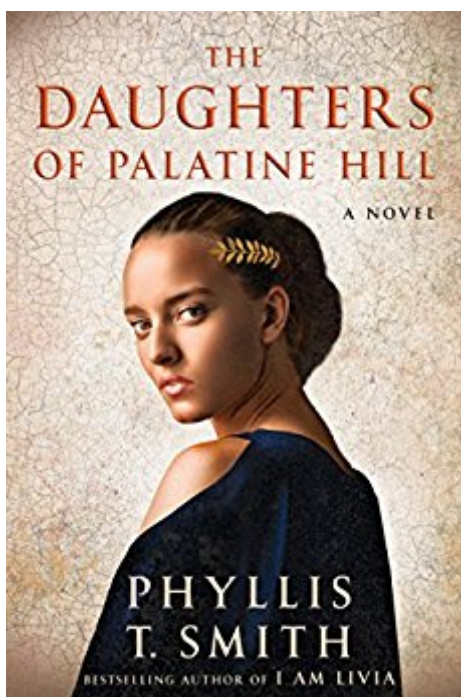


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The Daughters Of Palatine Hill: A Novel



Synopsis

Two years after Emperor Augustus's bloody defeat of Mark Antony and Cleopatra, he triumphantly returns to Rome. To his only child, Julia, he brings an unlikely companion—Selene, the daughter of the conquered Egyptian queen and her lover. Under the watchful eye of Augustus's wife, Livia, Selene struggles to accept her new home among her parents' enemies. Bound together by kinship and spilled blood, these three women—Livia, Selene, and Julia—navigate the dangerous world of Rome's ruling elite, their every move a political strategy, their most intimate decisions in the emperor's hands. Always suppressing their own desires for the good of Rome, each must fulfill her role. For astute Livia, this means unwavering fidelity to her all-powerful husband; for sensual Julia, surrender to an arranged marriage and denial of her craving for love and the pleasures of the flesh; for orphaned Selene, choosing between loyalty to her family's killers and her wish for revenge. Can they survive Rome's deadly intrigues, or will they be swept away by the perilous currents of the world's most powerful empire?

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Customer Reviews

This is the most excited I have been about a novel in a pretty long time. Allow me to explain. The

story is set in Rome, during the time of Caesar Augustus. (I'm swooning already.) What Phyllis T. Smith does with this time period, however, is bring it alive. The book switches between three female characters. We see life through the eyes of Livia, wife of Caesar Augustus, intensely devoted to her husband, with strength and strategy running through every bone in her body. We see life through the eyes of Julia, spoiled daughter of Augustus, who feels that she is a pawn to be tossed around at her father's will for the good of Rome. And we see life through the eyes of Cleopatra Selene, orphan at the hands of Augustus, her own life spared, living under the ever-watchful eyes of her parents' enemies. As the book progressed, I found myself drawn to Livia. The strength that she had to possess to balance all that she balanced, to suffer all that she suffered, to support her husband, the First Citizen of Rome, all while running things smoothly behind-the-scenes. You come to realize as the story progresses, that much of Caesar Augustus' success was owed in part to his wife Livia. I enjoyed reading about her, and found myself wanting to research more about her and her life. She was flawed, imperfect, prideful, passionate and human. The author maintains the belief that Livia was not responsible for the death of Augustus, the belief of which I lean towards as well. So it was refreshing to see Livia portrayed in a positive light. I enjoyed reading about Cleopatra Selene, and seeing her journey to Queen of Mauretania. I cannot imagine living in the home of the man who murdered my father, nor having to show myself devoted to him. She must have been a pretty amazing woman.

This novel is told from the perspectives of three very different women. Julia is the daughter of Emperor Augustus (heir to Julius Caesar), Livia is his wife and Selene is his ward, daughter of the defeated and now deceased Marc Anthony and Cleopatra. All three characters are striving to find their path in the new world of Rome after the civil war and the death of the Republic. For the most part I found this novel to be Julia's story. Her character not only had the most prose but was also the most vivid of the three. I came to feel a strong connection to her and therefore her bias became my own. Considering the two other main characters' opinions often conflicted with Julia's it is quite telling that I sided with her the way I did. I truly felt every heartbreak and pitied every lonely thought that she had. The author states in her author's note that her biggest challenge in writing this novel was to portray her [Julia] as a psychologically comprehensible human being. She absolutely succeeded. Julia's character resonated with me in a way that the others did not and a very strong empathetic response was stirred. I greatly admire the author's character development of Julia. Overall this is not an action-packed novel, rather the focus is upon the three female protagonists and how their lives were affected by the everyday workings of the early Roman

Empire. Augustus is portrayed as the personification of the Empire itself and therefore his whims become lore and his moods shape the lives of those around him. Taking up with Julia as I did meant that I did not like the character of Augustus at all. As a father he is a complete failure, regardless of how capable a ruler he was. Julia feels nothing more than a tool in his hand, used to help shape the Empire into what he wishes it to be.

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