

The background of the cover is a classical painting of a woman with long, dark, wavy hair, wearing a white dress with a gold shawl draped over her shoulders. She is looking slightly to the right. The painting is framed by a decorative border with a repeating floral motif in blue and gold. The text is overlaid on the painting.

FAITH L. JUSTICE

BECOMING
THE
TWILIGHT
EMPRESS

A THEODOSIAN WOMEN NOVELLA



BECOMING THE TWILIGHT EMPRESS



Audiobook Supplement

FAITH L. JUSTICE



RAGGEDY MOON BOOKS

BECOMING THE TWILIGHT EMPRESS

A Theodosian Women Novella

*Copyright © 2024 Faith L. Justice
All rights reserved.*

*2024
Raggedy Moon Books
Brooklyn, New York, USA
raggedymoonbooks.com*

*Cover design by Jennifer Quinlan
historicaleditorial.com*

*Paperback ISBN: 978-0-917053-30-6
Hardback: 978-0-917053-38-2
Epub ISBN: 978-0-917053-29-0
AudioBook ISBN: 978-0-917053-35-1
Library of Congress Control Number: 2024900295*

All rights reserved. This book or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without the express written permission of the author and publisher except for brief quotations for use in reviews.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

Supplement Contents

Books by Faith L. Justice 5

Dedication 6

Epigram 7

Theodosian Genealogy Chart 8

Note on 5th Century Rome and Imperial Titles 9

Characters 10

Author's Note 12

Glossary 16

Praise for 20

Acknowledgments 22

About the Author 23

Back cover 25

BOOKS BY FAITH L. JUSTICE

NOVELS

Selene of Alexandria

Sword of the Gladiatrix (Gladiatrix #1)

Becoming the Twilight Empress (Theodosian Women #0.5)

Twilight Empress (Theodosian Women #1)

Dawn Empress (Theodosian Women #2)

Rebel Empress (Theodosian Women #3)

SHORT STORY COLLECTIONS

The Reluctant Groom and Other Historical Stories

Time Again and Other Fantastic Stories

Slow Death and Other Dark Tales

NON-FICTION

Hypatia, Her Life and Times

CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Tokoyo, the Samurai's Daughter (Adventurous Girls #1)

*To my great friends and colleagues in the Circles in the Hair writing group.
Thirty-four years and still going strong.*

*“The decline of Rome was the natural and inevitable effect
of immoderate greatness.”*

Edward Gibbon
The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire

Emperors shown in SMALL CAPS.



NOTE ON 5TH CENTURY ROME AND IMPERIAL TITLES

From AD 286 most Roman emperors ruled with a co-emperor; one taking the Latin-speaking western provinces and the other the Greek-speaking eastern provinces. Only a few ruled singly—among them Constantine the Great and Theodosius I. At the beginning of this story, in 408, Theodosius' younger son Honorius ruled in the West from his court in Ravenna, Italy. In Constantinople, the older son Arcadius had recently died leaving Theodosius' seven-year-old grandson Theodosius II to rule the East with the guidance of a guardian.

Imperial Roman titles evolved over time. The title AUGUSTUS (Latin for "majestic," "the increaser," or "venerable") is the equivalent of the modern "emperor," and was conferred on the first emperor, Octavian (great-nephew and adopted son of Julius Caesar), by the senate in 27 BC. Every emperor after held the title of Augustus, which always followed the family name. The first emperor conferred the title AUGUSTA on his wife, Livia, in his will. Other imperial wives (but not all) earned this supreme title. By the fifth century, sisters and daughters also could be elevated to this status, but only by a sitting Augustus. I use emperor/empress and Augustus/Augusta interchangeably throughout the text.

Octavian took his adoptive father's name, Gaius Julius Caesar, but later dropped the Gaius Julius. CAESAR became the imperial family name and was passed on by adoption. When the Julio-Claudian line died out, subsequent emperors took the name as a sign of status on their accession, adoption, or nomination as heir apparent. By the fifth century, it was the title given to any official heir to the Augustus. It's also the root of the modern titles Kaiser and Czar.

Children of imperial families were usually given the title NOBILISSIMUS/NOBILISSIMA ("Most Noble"—boy/girl). This is the closest equivalent to the modern prince/princess, but not an exact match. The Roman title was usually conferred some years after birth, in anticipation that the child would take on higher office (Caesar or Augustus for a boy, Augusta for a girl). Throughout the text, I use the modern title princess instead of nobilissima, except on formal occasions and in correspondence.

With one exception (Constantinople for modern Istanbul), I chose to use the modern names of cities and the anglicized rather than Latin names of provinces.

CHARACTERS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE/MENTION

(Fictional characters in italics)

Galla Placidia Noblissima—daughter of Theodosius Augustus I (“The Great”) and his second wife Galla; half-sister to Flavius Honorius Augustus

Paulus—maimed Vandal soldier who served in Stilicho’s household

Flavius Stilicho—Supreme army commander in the West, married to Theodosius’ niece Serena, guardian during Honorius’ minority as emperor, and foster father to Placidia

Serena—niece and adopted daughter of Theodosius I, wife of Stilicho, and foster mother to Placidia

Flavius Honorius Augustus—son of Theodosius I and his first wife Flacilla, Co-Emperor of Rome in the West (court located in Ravenna), and half-brother to Placidia

Alaric—General, former Roman soldier and King of the Goths

Olympius—Master of Offices under Honorius, leader of anti-barbarian faction at court

Eucherius—son of Stilicho and Serena, betrothed to Placidia

Maria Augusta—deceased older daughter of Stilicho and Serena, first wife/empress of Honorius

Thermantia Augusta (called Tia)—younger daughter of Stilicho and Serena, second wife/empress of Honorius

Flavius Constantius—General, advisor to Honorius

Heraclian—General to Honorius, later Count of Africa

Manius—Captain of Thermantia’s personal guards

Marta—servants’ cook in the imperial palace and Manius’ love interest, Angelus’ cousin

Angelus—shepherd boy and guide through Ravenna’s marshes, Marta’s cousin

Nepos—second in command of Thermantia’s guards

Silus—one of Thermantia’s guards

Gainus—Goth, former Roman soldier

Priscus Attalus—Prefect of Rome

Theonas—Senator, supporter of Attalus

Lampadius—Senator, leader of anti-barbarian faction in Rome

Laeta—second wife to Gratian Augustus (half-brother to Theodosius' second wife Galla)

Tisamene—Laeta's mother

Marion—Placidia's servant in Rome

Ataulf—General of Gothic Cavalry, former Roman soldier, and brother-in-law to King Alaric

Jovius—Master of Offices under Honorius

Flavius Theodosius Augustus II—Co-emperor of Rome in the East (court located in Constantinople), nephew of Honorius and Placidia



AUTHOR'S NOTE

Becoming the *Twilight Empress* almost didn't happen. Here's the story: I fell in love with the Theodosian women many years ago when I was writing my first book, *Selene of Alexandria*, which featured a fictional student of the historical Hypatia, Lady Philosopher of Alexandria. As I researched the life and times of Hypatia, I kept running across these great women: Placidia, who ruled the failing Roman Empire in the West, Pulcheria, who set the stage for the rise of the Byzantine Empire in the East, and Athenais, a poor pagan scholar who captured the heart of a Most Christian Emperor.

They each had compelling human stories that I wanted to share with my readers. Consequently, *Twilight Empress*, covering Placidia's life from the final Gothic siege of Rome until her death, came out in 2017. *Dawn Empress*, covering Pulcheria's life, came out in 2020 and Athenais' story *Rebel Empress* will be out in 2024. In editing *Twilight Empress*, I decided to shorten the book, and chopped off the initial chapters. Starting Placidia's story with her abduction by the Goths felt right. (Not a spoiler; this happens in the first pages of the novel.) Those early draft chapters covering her escape from Ravenna and hardships during the first two sieges languished in old computer files.

However, those abandoned pages nagged at me. I always wanted to cover that harrowing time when the Goths besieged Rome three times in two years. I felt those challenges shaped Placidia into the formidable young woman she was at the beginning of *Twilight Empress*. The escape from Ravenna is totally surmised. Most historians feel she resided in Rome, but we don't know for

sure. However, she had her reasons for avoiding her brother's court and not returning when she had the chance to leave before any of the Goth sieges. In the absence of facts, it's the novelist's gift to fill in the story with their own fiction. I decided it made a better story to delay her leaving for Rome until after the execution of Stilicho, so she could accompany her ill cousin, the repudiated Empress Thermantia.

In addition, writing *Becoming the Twilight Empress* allowed me to deal with a piece of history that always bothered me. Why would Placidia give her consent to the senate to have her cousin/foster-mother Serena executed for treason during the panic and confusion of the first siege of Rome? The primary sources state that action as a fact. The secondary ones give various theories on how involved Placidia had been in the act: from reluctant verbal consent to a delegation of the Senate (depicted in my story) to her actively petitioning the senate in person and denouncing her foster-mother.

Stewart Irvin Oost in *Galla Placidia Augusta: A Biographical Essay* says of this black deed: "It is possible that Placidia did in fact sincerely believe in the treason both of Stilicho and Serena and was confident that she was acting in an emergency in the best interest of the state. But it is hard to believe that she was convinced the woman who had brought her up was in fact in collusion with Alaric against Rome. *The only explanation* (emphasis mine) must be that Placidia was already so prejudiced against Serena, disliked her so cordially that she could entertain the notion of the reality of her guilt on this occasion and concur in the decree condemning her to death."

Oost believes this is the more charitable interpretation, rejecting the theory that Placidia cold-bloodedly seized the occasion to kill Serena because, "we find no other incident in the admittedly scanty information about her life that would substantiate such a hypothesis about her character and Placidia, at least in later life, was a devout Christian." Other modern historians disagreed and felt Placidia was that bloody-minded.

I think Oost and his fellow historians were too narrow in their thinking. As Oost states, we have scanty information—no diaries, letters, or contemporaneous reports to give us insight into the motivations behind the act. Placidia *could* have hated her foster-mother and wished her dead—it was a violent time and imperial families were not immune to assassinating one another. She *could* have sincerely believed Serena was colluding with the enemy and her execution was an act of public safety. She also could have been so fearful for her own life, given

the mood of the city after her brother refused to help Rome, that she would do anything to divert attention away from herself during the threatened riots and onto another imperial scape-goat—a theory not proposed by the historians.

As an author, I chose to present a motivation I thought just as valid as any of the above. Placidia could have reluctantly gone along with the Senate because the woman who raised her asked her to save herself. Serena was a skilled politician who had successfully maneuvered the imperial courts for two generations. She was acknowledged as the only one who could sooth her uncle Theodosius' violent tempers and she raised her younger cousins Honorius and Placidia after his death. At this time in Rome, her husband and son had been executed for treason, her daughters were dead or dying. Serena could have known her time had come. She didn't want to take Placidia down with her and the vulnerable young princess reluctantly went along with it.

It's as good as any other theory and fits my story better. I wanted to show how Placidia became the tough, capable woman we meet at the beginning of *Twilight Empress*. Serena could have been a significant role model. Since she died relatively early in the story, I used two other imperial women to help Placidia on her journey: her Aunt Laeta and Laeta's mother Lady Tisamene. They both resided in Rome at the time and ancient historians give them credit for assisting the poor during this time of crisis. Also, I needed someone to care for Thermantia, the rejected empress, whom I was surprised to find out survived all the chaos and "died in obscurity" in 415.

There's no direct evidence Laeta and Tisamene had any relationship with Serena, Thermantia, or Placidia. But, given they were all imperial ladies in the same city, it stretches the imagination to think they had no communication or awareness of each other's plights. I like to believe that, in her time of loss and confusion, Placidia had the love and guidance of these experienced older female relatives, ones who could help her accept loss and move onto the path of duty she would assume. Placidia came out of these years stronger, and much less naïve, to take her place in the imperial pantheon of formidable Theodosian Women.

I would love to hear from you about your reactions to the story and characters. You can contact me at my website (faithljustice.com) or leave a comment on my blog.

Finally, I need to ask a favor. I'd love a review of *Becoming the Twilight Empress*. Loved it, hated it—please give me your feedback at your favorite book

review sharing site. No need for a literary critique—just a couple of sentences on what you liked/didn't like and why. Reviews can be tough to come by these days, and having them (or not) can make or break a book. So, I hope you share your opinion with others. If you review on Amazon, scan the QR code below to be taken directly to the review page.

Thanks for reading *Becoming the Twilight Empress*.

Faith L. Justice

Brooklyn, NY

Scan for Amazon review page:





GLOSSARY

agentes in rebus—imperial spy and messenger network controlled by the Master of Offices.

Arian heresy—a nontrinitarian Christian sect that believed Jesus Christ to be the Son of God, created by God the Father, distinct from the Father and therefore subordinate to the Father. Named after Arius (c. AD 250–336), a Christian presbyter in Alexandria, Egypt. Many of the barbarian tribes were converted to Christianity by Arian missionaries under the Arian Emperors Constantius II (337–361) and Valens (364–378). The Council of Nicaea of 325 declared Arius a heretic, but he was exonerated, then again denounced at the Ecumenical First Council of Constantinople of 381.

culus—Latin word for anus, equivalent to today’s epithet “ass-hole” (not considered as offensive as *mentula* or *cunnus*).

cunnus—vulgar Latin word for female vulva, equivalent to today’s epithet “cunt.”

diadem—“band” or “fillet;” originally in Greece, an embroidered white silk ribbon, ending in a knot and two fringed strips often draped over the shoulders, which surrounded the head of the king to denote his authority. Later made of precious metals and decorated with gems. Evolved into the modern crown.

fibula (singular) ***fibulae*** (plural)—an ornamental clasp designed to hold clothing together; usually made of silver or gold but sometimes bronze or other material; used by Greeks, Romans, and Celts.

forum (singular), **fora** (plural)—a rectangular plaza surrounded by important government buildings at the center of the city; the site of triumphal processions and elections; the venue for public speeches, criminal trials, and gladiatorial matches; the nucleus of commercial affairs.

Gaul—a region of Western Europe inhabited by Celtic tribes, encompassing present day France, Luxembourg, Belgium, most of Switzerland, parts of Northern Italy, as well as the parts of the Netherlands and Germany on the west bank of the Rhine. Rome divided it into three parts: Gallia Celtica, Belgica and Aquitania.

Goths—an early Germanic people, possibly originating in southern Sweden; they are mentioned by Roman authors as living in northern Poland in the first century AD; during later centuries they expanded towards the Black Sea, where they replaced the Sarmatians as the dominant power on the Pontic Steppe and launched a series of expeditions against the Roman Empire.

Huns—a nomadic group of people who lived in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia between the first century and the seventh century AD; may have stimulated the Great Migration, a contributing factor in the collapse of the Western Roman Empire. They formed a unified empire under Attila the Hun, who died in 453; their empire broke up the next year.

kithara—seven-stringed instrument of the lyre family.

kohl—black eyeliner originally used by Egyptians and others in the East to protect the eyes from bright sunshine, later as a cosmetic.

magister militum—“Master of the Soldiers;” a top-level military command used in the late Roman Empire, referring to a senior military officer equivalent to a modern war theatre commander.

magister utriusque militia—“Master of both branches of the soldiery;” the highest rank a general can achieve.

mentula (singular)/***mentulae*** (plural)—vulgar Latin word for penis, equivalent to modern epithet “dick” or “prick”

nobilissima puella, nobilissimus puer—"Most Noble Girl/Boy;" title conferred on imperial children by a sitting Augustus before given a higher title.

palla—outermost rectangular woman's mantle/shawl worn over the shoulders and hair; could be as complicated as a toga or as slight as a scarf.

paludamentum—originally a cloak or cape fastened at one shoulder, worn by military commanders. After Augustus, only emperors wore them. As supreme commanders of the Roman army, they were often portrayed wearing it in their statues and on their coinage.

Portus—Rome's primary seaport, built by Emperor Claudius to handle large merchant ships including the grain fleet.

prefect—the chief minister of territories (city, province, etc.) equivalent to mayors in cities and governors in provinces.

scholae—an elite troop of soldiers in the Roman army created by Emperor Constantine the Great to provide personal protection of the emperor and his immediate family.

solidus (singular) ***solidi*** (plural)—a gold coin introduced by Emperor Diocletian in 301 as a replacement for the aureus; entered widespread circulation under Constantine I after 312.

stoa—a classical portico or roofed colonnade.

stola—long, pleated dress, worn over a tunic, generally sleeveless, fastened by clasps at the shoulder called *fibulae*, usually made of fabrics like silk, linen, or wool, worn as a symbol representing a Roman woman's marital status.

Subura—the poorest neighborhood in Rome consisting of tall apartment buildings and situated over a drained swamp between the Roman hills.

Suevi—a large group of related peoples who occupied more than half of Germania and were divided into several distinct tribes under distinct names. At one time, classical ethnography had applied the name "Suevi" to so many Germanic tribes that it appeared as though in the first centuries

A.D. this native name would replace the foreign name “Germans.” In 259/60, a group appears to have been the main element in the formation of a new tribal alliance known as the Alamanni east of the Rhine and south of the Main; they later joined the Vandals and Alans invading Gaul and Spain.

tisane—herbal teas; beverages made from the infusion or decoction of herbs, spices, or other plant material in hot water.

triclinium—a formal dining room in a Roman building used for entertaining guests; could hold multiple couches arranged in a hollow “U” shape; each couch was wide enough to accommodate three diners who reclined on their left side on cushions while household slaves served, and others entertained guests with music, song, or dance.

tunica interior—woman’s tunic (usually with sleeves) worn under a *stola*, frequently longer, so the layers of fabric showed.

vigiles—or **vigiles urbani** (“watchmen of the city”) were the firefighters and police of Rome.

**Placidia continues her adventurous life of power and
intrigue in:**

Twilight Empress: A Novel of Imperial Rome

(Theodosian Women Book #1)

Don't miss this "addictive read" (*Kirkus Reviews*); "filled with romance, political intrigue, and drama that will keep you turning the pages." (*History from a Woman's Perspective*)

Scan the QR code to buy *Twilight Empress* at Amazon.
Available in print, eBook, and audiobook wherever books are sold, or
inquire at your local library.



PRAISE FOR

TWILIGHT EMPRESS (THEODOSIAN WOMEN #1)

“An addictive read...Justice chooses her key moments wisely, weaving a decades-long narrative about Placidia’s layered life as she rises to eventual leadership.” — *Kirkus Reviews*

“*Twilight Empress* is the kind of historical novel that dedicated fans of historical fiction will find satisfying and impressive...It is a rich tapestry of both historical research and vivid imagination.” — *Midwest Book Reviews*

“A truly fascinating combination of recorded history and artistic literary license...is both compelling and addictive.” — *Readers’ Favorite* five-star review

“Solid historical fiction, with full marks for a little-used time period and setting. It totally gets extra points for giving us a female lead character who’s not written about to death.” — *Historical Novel Society Reviews*

“A fast-paced historical novel that is filled with romance, political and courtly intrigue, and drama that will keep you turning the pages. I can’t wait to read the next book about Empress Pulcheria. — *History from a Woman’s Perspective*

DAWN EMPRESS (THEODOSIAN WOMEN #2)

“Justice chronicles, with a skillful blend of historical rigor and dramatic action...a gripping tale of a royal sister’s fraught political machinations. The prose is razor sharp, and the tale is as impressively unsentimental as it is genuinely moving.” — *Kirkus Reviews*

“A deftly written and impressively entertaining historical novel in which the author pays due attention to detail while ably crafting memorable characters and riveting plot twists and turns.” — *Midwest Book Reviews*

“Justice has penned another outstanding novel...Highly recommended.” — *Historical Novel Society Reviews* Critics’ Choice

“The prose is beautiful, sprinkled with vivid descriptions...fast-paced and engaging, one of those novels that will keep fans of historical novels reading through the night.” — *Readers’ Favorite* five-star review

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It has been my pleasure to write this story and bring these characters and this time to life. Among the many people who helped and encouraged me, I want to particularly thank the members of my writers' group *Circles in the Hair*. For more than thirty years, they have been there for me; reading drafts of my stories and novels, providing insightful feedback, and encouraging my dreams. They read several drafts of this book. Additional thanks go to my beta readers who provided invaluable feedback: Eileen Donovan, Laura Eppich, Kate Hornstein, Allison Macias, and Susan Wands. Special and loving thanks go to my husband Gordon Rothman for supporting me in countless ways; and to my daughter Hannah, who grew up sharing me with my writing career and showing no sibling rivalry whatsoever.

No historical fiction acknowledgment would be complete without thanks to the librarians who tirelessly answer questions and find obscure documents. My special thanks go to the New York Public Library—a world class institution. I consulted dozens of books there and hundreds of articles but relied most heavily on the research of Stewart Irvin Oost in his *Galla Placidia Augusta: A Biographical Essay* and Kenneth G. Holum in his *Theodosian Empresses: Women and Imperial Dominion in Late Antiquity*. A bibliography of the most useful works can be downloaded from my website (faithljustice.com).

Although I tried to get it right, no one is perfect. If the reader should find any errors of fact in the book, please know they are my own and not those of my sources. Please get in contact at my website (faithljustice.com) and let me know, so I can change subsequent editions.

Again, thanks to all who helped make this book possible with special thanks to those of you who read it and share it.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

F AITHL. JUSTICE writes award-winning fiction and articles in Brooklyn, New York. Her work appears in such publications as *Salon.com*, *Writer's Digest*, and *The Copperfield Review*. She was Chair of the New York City Chapter of the Historical Novel Society for five years and is still active on their Steering Committee. She is currently an Associate Editor for *Space and Time Magazine*. She co-founded a writers' workshop many more years ago than she cares to admit to. For fun, Faith likes to dig in the dirt—her garden and various archaeological sites. Sample her work, check out her blog, or ask her a question. She loves to hear from readers.

Connect with Faith online:

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/faith-l-justice-53974719/>
X (formerly Twitter @faithljustice): <https://twitter.com/faithljustice>
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/faithljusticeauthor/>
Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/fljusticeauthor/>

Scan the QR code for Faith's website/blog

<https://faithljustice.com>





RAGGEDY MOON BOOKS

raggedymoonbooks.com



In a tumultuous time of violence, betrayal, and ruthless evil, can one charismatic young woman survive the bloodshed?

Ravenna, A.D. 408. Placidia is watching her family fall apart. When her emperor brother accuses their powerful foster father of treason, the naïve imperial princess tries to reason with her sibling to no avail. And after her foster father is lured out of sanctuary and brutally executed, she flees the toxic court to avoid a forced marriage... but to dubious safety.

Braving increasing peril on her journey to Rome, Placidia barely survives impassable swamps, imperial assassins, and bands of barbarians. When the Goths besiege Rome and a starving populace threaten civil disorder, the daughter of Theodosius the Great must navigate fraught politics to become a vigilant leader... or face an early death.

Can she rise above an empire descending into chaos?



Faith L. Justice writes award-winning novels, short stories, and articles in Brooklyn, New York. For fun, Faith likes to dig in the dirt—her garden and various archaeological sites. Sample her stories and books, check out her blog, or ask Faith a question at her website: faithljustice.com.

