

AURELIUS' SLAVE GIRL

By Katrina Susan Henderson



ILLUSTRATED BY BRIAN DUKEHART

A 'NEW WOMAN' NOVEL

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AURELIUS' SLAVE GIRL

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1. In the Camp of Emperor Cornelius

The smell of blood filled the air of the camp as battle for the possession of the Roman Empire waged among the four contending factions. The current proclaimed Emperor was Marcus Cornelius, a former Senator during the reign of Nero, which came to an abrupt end when Nero took his own life and threw the Empire into chaos. Now in the fall of 69 A.D., (as the Christians determine dates), the faction under the command of Consul Flavius Vespasian seemed to be winning.

That revelation came as no surprise to me as Flavius Vespasian was a military genius and strategist in the Legion before becoming a Consul.

I was connected with the camp of the Emperor, having been conscripted by the Emperor's Praetorian Guard and forced to join their camp. I was by training a dealer in cloth and silks. I had worked in the family shop, with my mother, on the Flammian Way just outside the inner walls of the heart of the Empire, Rome. Now, conscripted into the army, I was only a guard at the camp.

I was there when the forces of our most divine Emperor Cornelius captured the chief Prefect of Flavius' Legion, Aurelius Metellus, on the battlefield on the banks of the Tiber River. The legionnaires, who had captured him, dragged him into the camp barely alive. He was bleeding from several wounds on various parts of his body and his formerly regal armor and cloak were slitted and shattered. On his face, he bore the look of hatred that I had only seen on the face of raging beasts in the Forum. I stood at attention when the Emperor himself approached Aurelius along with his Prefect of the Camp, Numitorius Vestius.

“So, it appears that we have captured the rebel, Aurelius Metellus, doesn't it Numitorius?” spoke the Emperor.

The Prefect of the Camp looked over the wounded man then replied, “It does appear so, Your Divinity.”

“What thinks we must do with such a scoundrel, Numitorius?” the Emperor asked as he motioned his favorite camp boy to his side.

“I know not, Divine One. Perhaps he should be saved for the games and so delight the Imperial Presence with his death throes under the claws of the beasts,” Numitorius replied.

The Emperor reached out to the boy who had come up beside him, ruffled his hair affectionately and then ate a date from the tray he was carrying after making the boy taste it first. The Emperor waved the boy away and then turned to address Aurelius himself.

“So, what do you say to that, Aurelius? Shall I throw you to the beasts of the Forum or shall I make you one of my personal slaves? Perhaps as a gift to one of my loyal supporters for I know that your body and spirit would delight many of my followers.”

Aurelius sneered at him and replied, “I would sooner kiss Pluto himself rather than agree to live under your restraints, false Emperor. The sooner I am killed, the better for you for soon Flavius will be here beating down your defenses and will soon come into the Imperial Presence himself to remove you from the position you falsely aspire to. You and your supporters will soon feel the wrath of Flavius and anything you do to me will be a light pleasantry compared to what he will do to you!”

“So it is the Forum for you, Aurelius. How unfortunate that you have chosen death beneath the claws of the beasts rather than life in service to your Emperor. So be it! Guards! Take him away and confine him in the cells beneath the Forum!” the Emperor declared.

Humitorius turned in my direction and ordered, “Drusillius! Oeneus! Take this lion bait away and confine him in a cell beneath the Forum. Guard him well and if he escapes, you will both take his place for the Emperor's entertainment.”

“Ave Prefect!” we shouted in unison as we came forward to take charge of the prisoner.

Aurelius did not fight us as he was bound and placed on the floor of the wagon. I climbed upon the wagon and gave the order to move out. We left the confines of the camp and were soon within the outlying buildings of Rome just inside the Outer Wall. On the floor of the wagon, Aurelius squirmed a bit and then looked up at me.

“In Jupiter's name, at least let me look upon Rome one last time before I go to rot beneath the Forum,” Aurelius cursed.

Oeneus spoke, “I do not think we can do that, Prefect.”

“Why not, Oeneus?” I asked. “After all, we are only instructed to confine him and prevent his escape. Must we be cruel and not allow the condemned a final look at what he once held so dear before betraying our Emperor and the people of Rome? I think that as long as the prisoner is bound and weaponless, that we can afford to be charitable and allow him one last look at glorious Rome,”

“Very well, Parvustipes Drusillius,” Oeneus mocked.

“That was not a kind thing to say, Oeneus,” I said flashing him an angry look.

Oeneus shrugged his shoulders and looked back at the road falling silent. As he drove down the narrow road, I climbed into the bed of the wagon and managed to prop Aurelius up so that he could see. I placed a bag of sand behind his back to support him.

“Thank you, Legionnaire Drusillius who some call the Small Stump in mockery. I thank you for letting me see Rome one last time. I will remember to mention your kindness when I face judgment in Hades,” Aurelius said as he sat up looking out the back of the wagon at the faces of women and children looking to see who was traveling

in the heat of the day in a wagon on the Flammian Way toward the Inner Walls of Rome.

“You are welcome, Prefect Aurelius. You are a soldier and deserved this last look at beautiful Rome. I'm sorry that it has come to this, but such is the way of the soldier,” I replied as I crouched beside him on the floor of the wagon.

“It was not always like this for you, Drusillius?” questioned Aurelius.

“No,” I replied. “I was much happier as a seller of cloth and silk. The ladies of Rome would come from leagues around to buy my wares. Their slaves could always take my wares and make clothes of unsurpassed beauty. It is all gone now and I am a soldier in an army I have no longing to be in.”

“Oh shut up, Drusillius! We're almost to the Inner Gate and if you don't want the Praetorians to think you are in league with this rebel, you'd better get back up here!” Oeneus shouted.

“You had best go, Drusillius. Once again, I thank you for your kindness,” Aurelius said as his gaze went back out into the crowd.

I climbed back onto the seat of the wagon with Oeneus and soon we came to the gate of the Inner City wherein lied the Palace and the glorious temples of Rome. At the gate, we were stopped by the Praetorian sentry who asked for our orders and told us to state our business.

“We are transporting a prisoner to the Forum to be held for Caesar's judgment,” I replied to his challenge.

“May I inspect the prisoner?” asked the Centurion of the Guard.

“Of course you may, Centurion,” Oeneus replied.

The Centurion approached the wagon and looked Aurelius in the eye saying, “So, the great Prefect Aurelius has fallen into the clutches of his enemies. I look forward to seeing you perform in the Forum.”

“Argos. I see that the slime has risen to the top of the Praetorian Guard,” Aurelius answered before spitting into the Centurion's face.

“You'll die now, dog!” the Centurion shouted drawing his sword.

“Stop, Centurion!” I yelled as Oeneus and I drew our swords.

The Centurion's gaze fell upon me and he asked angrily, “Why must I stop, Legionnaire? And why should I listen to a lowly one such as you?”

“Because the Emperor, himself, would be most displeased if you deprived him of his entertainment in the Forum. I'm sure that if you wish to take his place in the Forum, Divine Caesar will be happy to grant you your wish,” I replied steadily.

“Come on, Argos! Kill me! I call your wife a pig and your mother a dog!” Aurelius taunted.

“Move on before I take my chances with Caesar. Move on!” Centurion Argos walked away in a huff.

We quickly moved through the Inner Gate and into the inner sanctum of the Inner City. The roads here were of good Tiber River stone that was worn smooth by the passage of thousands of people daily. Dominating the skyline were the Imperial Palace and the Temple of Jupiter. Next to the Temple of Jupiter could be seen the Temple of Juno and the Temple of Minerva. The Imperial Palace, itself, was currently alight and shone like a beacon, defying the forces of Flavius that surrounded the city. We drove past the Senate, at the base of Capitoline Hill, and pulled up in front of the Forum. There we threw the reins of the horses to a slave boy and went around to the back of the wagon to drag Aurelius out. He winced in pain as we got him to his feet and half-dragged, half-carried him to the stairs leading beneath the Forum. We negotiated the stairs with difficulty and came to the cell level where we were greeted by a Forum guard.

“What do we have here? Another guest I take it,” the guard greeted.

“Yes, do you have a room for him?” I asked.

The guard roared with laughter saying, “Of course. We always have room for an honored guest. I take it that this one is important to Caesar?”

“Very much so,” I replied. “Caesar himself has sent us to stand guard over him during his confinement until the games.”

“Follow me, lads. I have the perfect room for Caesar's guest,” The guard led us down a dark musty hall.

After about fifteen minutes of travel, we came to an area of the hall where the walls were moist and as dark as the pits of Hades. There was the squeal of rats and the smell of rotting flesh.

“Ah, here we are. The finest accommodation in Rome for a guest of Caesar,” the guard announced as he opened the cell door with a key from his key ring.

The cell was small, barely enough room for a man to stretch out in with a narrow stone slab for a bed and filthy straw on the floor. The floor was damp and the walls were of rough unfinished stone.

The guard turned to Aurelius, “I hope the accommodations are to your liking, honored guest of Caesar.”

Aurelius grinned in reply saying, “Just as I always dreamed it would be. Jupiter has surely blessed me to see the perfect quarters for the honored guest of a false Caesar.”

“I'm glad you like them. You can put him in now lads and I'll have my club ready if he makes trouble.”

Oeneus and I took Aurelius into the cell and sat him upon the stone slab. There, Oeneus drew his sword while I took my knife and cut Aurelius' bonds. With a grunt of pain, Aurelius lay flat on the slab and I could see that he was bleeding from a wound in his side. I reached into my soldier's kit and drew forth a bandage and bounded the wound. After I finished, Aurelius fell asleep on the slab. We then withdrew and the guard closed the door, locking it and handing the key to Oeneus. Oeneus took the

first watch, so I went back up to the surface with the guard who took me to the Forum Guard's quarters where I could bunk with the other men.

After I had slept the night through, I went to the Baths, where I underwent my standard teasing about the smallness of my manhood. After I left the Baths, I went into the market to buy some food for the long watch ahead. I checked out the news in Rome and then headed for the Forum as it was nearly evening and time for me to relieve Oeneus from the watch.

"I relieve you, Oeneus," I said as I approached him down the long musty hall when my torch light fell upon him.

"Good, I thought I was ready to see Pluto jump out of the darkness back there," Oeneus grumbled.

"It's sunset up top, so I will see you in the morning. Was the prisoner any problems?" I replied.

"No. He tried to engage me in conversation a little while after you left yesterday, but I don't talk to rebels. Well since you're here now, I think I'll just get some dinner and some needed sleep. See you in the morning, Drusillius, and if you'll take my advice, you'll not talk to the rebel."

"Good night, Oeneus," I said as he faded down the hallway leaving me in the darkness with only a sputtering torch to keep me company.

Now, I'm not one to normally be afraid of being left alone, but the darkness, the smell and the squealing of rats have been things that have always made me nervous since I was small. So, I tightened up my grip on my sword and tried to think of more pleasant days when I ran the cloth shop with my mother, Aula. Since the death of my father, Cellinius Octavius, I had to take most of the responsibility for the business much to the delight of my mother. In the darkness, I could hear the steady sound of breathing and I knew it was Aurelius sleeping in his cell. For some reason, his presence made me feel more at ease and I was no longer afraid. I guess the presence of such a warrior, even one in disgrace, makes fearing the darkness and the rats trivial.

I stood guard for many hours when I heard footsteps approaching. As a torch became visible down the hallway, my nostrils were assaulted by an awful stench. It came from a pail the man approaching was carrying who I could now see was a slave at the Forum.

"Halt, slave. What is your business here?" I challenged.

"I've come to bring the prisoner food, master. May I approach?" quivered the slave.

"Approach then," I ordered.

The slave came closer and I could see what was in the bucket he was carrying. In the bucket were animal entrails mixed with the leavings from Caesar's camp. The stench was terrible enough to make one race to the Vomitorium. I motioned the slave to stop before me.

"Place it on the floor here. I will tend to his feeding and leave the bucket at the top of the stairs for you to pick up."

“Yes, master,” the slave answered setting the pail at my feet and then beat a quick retreat back up the hall, leaving me the newer torch.

After I had waited a few minutes to make sure the slave had left us, I took the pail and poured it down the sewage hole in the floor a number of yards away from my station near the door. I then rinsed it with some water and placed it at the top of the stairs for the slave to retrieve. I then hurried back to my position near the door. As I arrived back, I heard Aurelius yawning from inside the cell.

“Good morning. Do you feel up to talking to a rebel this morning?” Aurelius asked from within his cell.

“It is evening, Prefect. I will talk to you, but we must keep our voices low or else I may be implicated with you,” I replied to Aurelius through the bars on the door.

“Ah, it is you, Drusillius. You at least show kindness and respect to a Prefect of Rome,” he replied.

“It may be the only kindness you will receive, Aurelius. No one deserves the fate they have in store for you and I am powerless to help you. If I try, the Forum guards will descend on us and we will be killed. I can't let that happen,” I answered.

“Why do you torture yourself with it then, Drusillius?”

“I can't explain it, Aurelius. Would the Prefect like some food?” I asked.

“Yes. If it is good food.”

“Just a moment. Here you are,” I replied as I reached into my pack and broke a loaf of bread in two, handing the largest piece to Aurelius.

Aurelius reached through the bars and grabbed the bread.

I also gave him some of the rest of the food I had purchased and inside I could hear him eat heartily. Periodically, I let him sip some wine from the flask I carried with me.

“Thank you, Drusillius. The meal was better than I thought I would have here.”

“It is better, Aurelius. The meal they brought you was not fit for men, only for lowly beasts, so I poured it down the sewer,” I explained.

“Then the food was from your own hand?” asked Aurelius incredulously.

“Yes,” I replied simply.

After a long silence, Aurelius asked, “Tell me about yourself, Drusillius. Time passes slowly here waiting for death in the Forum.”

I thought for a moment then replied, “As you wish, Aurelius. I was born the only child of the cloth merchant Cellinius Octavius and his wife, Aula. I am a plebeian by birth and have never sought above my station, being happy in the cloth business. While other boys would play soldier in the streets, I preferred to work in the shop helping my customers find exactly what they needed to make the fine clothes they wore. I was quite good at spotting what cloth set off my clients looks for the best effect. There weren't too many chores to do for a boy, so I tended to help my mother with the chores that would have been reserved for a daughter. She laughingly once said that I should have been her daughter rather than her son.”

“Her teaching shines in you, Drusillius. What happened to the happy place you knew as a child?”

I felt a catch in my voice and answered, “Ten years ago, my father died of a sleeping sickness he caught somewhere in the Orient. That left me and my mother to fend for ourselves. We were doing all right, until last year.”

“During the riots following the death of Nero,” interrupted Aurelius.

“Yes, Aurelius. My last link to that world died when my mother was killed in the riots that followed. I remember weeping bitterly as our shop was confiscated for the duration of the civil emergency. Being out of work and without a denari to my name, I was quickly conscripted into the army of Emperor Cornelius.”

“That is a tragic tale, Drusillius. The Fates have not dealt you an easy hand.”

“Thank you for the condolences, Aurelius. But nothing can replace my only loved ones who are gone from my life. I have no one to love or be loved by and I would give everything to change that unhappy condition. But, that is water under the bridge. If reports are true, Flavius should be invading the city tomorrow.”

Aurelius' voice brightened saying, “Flavius has begun the offensive?”

“Yes,” I replied. “His forces are even now broaching the Outer Wall. I feel that they will be in by midnight, if they keep up their relentless approach.”

“Will you be ordered to kill me, Drusillius?” asked Aurelius steadily.

“I pray to Jupiter that I will not be so ordered. I pray to god of my mother, mother Juno, that she will find a way for us both to survive,” I answered.

“And if you are?” pressed Aurelius.

“I don't know,” I replied.

“I see,” answered Aurelius. “If you don't mind, why do they call you Parvustipes in mockery?”

I laughed answering, “Well, my manhood isn't exactly large and it tends to contract inside slightly, preferring apparently not to hang out limp. Many people at the Baths started teasing me about it when I was very young and have kept it up since. One of the female attendants at the Baths put that label on me when I was five.”

“I see. Well, since one or both of us may be dead before midnight. I think I'll catch up on some more sleep. Your friend talks in his sleep and kept me up all day. You seem like the decent sort, Drusillius. Would you at least wake me before you kill me?”

“I will, Aurelius. Pleasant dreams and pray to Jupiter that there will be a way out of this for both of us. I know I will.”

“Good night, Drusillius,” answered Aurelius as the cell got quiet.

Soon I heard snoring coming from the cell and knew that Aurelius had fallen asleep. How could he sleep? I was getting all worked up from the waiting. I guess that was why I was never cut out to be a soldier and why I yearned to once again be back where I was happy as my mother's surrogate daughter, working in the cloth shop on, Flammian Way.

2. I am Enslaved Under the New Emperor's Reign

It was about midnight when Oeneus came running down the hallway without a torch. He was out of breath and must have ran all the way from the Inner City Wall. His armor was badly damaged and his Legionnaire's Shield was missing.

“Drusillius! All is lost! Flavius' forces have breached the Inner Wall and are even now moving towards us. The Emperor has retreated to the Palace and the streets are flooded with Flavius' Legions. The Prefect of the Camp has given orders that Aurelius is to be killed before Flavius' troops can arrive to save him!” Oeneus was half out of breath.

“Would it not be better to let him live and use him to bargain for our lives and a way out of Rome?” I asked.

“We are soldier's, Drusillius. Ours is not to question why, ours is to do and die,” he replied.

“Don't give me that crap, Oeneus. If we can make a deal and live, why not?” .

Oeneus drew his sword and said, “You never were a soldier. You're just a weak willed woman! Stand aside, Parvustipes. This is man's work and not for a girl such as you!”

I saw how determined Oeneus was so I moved to one side and held my arms loosely at my sides. Satisfied that I was no danger to him, Oeneus took out the key to the cell that the guard had given him and opened the door to the cell. He threw the door open and only silence greeted him from the darkened cell. The sputtering torch shone feebly in the hall and nothing stirred.

“Fetch me a torch, Drusillius,” Oeneus ordered.

I went to the wall scion and took out the torch, bumping into him as I shoved it into his hand. Suddenly, with Oeneus distracted, Aurelius leaped from the cell grabbing Oeneus by the torch arm and hurling him down the hallway.

“Quick, Drusillius. Your sword and shield,” gasped Aurelius.

It was like being in a dream. I handed him my sword and my shield and fell back against the wall. Aurelius leaped in front of me and prepared to meet Oeneus' charge.

Oeneus got up and snarled, “Traitor! You will die after I have dispatched him to Hades. He is weak from drugs placed in the offal and water he was to drink. Soon he will topple and then my dear, Drusillius, you will die the death of a traitorous woman, so I swear by Jupiter!”

Aurelius smiled at Oeneus and said, “Save your breath for fighting, Oeneus. I will be tougher to beat than you thought. Drusillius fed me from his own supplies and not the offal that you eat. A murderer such as you is not a fit executioner for a Roman Prefect. A woman would have been more suitable than you!”

With that, Oeneus let out a roar and swung at Aurelius who nimbly parried the swing. Aurelius then struck back and Oeneus barely got out of the way as the sword rang on the stones. Back and forth the two men fought while I watched with amaze-

ment like a woman who was being protected in one of my mother's stories. The steel of the swords whistled in the damp underground and the ringing of them striking together sounded like sounds from a potters shop. The two men were covered with sweat and I knew that I would not have been able to keep it up as long as they had. The two moved back and forth down the narrow hallway and then suddenly, it was over. Oeneus had swung too far to his left and had left his right side open. Utilizing his campaign honed instincts, Aurelius deprived him of his life in one fatal swing of my Gladius. With a blood stained sword in one hand and a damaged shield on the other, he looked like the God of War, Mars, approaching me. From far down the hall, many footsteps could be heard approaching us.

"I'm dead, Aurelius. They will now kill me for being in army of the false Caesar whom they are even now casting down. I wish I were not here but safe back home in the cloth shop," I sobbed as I knew death was the only thing left to me.

"I'm sorry, Drusillius. But this is the only way I can save you," said Aurelius.

The next thing I heard was a whosh of air and felt a hard impact on the back of my head. The world began to swirl and blackness descended on my mind. As I lapsed into unconsciousness, I heard the sound of soldier's greeting Aurelius and requesting what to do with me. After that, I heard nothing.

Several hours must have passed because I woke up lying on some dry hay on my back. My head was pounding and my throat was dry, like I had not had a drink in a long while. I felt dizzy so I lay still and kept my eyes closed. In the darkness, I could hear the sound of several people breathing and caught the coy scent of perfume from somewhere to my left. I was totally naked lying there in the dark not knowing what would happen to me next. Sometime later, I must have dozed off.

"Wake up you lion bait! Wake up, Pluto take you!" yelled someone jarring me wide awake.

The morning sun was streaming in through a highly placed window outside of the large cage we were in. The floor was strewn with straw and there were several other people in the cage with me, mostly men. The bars were of good Roman iron and were as thick as my arm. I realized, that this must be one of the pens that Caesar kept his pets in until feeding time at the Forum.

"Okay, separate. Females on the left and males on the right," roared a huge man hideously dressed in studded black leather and wearing a black leather hood.

Silently we separated, the males on the right and the females on the left. I moved to the right with the men and then the cage door opened. In strutted the leather clad man along with two large guards dressed in the uniform of Flavius' Legion.

"Alright, my children," the leather clad man roared out. "I am Otho, master here in the pits. Today, Divine Caesar Falvius has graciously offered to spare your lives and sell you as slaves in the Forum for your crimes against the state. Those of you who are not sold today, will be split equally between the Forum and the galleys. Pray that you are sold and not cast away to the beasts or the sea. The reason why you are being spared is simply that since you all where merely camp followers and did not actively

fight against the Emperor, you are being shown clemency by our Divine Caesar. Do not disappoint him.”

He strutted around huge and boisterous and looked us over. One by one he inspected and questioned each of the women. Two, he spent more time with than the others while a court scribe wrote down what was being said.

I realized, to my horror, that Otho was appraising us for the sale. He was finding out how much we would be worth and was no doubt wanting to bid on some of us himself. I felt deeply ashamed at the thought of being sold, but was curious to see if anyone would bid on me and what I would be worth to someone. It took him half an hour to work through all the women that had been in the false Caesar's camp. Then, he came to the men to appraise us. Some of the men just looked indifferent and only talked after having been beaten. Others showed their contempt for their jailers and were killed by the guards men's swords right there on the spot. It was an hour before he came to me and I was determined to do what the women had done and answer his questions as best I could.

“What is your name, slave?” asked Otho menacingly.

“Drusillius, if it pleases, master,” I replied just as the women had.

“Good, you learn quick. That is a good trait for a slave. It will save you many beatings. Your manhood is rather tiny is it not?” Otho asked as he inspected me head to foot.

“Yes, master,” I answered feeling like a hunk of meat on a platter.

“He is also called Parvustipes,” volunteered one of the other men that I recognized from the camp.

“Thank you, slave. Glaccius, give the slave a reward for the information and a punishment for speaking out of turn,” said Otho not interrupting his inspection of me.

“At once, Otho,” replied one of the guards who gave the man a ladle of water and then punched him in the face with the full force of his fist.

“So, you were called Parvustipes. A very appropriate name, but not a pretty one. I think Drusilla is a better name for you. Go over and join the women,” ordered Otho pointing to the small group of females on the other side of the cage from me.

“Yes, master,” I replied as I reluctantly moved towards the female group.

Suddenly I heard the crack of leather and a painful slash hit my back. I squealed like a stuck pig and ran quickly to the other side.

The guards and Otho were all laughing at the expression on my face and at my headlong flight.

“She'll move faster next time an order is given, won't she. Let's finish our rounds,” Otho laughed.

I felt totally humiliated as I joined the female group. This was worse than the Baths and Otho had even renamed me Drusilla, a girls name, and had referred to me as if I was a female!