, nor did they know where they were going or what would happen to them. At last, they reached the tall stockades that encircled the camp. Herded inside like animals, the children huddled together. People surrounded them, poking their arms and legs and peering into their faces.

'They're going to kill us,' a girl whimpered. 'To die is better than to be a slave,' said an older boy. 'We must show them we are not afraid.'

A fat man in a greasy tunic and leather apron seized Cada by the arm. Bawling to one of the soldiers, he held out a coin.





Just then a fanfare of trumpets sounded. Everyone drew back as a column of Roman infantry tramped in through the gates. They wore helmets and armour. Swords hung at their belts, and they carried tall spears and huge curved shields. When their centurion shouted, they all stopped at the same time. The children had never before seen such a sight. No one ever told a British warrior on his war chariot what to do. Each man and his charioteer fought for themselves.

The merchant tightened his grip on Cuda's arm, but the centurion called out again, and now the ranks of soldiers drew aside. Four men came forward, carrying a litter on their shoulders. They lowered it, and a stern-faced man in a white toga climbed down.

'Hail!' he said, raising his arm.

Every legionary raised an arm in salute.

'Hail to the lord procurator!' they cried.



All at once, a small figure on a white pony rode out of the retinue that followed the litter. Jumping off his horse, he saluted the procurator

and then he pointed

straight at Cuda. The girl gasped. The boy was Marcus.

The centurion snatched Cuda from the fat merchant and led

her in front of the stern-faced man.

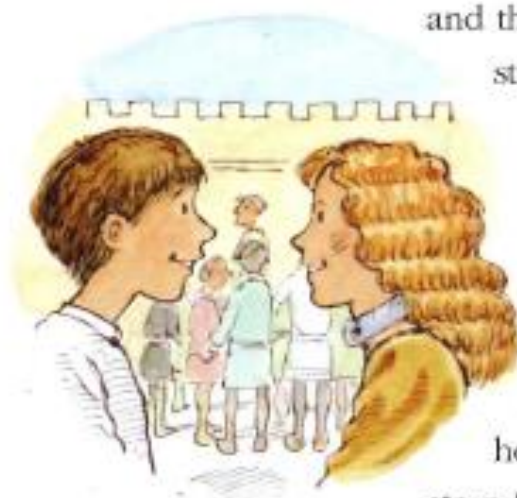
'Tell the procurator your name, girl,' the soldier said in Cuda's language.

The iron hoop round Cuda's neck bit into her flesh. Her whole body ached with exhaustion. But she raised her head proudly.

'I am Cuda of the Trinobantes,' she replied.

The procurator spoke to Marcus, who answered in a long sentence.

'The son of the lord procurator says you saved his life,' the centurion translated.



'He also says you have the voice of a skylark and can charm the angry gods with your singing. Is this true?'

'My people say so,' Cuda told him.

The procurator's stern face broke into a smile. Then he gave an order to one of the mounted soldiers, who leaned down and lifted

Cuda on to his horse.

Marcus too mounted

his pony. Then the procurator

climbed back on to his litter and, with Cuda on the soldier's pommel and

Marcus riding alongside, the

whole retinue set off out

of the camp.

