

THE TALE OF CARTIMANDUA

Cartimandua loved being queen of the Brigantes. She enjoyed the feeling of having power over her tribe, and fiercely wanted to hang on to it all.

When rumours reached her of the Romans, and their battles with tribes in the south, she was troubled. In all the tales she heard the Romans always won. Traders and spies told her of the rich life lived by these mighty Roman warriors, with their grand stone buildings and delicate pottery and glass. Afraid that she was going to lose everything, Cartimandua prayed to the gods for a sign, showing her what to do.

At this time King Caractacus ruled a tribe living in the west. His tribe fought bravely against the Romans but were defeated and the king and his family fled in fear of their lives. They ran north to Cartimandua and begged for her protection. She looked at the king, his wife and children, and decided that this was her sign from the gods. She took them in and offered them rest and safety, but secretly sent messages to the Roman Emperor Claudius offering up her guests as prisoners. King Caratacus and his family were betrayed and taken by the Romans. The Romans gave Cartimandua great rewards – gifts of beautiful jewellery, pottery and glass.

Cartimandua knew the Romans would not attack her now that she was their friend, and she began to dream of an even better, richer life. After some time she became bored with her husband Venutius who had become lazy and spent all his time hunting and feasting. She longed for a younger, braver, more handsome man and her eye fell on Vellocatus, who was her husband's armour-bearer. Cartimandua divorced her husband and married young Vellocatus instead.

The tribe was furious with their middle-aged queen for behaving like this – marrying a teenager! – and Venutius swore that he would have his revenge. He gathered together some angry tribespeople and attacked Cartimandua. Fearing for her safety she sent messages to the Romans, who tried several times before they were finally able to rescue her.

Nobody knows what happened to Cartimandua and Venutius after this. The Romans did become the rulers of the Brigantes. Over time everyone became used to the new situation and lived in peace. Whether the Queen got to live the life of luxury she dreamed of...who can say?