



MONTHS PASSED, AND news came that the tribes had sacked the Roman towns of Londinium and Verulamium. At the farmstead, the women and children mowed the hay and harvested the grain. As the days grew shorter, they began to prepare for Sammain, the great festival of the beginning of the year, when spirits walked the earth and cattle would be sacrificed to the gods.

One afternoon, Cuda and another girl were guarding the geese in a distant meadow, when they saw a dark pall of smoke rising from a nearby village. Then



two boys ran up.

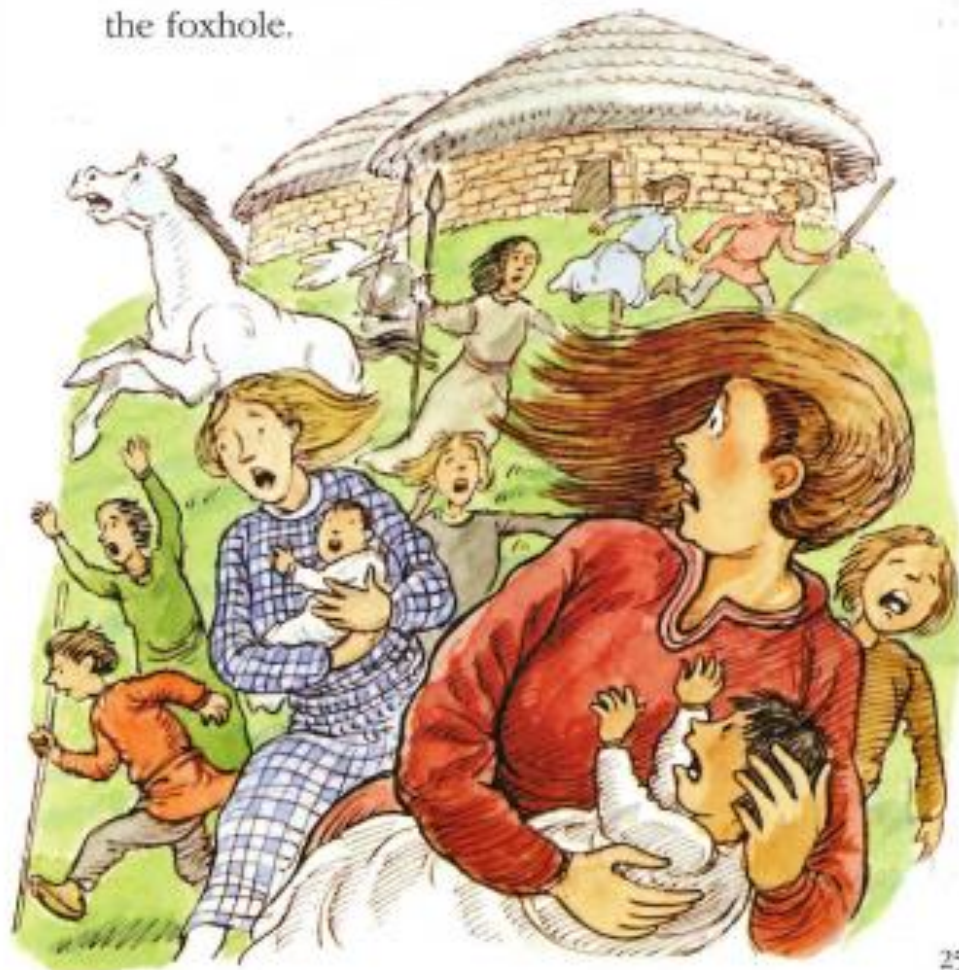
'The tribes have been defeated,' one of them gasped.

'Our warriors are all dead or captured. The Romans have burned our village and taken our people away to be slaves.'

'Where are you going?' Cuda cried. But the boys had disappeared into the woods.



When the girls got back to the farm, all was in uproar. Babies screamed, horses neighed in terror. Some of the women grabbed their children and ran towards the marshes. Others seized weapons and fled for the woods. Finding herself alone, Cuda ran to the spring where she had met Marcus and wriggled down into the foxhole.





'Goddess Nemotona, protect me,' she begged. 'Bran, my father, and my mother look up from the Otherworld and take care of me.'

She could hear men crashing through the thicket, shouting to each other. A sword slashed close by.



Then a hand grasped her shoulder, and she was jerked out of the hole. Bloodshot eyes glared into hers.

'It's a girl,' the soldier bawled, drawing his sword.

As Cuda shrank away in terror, a centurion strode over and seized her. 'Girl slaves are worth money,' he said.