ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

ROMANCE

The Senators Daughter + 320 AD
Jessie Sutherland
Xlibris
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Two Stars (out of Five)

Debut author Jessie Sutherland transports readers back to the world of ancient Rome in 320 AD where, under the rule of the Emperor Constantine, Romans, Christians, and Goths struggle to co-exist in the wake of differing religions and social customs. In this arena of overlapping cultures, Cyriaca, the daughter of Roman senator Flavius, comes to adore the captive Christian gladiator, Joshua. *The Senators Daughter: Rome + 32*0 AD,* chronicles Cyriaca's trials in life and love.

In Cyriaca, Sutherland creates a protagonist who assertively pushes the limits of propriety for a senator's daughter and for a woman in her society. Kind to people of all social classes, she treats wounded slaves in the dungeon and befriends her Jewish maidservant. Her sense of compassion allows her to fall for the Christian Joshua, despite their divergent faiths. She even practices medicine on a lion wounded in the gladiator's ring. In a time when healing was the provenance of men, Cyriaca practices her doctoring skills, most notably when she helps perform an early cesarean section. Cyriaca has an ally in her mother, Silvia, who influences her husband to make decisions to benefit their daughter.

In addition to depicting strong female characters, Sutherland adeptly displays differences between the polytheistic Romans and the monotheistic Christians. The characters all pray to their respective deities, and the author refrains from showing preference for one faith over another. (Indeed, the interfaith tolerance Sutherland writes of could serve as a model of harmony to solve today's clashes among religions.) While some of Cyriaca's actions, as well as the apparent religious tolerance described, sometimes strain credibility, the author successfully evokes the atmosphere of ancient Rome by using specific terms for Roman garments and vehicles.

Unfortunately, there are still many things that jolt the audience out of ancient Rome, including Sutherland's inappropriate use of modern idioms. When Joshua asks Cyriaca to marry him, she responds that she would love "to jump the stick" with him, a variation on the familiar phrase "to jump the broom." Besides anachronistic phrasing, the incorrect use of apostrophes

and capitalization render the text difficult to read. The sex scenes are wildly uneven, veering from sensual kisses to descriptions more suitable to erotica. Simplistic sentences and an overreliance on convenience also make it difficult for the audience to stay interested. Those readers who do remain engaged, however, will find in *The Senators Daughter* a headstrong protagonist and a swoony love story.

Jill Allen