

THE WINGED HATS

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The next day happened to be what they called a Wild Afternoon. Father and Mother went out to pay calls; Miss Blake went for a ride on her bicycle, and they were left all alone till eight o'clock.

When they had seen their dear parents and their dear preceptress politely off the premises they got a cabbage-leaf full of raspberries from the gardener, and a Wild Tea from Ellen. They ate the raspberries to prevent their squashing, and they meant to divide the cabbage-leaf with Three Cows down at the Theatre, but they came across a dead hedgehog which they simply had to bury, and the leaf was too useful to waste.

Then they went on to the Forge and found old Hobden the hedger at home with his son the Bee Boy who is not quite right in his head, but who can pick up swarms of bees in his naked hands; and the Bee Boy told them the rhyme about the slow-worm:—

If I had eyes as I could see,

No mortal man would trouble me.'

They all had tea together by the hives, and Hobden said the loaf-cake which Ellen had given them was almost as good as what his wife used to make, and he showed them how to set a wire at the right height for hares. They knew about rabbits already.

Then they climbed up Long Ditch into the lower end of Far Wood. This is sadder and darker than the 'Volaterrae' end because of an old marlpit full of black water, where weepy, hairy moss hangs round the stumps of the willows and alders. But the birds come to perch on the dead branches, and Hobden says that the bitter willow-water is a sort of medicine for sick animals.

They sat down on a felled oak-trunk in the shadows of the beech undergrowth, and were looping the wires Hobden had given them, when they saw Parnesius.

'How quietly you came!' said Una, moving up to make room. 'Where's Puck?'

'The Faun and I have disputed whether it is better that I should tell you all my tale, or leave it untold,' he replied.

'I only said that if he told it as it happened you wouldn't understand it,' said Puck, jumping up like a squirrel from behind the log.

'I don't understand all of it,' said Una, 'but I like hearing about the little Picts.'

'What I can't understand,' said Dan, 'is how Maximus knew all about the Picts when he was over in Gaul.'

'He who makes himself Emperor anywhere must know everything, everywhere,' said Parnesius. 'We had this much from Maximus' mouth after the Games.'

'Games? What games?' said Dan.

Parnesius stretched his arm out stiffly, thumb pointed to the ground. 'Gladiators! That sort of game,' he said. 'There were two days' Games in his honour when he landed all unexpected at Segedunum on the East end of the Wall. Yes, the day after we had met him we held two days' games; but I think the greatest risk was run, not by the poor wretches on the sand, but by Maximus. In the old days the Legions kept silence before their Emperor. So did not we! You could hear the solid roar run West along the Wall as his chair was carried rocking through the crowds. The garrison beat round him—clamouring, clowning, asking for pay, for change of quarters, for anything that came into their wild heads. That chair was like a little boat among waves, dipping and falling, but always rising again after one had shut the eyes.' Parnesius shivered.

‘Were they angry with him?’ said Dan.

‘No more angry than wolves in a cage when their trainer walks among them. If he had turned his back an instant, or for an instant had ceased to hold their eyes, there would have been another Emperor made on the Wall that hour. Was it not so, Faun?’

‘So it was. So it always will be,’ said Puck.

‘Late in the evening his messenger came for us, and we followed to the Temple of Victory, where he lodged with Rutilianus, the General of the Wall. I had hardly seen the General before, but he always gave me leave when I wished to take Heather. He was a great glutton, and kept five Asian cooks, and he came of a family that believed in oracles. We could smell his good dinner when we entered, but the tables were empty. He lay snorting on a couch. Maximus sat apart among long rolls of accounts. Then the doors were shut.

“These are your men,” said Maximus to the General, who propped his eye-corners open with his gouty fingers, and stared at us like a fish.

“I shall know them again, Cæsar,” said Rutilianus.

“Very good,” said Maximus. “Now hear! You are not to move man or shield on the Wall except as these boys shall tell you. You will do nothing, except eat, without their permission. They are the head and arms. You are

the belly!”

“As Cæsar pleases,” the old man grunted. “If my pay and profits are not cut, you may make my Ancestors’ Oracle my master. Rome has been! Rome has been!” Then he turned on his side to sleep.

“He has it,” said Maximus. “We will get to what I need.”

‘He unrolled full copies of the number of men and supplies on the Wall—down to the sick that very day in Hunno Hospital. Oh, but I groaned when his pen marked off detachment after detachment of our best—of our least worthless men! He took two towers of our Scythians, two of our North British auxiliaries, two Numidian cohorts, the Dacians all, and half the Belgians. It was like an eagle pecking a carcass.

“And now, how many catapults have you?” He turned up a new list, but Pertinax laid his open hand there.

“No, Cæsar,” said he. “Do not tempt the Gods too far. Take men, or engines, but not both; else we refuse.”

‘Engines?’ said Una.

The catapults of the Wall—huge things forty feet high to the head—firing nets of raw stone or forged bolts. Nothing can stand against them. He left us our catapults at last, but he took a Cæsar’s half of our men without

pity. We were a shell when he rolled up the lists!

“Hail, Cæsar! We, about to die, salute you!” said Pertinax, laughing. “If any enemy even leans against the Wall now, it will tumble.”

“Give me the three years Allo spoke of,” he answered, “and you shall have twenty thousand men of your own choosing up here. But now it is a gamble—a game played against the Gods, and the stakes are Britain, Gaul, and perhaps, Rome. You play on my side?”

“We will play, Cæsar,” I said for I had never met a man like this man.

“Good. To-morrow,” said he, “I proclaim you Captains of the Wall before the troops.”

‘So we went into the moonlight, where they were cleaning the ground after the Games. We saw great Roma Dea atop of the Wall, the frost on her helmet, and her spear pointed towards the North Star. We saw the twinkle of night-fires all along the guard-towers, and the line of the black catapults growing smaller and smaller in the distance. All these things we knew till we were weary; but that night they seemed very strange to us, because the next day we knew we were to be their masters.

The men took the news well; but when Maximus went away with half our strength, and we had to spread ourselves into the emptied towers, and the townspeople complained that trade would be ruined, and the Autumn gales

blew—it was dark days for us two. Here Pertinax was more than my right hand. Being born and bred among the great country-houses in Gaul, he knew the proper words to address to all—from Roman-born Centurions to those dogs of the Third—the Libyans. And he spoke to each as though that man were as high-minded as himself. Now I saw so strongly what things were needed to be done, that I forgot things are only accomplished by means of men. That was a mistake.

‘I feared nothing from the Picts, at least for that year, but Allo warned me that the Winged Hats would soon come in from the sea at each end of the Wall to prove to the Picts how weak we were. So I made ready in haste, and none too soon. I shifted our best men to the ends of the Wall, and set up screened catapults by the beach. The Winged Hats would drive in before the snow-squalls—ten or twenty boats at a time—on Segedunum or Ituna, according as the wind blew.

‘Now a ship coming in to land men must furl her sail. If you wait till you see her men gather up the sail’s foot, your catapults can jerk a net of loose stones (bolts only cut through the cloth) into the bag of it. Then she turns over, and the sea makes everything clean again. A few men may come ashore, but very few.... It was not hard work, except the waiting on the beach in blowing sand and snow. And that was how we dealt with the Winged Hats that winter.

‘Early in the Spring, when the East winds blow like skinning-knives, they

gathered again off the East end with many ships. Allo told me they would never rest till they had taken a tower in open fight. Certainly they fought in the open. We dealt with them thoroughly through a long day: and when all was finished, one man dived clear of the wreckage of his ship, and swam towards shore. I waited, and a wave tumbled him at my feet.

‘As I stooped, I saw he wore such a medal as I wear.’ Parnesius raised his hand to his neck. ‘Therefore, when he could speak, I addressed him a certain Question which can only be answered in a certain manner. He answered with the necessary Word—the Word that belongs to the Degree of Gryphons in the science of Mithras my God. I put my shield over him till he could stand up. You see I am not short, but he was a head taller than I. He said: “What now?” I said: “At your pleasure, my brother, to stay or go.”’

‘He looked out across the surf. There remained one ship unhurt, beyond range of our catapults. I checked the catapults and he waved her in. She came as a hound comes to a master. When she was yet a hundred paces from the beach, he flung back his hair, and swam out. They hauled him in, and went away. I knew that those who worship Mithras are many and of all races, so I did not think much more upon the matter.

‘A month later I saw Allo with his horses—by the Temple of Pan, O Faun!—and he gave me a great necklace of gold studded with coral.

‘At first I thought it was a bribe from some tradesman in the town—meant for old Rutilianus. “Nay,” said Allo. “This is a gift from Amal, that Winged Hat whom you saved on the beach. He says you are a Man.”

“He is a Man, too. Tell him I can wear his gift,” I answered.

“Oh, Amal is a young fool; but, speaking as sensible men, your Emperor is doing such great things in Gaul that the Winged Hats are anxious to be his friends, or, better still, the friends of his servants. They think you and Pertinax could lead them to victories.” Allo looked at me like a one-eyed raven.

“Allo,” I said, “you are the corn between the two millstones. Be content if they grind evenly, and don’t thrust your hand between them.”

“I?” said Allo. “I hate Rome and the Winged Hats equally; but if the Winged Hats thought that some day you and Pertinax might join them against Maximus, they would leave you in peace while you considered. Time is what we need—you and I and Maximus. Let me carry a pleasant message back to the Winged Hats—something for them to make a council over. We barbarians are all alike. We sit up half the night to discuss anything a Roman says. Eh?”

“We have no men. We must fight with words,” said Pertinax. “Leave it to Allo and me.”

‘So Allo carried word back to the Winged Hats that we would not fight them if they did not fight us; and they (I think they were a little tired of losing men in the sea) agreed to a sort of truce. I believe Allo, who being a horse-dealer loved lies, also told them we might some day rise against Maximus as Maximus had risen against Rome.

‘Indeed, they permitted the corn-ships which I sent to the Picts to pass North that season without harm. Therefore the Picts were well fed that winter, and since they were in some sort my children, I was glad of it. We had only two thousand men on the Wall, and I wrote many times to Maximus and begged—prayed—him to send me only one cohort of my old North British troops. He could not spare them. He needed them to win more victories in Gaul.

‘Then came news that he had defeated and slain the Emperor Gratian, and thinking he must now be secure, I wrote again for men. He answered: “You will learn that I have at last settled accounts with the pup Gratian. There was no need that he should have died, but he became confused and lost his head, which is a bad thing to befall any Emperor. Tell your Father I am content to drive two mules only; for unless my old General’s son thinks himself destined to destroy me, I shall rest Emperor of Gaul and Britain, and then you, my two children, will presently get all the men you need. Just now I can spare none.”’

‘What did he mean by his General’s son?’ said Dan.

‘He meant Theodosius Emperor of Rome, who was the son of Theodosius the General under whom Maximus had fought in the old Pict War. The two men never loved each other, and when Gratian made the younger Theodosius Emperor of the East (at least, so I’ve heard), Maximus carried on the war to the second generation. It was his fate, and it was his fall. But Theodosius the Emperor is a good man. As I know.’ Parnesius was silent for a moment and then continued.

‘I wrote back to Maximus that, though we had peace on the Wall, I should be happier with a few more men and some new catapults. He answered: “You must live a little longer under the shadow of my victories, till I can see what young Theodosius intends. He may welcome me as a brother-Emperor, or he may be preparing an army. In either case I cannot spare men just now.”’

‘But he was always saying that,’ cried Una.

‘It was true. He did not make excuses; but thanks, as he said, to the news of his victories, we had no trouble on the Wall for a long, long time. The Picts grew fat as their own sheep among the heather, and as many of my men as lived were well exercised in their weapons. Yes, the Wall looked strong. For myself, I knew how weak we were. I knew that if even a false rumour of any defeat to Maximus broke loose among the Winged Hats, they might come down in earnest, and then—the Wall must go! For the Picts I never cared, but in those years I learned something of the strength of the

Winged Hats. They increased their strength every day, but I could not increase my men. Maximus had emptied Britain behind us, and I felt myself to be a man with a rotten stick standing before a broken fence to turn bulls.

‘Thus, my friends, we lived on the Wall, waiting—waiting—waiting for the men that Maximus never sent!

‘Presently he wrote that he was preparing an army against Theodosius. He wrote—and Pertinax read it over my shoulder in our quarters: “Tell your Father that my destiny orders me to drive three mules or be torn in pieces by them. I hope within a year to finish with Theodosius, son of Theodosius, once and for all. Then you shall have Britain to rule, and Pertinax, if he chooses, Gaul. To-day I wish strongly you were with me to beat my Auxiliaries into shape. Do not, I pray you, believe any rumour of my sickness. I have a little evil in my old body which I shall cure by riding swiftly into Rome.”

‘Said Pertinax: “It is finished with Maximus! He writes as a man without hope. I, a man without hope, can see this. What does he add at the bottom of the roll? ‘Tell Pertinax I have met his late Uncle, the Duumvir of Divio, and that he accounted to me quite truthfully for all his Mother’s monies. I have sent her with a fitting escort, for she is the mother of a hero, to Nicæa, where the climate is warm.’

“That is proof!” said Pertinax. “Nicæa is not far by sea from Rome. A

woman there could take ship and fly to Rome in time of war. Yes, Maximus foresees his death, and is fulfilling his promises one by one. But I am glad my Uncle met him.”

“You think blackly to-day?” I asked.

“I think truth. The Gods weary of the play we have played against them. Theodosius will destroy Maximus. It is finished!”

“Will you write him that?” I said.

“See what I shall write,” he answered, and he took pen and wrote a letter cheerful as the light of day, tender as a woman’s and full of jests. Even I, reading over his shoulder, took comfort from it till—I saw his face!

“And now,” he said, sealing it, “we be two dead men, my brother. Let us go to the Temple.”

‘We prayed awhile to Mithras, where we had many times prayed before. After that we lived day by day among evil rumours till winter came again.

‘It happened one morning that we rode to the East Shore, and found on the beach a fair-haired man, half frozen, bound to some broken planks. Turning him over, we saw by his belt-buckle that he was a Goth of an Eastern Legion. Suddenly he opened his eyes and cried loudly: “He is dead! The letters were with me, but the Winged Hats sunk the ship.” So saying, he

died between our hands.

‘We asked not who was dead. We knew! We raced before the driving snow to Hunno, thinking perhaps Allo might be there. We found him already at our stables, and he saw by our faces what we had heard.

“It was in a tent by the Sea,” he stammered. “He was beheaded by Theodosius. He sent a letter to you, written while he waited to be slain. The Winged Hats met the ship and took it. The news is running through the heather like fire. Blame me not! I cannot hold back my young men any more.”

“I would we could say as much for our men,” said Pertinax, laughing.

“But, Gods be praised, they cannot run away.”

“What do you do?” said Allo. “I bring an order—a message—from the Winged Hats that you join them with your men, and march South to plunder Britain.”

“It grieves me,” said Pertinax, “but we are stationed here to stop that thing.”

“If I carry back such an answer they will kill me,” said Allo. “I always promised the Winged Hats that you would rise when Maximus fell. I—I did not think he could fall.”

“Alas! my poor barbarian,” said Pertinax, still laughing. “Well, you have sold us too many good ponies to be thrown back to your friends. We will make you a prisoner, although you are an ambassador.”

“Yes, that will be best,” said Allo, holding out a halter. We bound him lightly, for he was an old man.

“Presently the Winged Hats may come to look for you, and that will give us more time. See how the habit of playing for time sticks to a man!” said Pertinax, as he tied the rope.

“No,” I said. “Time may help. If Maximus wrote us letters while he was a prisoner, Theodosius must have sent the ship that brought it. If he can send ships, he can send men.”

“How will that profit us?” said Pertinax. “We serve Maximus, not Theodosius. Even if by some miracle of the Gods Theodosius down South sent and saved the Wall, we could not expect more than the death Maximus died.”

“It concerns us to defend the Wall, no matter what Emperor dies, or makes die,” I said.

“That is worthy of your brother the philosopher,” said Pertinax. “Myself I am without hope, so I do not say solemn and stupid things! Rouse the Wall!”

‘We armed the Wall from end to end; we told the officers that there was a rumour of Maximus’s death which might bring down the Winged Hats, but we were sure, even if it were true, that Theodosius, for the sake of Britain, would send us help. Therefore, we must stand fast.... My friends, it is above all things strange to see how men bear ill news! Often the strongest till then become the weakest, while the weakest, as it were, reach up and steal strength from the Gods. So it was with us. Yet my Pertinax by his jests and his courtesy and his labours had put heart and training into our poor numbers during the past years—more than I should have thought possible. Even our Libyan Cohort—the Thirds—stood up in their padded cuirasses and did not whimper.

‘In three days came seven chiefs and elders of the Winged Hats. Among them was that tall young man, Amal, whom I had met on the beach, and he smiled when he saw my necklace. We made them welcome, for they were ambassadors.

We showed them Allo, alive but bound. They thought we had killed him, and I saw it would not have vexed them if we had. Allo saw it too, and it vexed him. Then in our quarters at Hunno we came to Council.

‘They said that Rome was falling, and that we must join them. They offered me all South Britain to govern after they had taken a tribute out of it.

I answered, "Patience. This Wall is not weighed off like plunder. Give me proof that my General is dead."

"Nay," said one elder, "prove to us that he lives"; and another said, cunningly, "What will you give us if we read you his last words?"

"We are not merchants to bargain," cried Amal. "Moreover, I owe this man my life. He shall have his proof." He threw across to me a letter (well I knew the seal) from Maximus.

"We took this out of the ship we sunk," he cried. "I cannot read, but I know one sign, at least, which makes me believe." He showed me a dark stain on the outer roll that my heavy heart perceived was the valiant blood of Maximus.

"Read!" said Amal. "Read, and then let us hear whose servants you are!"

'Said Pertinax, very softly, after he had looked through it: "I will read it all. Listen, barbarians!" He read from that which I have carried next my heart ever since.'

Parnesius drew from his neck a folded and spotted piece of parchment, and began in a hushed voice:—

"To Parnesius and Pertinax, the not unworthy Captains of the Wall, from Maximus, once Emperor of Gaul and Britain, now prisoner waiting death by

the sea in the camp of Theodosius—Greeting and Good-bye!”

“Enough,” said young Amal; “there is your proof! You must join us now!”

Pertinax looked long and silently at him, till that fair man blushed like a girl. Then read Pertinax:—

“I have joyfully done much evil in my life to those who have wished me evil, but if ever I did any evil to you two I repent, and I ask your forgiveness. The three mules which I strove to drive have torn me in pieces as your Father prophesied. The naked swords wait at the tent door to give me the death I gave to Gratian. Therefore I, your General and your Emperor, send you free and honourable dismissal from my service, which you entered, not for money or office, but, as it makes me warm to believe, because you loved me!”

“By the Light of the Sun,” Amal broke in. “This was in some sort a Man! We may have been mistaken in his servants!”

‘And Pertinax read on: “You gave me the time for which I asked. If I have failed to use it, do not lament. We have gambled very splendidly against the Gods, but they hold weighted dice, and I must pay the forfeit. Remember, I have been; but Rome is; and Rome will be! Tell Pertinax his Mother is in safety at Nicæa, and her monies are in charge of the Prefect at Antipolis. Make my remembrances to your Father and to your Mother,

whose friendship was great gain to me. Give also to my little Picts and to the Winged Hats such messages as their thick heads can understand. I would have sent you three Legions this very day if all had gone aright. Do not forget me. We have worked together. Farewell! Farewell! Farewell!”

‘Now, that was my Emperor’s last letter.’ (The children heard the parchment crackle as Parnesius returned it to its place.)

“I was mistaken,” said Amal. “The servants of such a man will sell nothing except over the sword. I am glad of it.” He held out his hand to me.

“But Maximus has given you your dismissal,” said an elder. “You are certainly free to serve—or to rule—whom you please. Join—do not follow—join us!”

“We thank you,” said Pertinax. “But Maximus tells us to give you such messages as—pardon me, but I use his words—your thick heads can understand.” He pointed through the door to the foot of a catapult wound up.

“We understand,” said an elder. “The Wall must be won at a price?”

“It grieves me,” said Pertinax, laughing, “but so it must be won,” and he gave them of our best Southern wine.

'They drank, and wiped their yellow beards in silence till they rose to go.

'Said Amal, stretching himself (for they were barbarians), "We be a goodly company; I wonder what the ravens and the dogfish will make of some of us before this snow melts."

"Think rather what Theodosius may send," I answered; and though they laughed, I saw that my chance shot troubled them.

'Only old Allo lingered behind a little.

"You see," he said, winking and blinking, "I am no more than their dog. When I have shown their men the secret short ways across our bogs, they will kick me like one."

"Then I should not be in haste to show them those ways," said Pertinax, "till I were sure that Rome could not save the Wall."

"You think so? Woe is me!" said the old man. "I only wanted peace for my people," and he went out stumbling through the snow behind the tall Winged Hats.

In this fashion then, slowly, a day at a time, which is very bad for doubting troops, the War came upon us. At first the Winged Hats swept in

from the sea as they had done before, and there we met them as before—with the catapults; and they sickened of it. Yet for a long time they would not trust their duck-legs on land, and I think when it came to revealing the secrets of the tribe, the little Picts were afraid or ashamed to show them all the roads across the heather. I had this from a Pict prisoner. They were as much our spies as our enemies, for the Winged Hats oppressed them, and took their winter stores. Ah, foolish Little People!

‘Then the Winged Hats began to roll us up from each end of the Wall. I sent runners Southward to see what the news might be in Britain; but the wolves were very bold that winter among the deserted stations where the troops had once been, and none came back. We had trouble too with the forage for the ponies along the Wall. I kept ten, and so did Pertinax. We lived and slept in the saddle riding east or west, and we ate our worn-out ponies. The people of the town also made us some trouble till I gathered them all in one quarter behind Hunno. We broke down the Wall on either side of it to make as it were a citadel. Our men fought better in close order.

‘By the end of the second month we were deep in the War as a man is deep in a snow-drift or in a dream. I think we fought in our sleep. At least I know I have gone on the Wall and come off again, remembering nothing between, though my throat was harsh with giving orders, and my sword, I could see, had been used.

‘The Winged Hats fought like wolves—all in a pack. Where they had suffered

most, there they charged in most hotly. This was hard for the defender, but it held them from sweeping on into Britain.

‘In those days Pertinax and I wrote on the plaster of the bricked archway into Valentia the names of the towers, and the days on which they fell one by one. We wished for some record.

‘And the fighting? The fight was always hottest to left and right of the great Statue of Roma Dea, near to Rutilianus’ house. By the light of the Sun, that old fat man, whom we had not considered at all, grew young again among the trumpets! I remember he said his sword was an oracle! “Let us consult the Oracle,” he would say, and put the handle against his ear, and shake his head wisely. “And this day is allowed Rutilianus to live,” he would say, and, tucking up his cloak, he would puff and pant and fight well. Oh, there were jests in plenty on the Wall to take the place of food!

‘We endured for two months and seventeen days—always being pressed from three sides into a smaller space. Several times Allo sent in word that help was at hand. We did not believe it, but it cheered our men.

‘The end came not with shoutings of joy, but, like the rest, as in a dream. The Winged Hats suddenly left us in peace for one night, and the next day; which is too long for spent men. We slept at first lightly, expecting to be roused, and then like logs, each where he lay. May you never need such sleep! When I waked our towers were full of strange, armed

men, who watched us snoring. I roused Pertinax, and we leaped up together.

“What?” said a young man in clean armour. “Do you fight against Theodosius? Look!”

‘North we looked over the red snow. No Winged Hats were there. South we looked over the white snow, and behold there were the Eagles of two strong Legions encamped. East and west we saw flame and fighting, but by Hunno all was still.

“Trouble no more,” said the young man. “Rome’s arm is long. Where are the Captains of the Wall?”

‘We said we were those men.

“But you are old and grey-haired,” he cried. “Maximus said that they were boys.”

“Yes that was true some years ago,” said Pertinax. “What is our fate to be, you fine and well-fed child?”

“I am called Ambrosius, a secretary of the Emperor,” he answered. “Show me a certain letter which Maximus wrote from a tent at Aquileia, and perhaps I will believe.”

‘I took it from my breast, and when he had read it he saluted us, saying:

“Your fate is in your own hands. If you choose to serve Theodosius, he will give you a Legion. If it suits you to go to your homes, we will give you a Triumph.”

“I would like better a bath, wine, food, razors, soaps, oils, and scents,” said Pertinax, laughing.

“Oh, I see you are a boy,” said Ambrosius. “And you?” turning to me.

“We bear no ill-will against Theodosius, but in War——” I began.

“In War it is as it is in Love,” said Pertinax. “Whether she be good or bad, one gives one’s best once, to one only. That given, there remains no second worth giving or taking.”

“That is true,” said Ambrosius. “I was with Maximus before he died. He warned Theodosius that you would never serve him, and frankly I say I am sorry for my Emperor.”

“He has Rome to console him,” said Pertinax. “I ask you of your kindness to let us go to our homes and get this smell out of our nostrils.”

‘None the less they gave us a Triumph!’

'It was well earned,' said Puck, throwing some leaves into the still water of the marlpit. The black, oily circles spread dizzily as the children watched them.

'I want to know, oh, ever so many things,' said Dan, 'What happened to old Allo? Did the Winged Hats ever come back? And what did Amal do?'

'And what happened to the fat old General with the five cooks?' said Una. 'And what did your Mother say when you came home?'

'She'd say you're settin' too long over this old pit, so late as 'tis already,' said old Hobden's voice behind them. 'Hst!' he whispered.

He stood still, for not twenty paces away a magnificent dog-fox sat on his haunches and looked at the children as though he were an old friend of theirs.

'Oh, Mus' Reynolds, Mus' Reynolds!' said Hobden, under his breath. 'If I knowed all was inside your head, I'd know something wuth knowin'. Mus' Dan an' Miss Una, come along o' me while I lock up my liddle hen-house.'