

a novel

DAUGHTER
of the
REBELLION



JAMIE OGLE

Praise for Jamie Ogle

Daughter of the Rebellion is a masterful novel—gritty, heart-wrenching, and deeply hopeful. Jamie Ogle weaves a gripping tale of faith and resistance in the shadow of Rome’s brutal arena, where a captive warrior and a principled healer must risk everything for freedom. With richly drawn characters and unflinching spiritual depth, this story shines with courage, conviction, and the fierce beauty of redemption.

JENELLE HOVDE, author of *No Stone Unturned*

Daughter of the Rebellion captivated me from the first chapter with its striking contrast between the brutalities of a gladiator school and the faithfulness of Christ followers in this fallen world. I was completely immersed in the lives of the imprisoned female gladiators and in the resolve of a prodigal daughter trying to find her way home.

MELANIE DOBSON, award-winning author of *The Lost Story of Via Belle*

[A] captivating historical in an ancient Turkey roiling with religious tension. . . . It’s a winning mix of thrills and heart.

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY on *As Sure as the Sea*

The turbulent Roman Empire comes alive through expert research and vibrant settings, but the journey of the characters transcends the centuries. Breathtaking and deeply inspiring, this is a story readers will hold in their hearts long beyond the last page.

AMANDA BARRATT, Christy Award–winning author of *The Warsaw Sisters*,
on *As Sure as the Sea*

This compelling, richly researched story of sacrifice and healing is definitely one not to be missed.

CONNILYN COSSETTE, Christy Award-winning author, on *As Sure as the Sea*

A terrific read, rich in historical detail. With vividly drawn settings and complex characters, Jamie Ogle brings ancient Rome to life in this immersive and heart-wrenching story about early Christians who sacrificed everything for their faith.

FRANCINE RIVERS, *New York Times* bestselling author, on *Of Love and Treason*

Ogle provides an illuminating peek at the lives of ordinary Romans. The author creates a fully dimensional St. Valentine, as well as feasible supporting characters and settings. A well-plotted story of politics and love set against the drama of the early Church.

HISTORICAL NOVEL SOCIETY on *Of Love and Treason*

What a triumph! *Of Love and Treason* is for anyone who's ever wondered why bad things happen to good people. A tender love story and boost to faith!

MESU ANDREWS, author of *Noble*

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Tyndale House Publishers
Carol Stream, Illinois

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Daughter of the Rebellion

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Cover design by Eva M. Winters

Interior design by Brandi Davis

Edited by Sarah Mason Rische

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

ISBN 979-8-4005-0661-1

Printed in the United States of America

32 31 30 29 28 27 26
7 6 5 4 3 2 1

For all those praying that God will make a way when it feels impossible.

And for Kim Smith: for swooping into that empty seat across the lunch table at co-op, completely unaware that I was panic-praying about another book idea, and saying, “Okay, so you have GOT to hear the story of Telemachus . . .” This one’s for you.

“Stand like a beaten anvil. It is the part of a good athlete to be bruised and to prevail.”

IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH

“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”

2 TIMOTHY 4:7

Prologue

VISIGOTH REBEL CAMP
OUTSKIRTS OF POLLENTIA, ITALY
6 APRILIS, AD 402

The morning was quiet. Too quiet.

Adel shoved another stick into the coals beneath the cauldron of day-old soup, one eye on the line of trees separating the sleeping Visigoth camp from the river. Dawn had barely broken, setting the world in shades of gray and illuminating thin, shifting bands of mist across the grasses.

She pushed to her feet and brushed off the dirtied front of her blue tunic, the skirt slit to her thighs on either side to reveal green trousers beneath. Her sword bumped against her knees, its weight both a comfort and a mockery. She and the other women guarding the camp and supplies were trained and armed to the teeth—but they never got a chance to use their training. Not against the Romans, anyway. The Visigoth warriors were too efficient, leaving in the morning and returning by evening, laden with overdue “payments” from the emperor. At least, that’s how her *atta*—her father—justified pillaging Roman towns.

The emperor will keep his word and pay our men for fighting his battles, or we will take what we are owed by force. Until he deigns to speak with us, it is the only way.

Emperor Honorius could hide in his swamp city of Ravenna as long as he wanted. But he would hear of his Visigoth mercenaries' plight. Of their demand for justice. No more would he call them to the front lines of his battles, use them as fodder, and let their families starve. If he would not listen to their pleas for an audience, then let him hear the sounds of his cities burning.

Visigoth scouts had sent word that the Roman army was approaching, racing toward their camp, and led by the famed general Stilicho. That they would be here any day.

Closing her eyes, Adel cocked her head, listening. The camp was not all asleep, she knew. Scouts hunched in the grasses at the river's edge, keeping watch. There was no need for the ball of snakes roiling in her belly.

A rustle in the grass behind her betrayed a heavy tread. Her hand went to her sword hilt.

Another step whispered closer.

She drew the blade and whirled, the jarring clack of steel on wood reverberating up her arm as her sword met a battered staff.

"A blessed Easter to you too, Adalgard."

A copper shaft of light burst over the horizon, setting the silhouette of the white-clad giant in an angelic blaze.

The corner of Adel's lips twitched. "Strike first, bless later, I always say."

The giant chuckled, shifting his staff to break the contact and stepping to the side where his robe came into view, the simple cut and undyed fabric marking him as a servant of the church. Adel was glad that Telemachus had persisted in accompanying Alaric's war band, despite having equal success in dislodging their staunch Arian beliefs as he had in persuading them to pursue peace. He was tolerated for his kindness and prayers, but his beliefs had placed him at the edge of camp society. Adel's own presence at her father's table had been strained for months now, and the two outcasts had become unlikely friends.

“You are taking some of my lessons to heart, I see.”

She nodded, and recited, “Be faster than your opponent. One step ahead is good; three are better.”

The monk smiled and raised an eyebrow, chiding her with a sort of fatherly pride that her *atta* had once shown. “If only you would take to heart the other lessons.”

Adel sheathed the sword and turned to face the fire once more. His declaration that Jesus was God in flesh who’d died on her behalf, had been far easier to accept than the idea that her sins had been washed clean, were no longer remembered. Perhaps she could believe it for a little while, until she saw the pained wrinkle in her *atta*’s brow every time he looked at her. The stilted words hanging between them like a city wall that could not be breached. Some things could not be forgotten.

The slight breeze carried woodsmoke and the musty scent of earth that filled her nose and carried with it the sharp memory of home. The feel of her mother’s arms wrapped around her and the profusion of herbs and flowers that nearly disguised their hut. The ache of longing cut so deeply it hurt to breathe. And yet, there was no future for her at home. No security for an unwed woman in a village whose men had all gone to battle. And when she’d tried to procure security for herself—

“You are not the sum of your mistakes, Adel.”

She tried to smooth away whatever expression Telemachus had read, his words threatening the dam of her emotions. If only they were true. She might believe him in another time, another place. But not here. Not now. To join the army as a war-daughter was nothing to be ashamed of. Some might say it was her duty as eldest daughter. And yet, Adel knew it was the wagging tongues in the village and not Visigoth pride that had been the reason she’d agreed to follow her *atta* and uncles to war. For months she had done her duty, cooking meals, stitching wounds, washing clothes, guarding wagons of supplies and plunder, and listening around the fires as the men boasted of their exploits in the day’s raids.

She could only strive to work hard as a war-daughter, care for her family, and perhaps, in time, her father might look at her again with pride instead of pain. And if she could not have that, then perhaps she could escape it all and earn wealth and security of her own.

“I could fight with the men.” Adel braced one boot on a dead branch and wrenched one of the ends, snapping it. “You know I could.” She tossed the broken piece into the fire.

“I know.” Telemachus sighed, as if she’d failed his lessons yet again. “You are very skilled. But that is not—”

“The Amazons fought.”

“Yes. And those women have disappeared into myth and legend.” He fiddled with the leather cord tethering a simple wooden cross around his neck. “A sword and battlefield will never fill that chasm inside.”

She raised a brow. “But fame and fortune might.”

Something changed in his demeanor, sent shadows across his face. “Adel.”

She scowled and threw the rest of the stick onto the fire. Was it selfish to want more than a hungry life chained to crocks of mother dough and looks of derision? To want bread on the table instead of dust? A man in the field instead of one in the ground? To for once, be worthy of the stories told around the evening fires, instead of those muttered between close heads as she passed by?

“You remain in the camp not for lack of skill, but because you are worth fighting for. I wish you would trust me and your father.”

His words made her want to both laugh and cry. If only those words could be true too.

The fire crackled and snapped, thundered and—

Her head jerked up, gaze darting first toward Telemachus and then toward the line of trees separating the river from the camp. That was no fire. No storm, either.

Broad-shouldered bodies broke through the underbrush. Not their own scouts clad in blue and green tunics, or even the small troop of spies sent out several days before. The men rushing from the river and across the grassy meadow were dressed in scarlet, brass, and leather, brandishing gleaming short swords.

General Stilicho, and the emperor's army.

Telemachus gripped her arm as the alarm horn roused the camp. "Get behind me. You must get away."

She shrugged his hand off. Lightning raced through her veins, sending quivering energy to her limbs. "You have no weapon."

"They will not hurt a man of God."

There was certainty in his voice, though Adel felt none of it. These were Romans. Liars. Manipulators. Not men of honor.

Visigoth warriors burst through tent flaps, half dressed and fully armed. Camp women rallied in an instant, the shrill ring of unsheathed blades rising to meet the enemy. She glimpsed her cousin Berit among them, only sixteen. She should not be fighting, should not be stretching an arrow on a bowstring.

Adel's dampened fingers slid over the hilt of her sword, tightening around it with a grip that steadied her limbs. She drew it and lowered into a ready stance that seemed to calm her racing heart as the first wave of Roman legionaries swept over the Visigoth camp.

If this be her story, then let it be one for the fires.

I

NINETEEN MONTHS LATER
CITY OF ROME
18 NOVEMBER, AD 403

Adel gritted her teeth and flung her shield up in time to block the barrage of swings. The clash of sword on *scutum* echoed above the gasps and cheers of the dinner-party crowd clustered around the makeshift ring created in the courtyard of the lavish *domus*. Lamp smoke, roasted meat, and the tang of wine spiced what little air she could breathe through her helmet.

Adel took a step back, her bare toes spreading to grip the cool marble as she prepared to launch the counterattack that would force her scarlet-clad opponent back across the ring and—if all went to plan—to her knees.

From all around, discordant chants of, “Amazon! Am-a-zon!” mingled with the boos and hisses for her opponent, Vesuvia.

Her people had never told stories of mock battles and dulled swords, nor revered warriors who fought but never died. But then, her people were not Romans.

Adel’s hot breaths steamed over her face, trapped inside the brass-plated helmet strapped to her head. Sweat dribbled down her temple in

a boiling stream, and she struggled to quell the panic of slow suffocation. The only ventilation came through the small eyeholes covered in gilded mesh. They were effective barriers—letting in neither sword nor fresh air. She tilted her head, angling Vesuvia into view in time to emerge from behind her shield and block the next swing with her *gladius*.

Vesuvia's expression was hidden by her own silver helmet, fashioned in the likeness of a moth. Scarlet plumes rose above each ear and metal screens bulged over her eyes. She was clad in a fiery red loincloth and matching breastband partially hidden by the small breastplate that only covered the top of her chest, her costume mimicking the destructive mountain of fire. Though why Adel, outfitted as a legendary Amazon warrior woman, would be fighting a fire mountain instead of a Greek, she didn't know. She knew from experience, however, that no true warrior woman would go to battle with a bare stomach and a single leg greave. No, that stupidity was for the leering crowd of men gathered around them now, erupting in unveiled suggestions and coarse laughter.

Adel steeled herself against it. Refused to let the sharpened barbs needle through the armor of her heart. Their words were nothing to her. Actions were everything. She took one more step back. Her costume, polished leather and lichen-green fabric, brushed the back of her thigh as she sank to a ready stance, preparing to launch the series of strikes that would force Vesuvia back across the ring. She'd trained for this. Practiced long hours of sword drills and footwork. Her handler had prepared her well. While Vesuvia struck fast, Adel was both quick and strong. Her opponent would tire after this next series of moves, and then Adel would shine. It was how she'd earned her name, her place, the long list of wealthy patrons who paid to have her fight at their dinner parties. Earned coin by precious coin to save or spend on whatever her heart desired. It was freedom. Security. Gained by her own two hands.

This party would pay well. And not a moment too soon. She'd need a new tunic to meet with—

A hand gripped her upper thigh from behind, sliding upward, fingers digging into her skin. Laughter erupted. Her focus slipped as fury rolled through her. *How dare—*

She swung her shield backward, slamming it against whoever had grabbed her. A torrent of curses against Mars and Jupiter streamed behind her as Vesuvia pounced with a battering of quick blows that sent her reeling.

Marble tile slammed into Adel's knees. Her shield arm went numb. Through the eyeholes in her helmet she saw Vesuvia step backward, her sword swinging above her head in . . . victory? The edge of the gladius gleamed as red as the feathers in her helmet.

Red?

The room dropped into a ringing silence. Adel's gladius clattered against floor tiles laid in a basketweave pattern that reminded her of the war-daughters' hair, plaited for the Easter celebration and woven with flowers. A distant memory of laughter spun in her head, shattered all at once by the warning cry of a Roman trumpet. Shouts, screams, pounding feet. A searing in her chest wrenched the air from her lungs.

In an instant, her senses roared back into full volume—heat, pain, the echoing bellows of the watching crowd who seemed as shocked as she was.

The Amazon never lost.

Breathe. She couldn't breathe. Her mouth gaped. She reached up and clawed at the strap on her helmet, her fingers stiff and clumsy. She needed air.

"Hold still." Hands gripped her underarms, holding her steady, as still others worked at her helmet and shield straps. She fought against the hold, nausea swirling along with the faces of the crowd pressing closer. She just needed a little air, and she'd be fine. The helmet lifted away and coolness washed over her sweat-drenched hair and neck. She sucked in a deep breath and lurched forward, her fingers closing around the hilt of her gladius. A hand landed over hers, stilling her.

“You’re done.” A graveled voice bit through the fog, words settling in Adel’s stomach with sickening clarity as she looked up to see a *magister* from one of the rival gladiator schools push through the crowd to grip Vesuvia’s arm and raise it high in victory.

The air felt struck from Adel’s lungs again. *Idiot. Idiot.* Shame and anger coiled in her chest. Men were forever doing stupid things in the closeness of dinner party spectacles—as if highly trained women hired to fight for entertainment could be used for other things as well. How could she have let one grabbing brute throw her focus?

An angry voice rose from the crowd. “This is *not* what I paid for!”

“It was his fault,” someone else shouted. “He grabbed the Amazon.”

The sounds seemed to fade in and out, edges of her vision blurring around the sight of a victorious Vesuvia being swallowed by the crowd. She’d lost.

A chill replaced the fury of a moment ago, carrying fear with it. Had she brought shame on the Ludus Gallicus as she’d shamed everything else she’d loved?

“Remove the shield.” That same low voice from earlier was closer, familiar. “I’ve got to get to her arm.” One of the *medici* from her ludus leaned forward, blocking her line of sight. The old one with sagging jowls. Sergius something or other. She’d never bothered to remember.

“What’s your name?” he barked.

She shut her eyes, teeth grinding against the pain roaring up her shoulder with fiery claws. “Do you not know?”

“Now isn’t the time for impudence.” His words slurred slightly, breath heavy with spiced wine.

“How dare you interfere with a fight!”

Pain or not, Adel would recognize the voice of her magister anywhere—though Ignacio was usually shouting at her, rather than a spectator.

A strange voice laughed. “Oh, come off it, trainer. It’s not like this is a real fight. They’re only women.”

Sergius's fingers bit into her good arm, and a good thing too, or she might have leaped up and showed the brute what a woman could do in a real fight. Not a staged one like this had been.

"Hold still."

Adel bit back a growl as Sergius peeled her skin from the bone—or perhaps he'd only wrapped a cloth over the wound. She couldn't bring herself to look at it.

She'd lost. The weight of it slammed into her again.

"Drink this."

A cup banged against her teeth, and she gulped wine mixed with something bitter.

"Get her up," Sergius ordered. "Take her out."

Hands slid beneath her arms and tightened, hauling Adel to her feet. Her head whirled and her stomach heaved.

Sergius scooped up his bag and stood by as one of her guards looped an arm around her waist. She pushed him away, gritting her teeth.

"I can walk. Let me walk. I am fine." She lifted her chin. *Only women*. Even if her legs had been struck off, these Roman pigs would not see her carried out.

The guard withdrew his arm, though he hovered close. Adel elbowed him back. "I can do it."

With a nod, the guard stepped in front of her and barked, "Make way." He shoved a path through the gaping crowd as Ignacio shouted behind them about interference, and the lady of the domus shrieked that she'd been promised there would be no blood on her floors.

Evening air washed over Adel as they rushed through the front garden toward the gate, the coolness heavy with the scents of cedar and stone pine. Adel's heart had taken up residence in her arm, throbbing with each beat, every footstep. Her gut heaved again and this time she pitched toward the edge of the path, dropping to her knees to empty her stomach beside a bed of scarlet geraniums. The flowers drew her eye,

balls of bright flame against the dark foliage. Her breath hitched. Were they truly so bright? Or did they only seem so against the darkness?

“Come on.” The guard’s hands tucked into her armpits again.

As he hauled her to her feet, Adel shoved her fingers into the flowers, tightening around several spear-shaped seed pods. They snapped free in her grip, and she kept her fist balled around them as the guard drew her back to the path and to the gate while Sergius marched ahead—on rather unsteady feet. “Is the litter still outside?” he slurred.

“Should be,” the guard answered.

A wide-eyed servant stationed at the gate swung it open to reveal at least a dozen sedan chairs waiting in the street, surrounded by crowds of litter-bearers and attendants.

Adel’s knees wobbled as her guardians urged her toward the nondescript litter hung with plain brown curtains. She’d never ridden in it before. A ride back to the Ludus Gallicus in the chair meant injury. Failure.

She shook her head. “I can walk. I do not need the litter.” Something hot pulsed down her arm. Dripped from her fingers. Adel dared her first look.

Even in the dimness of evening she could see the bandage was soaked with blood. Running down her arm. Streaking her bare leg and dotting the short skirt of her green costume.

“I am . . . fine.”

“Now isn’t the time to be stubborn.” Sergius elbowed back the curtain, and the guard twisted her inside, pushing her down on the wooden seat. He backed out to allow a view of the medicus, crouching on the ground where he dug through his bag.

“Drink this. You wasted the first dose in the garden.” He pushed a bottle to her lips with a bruising force.

Adel swallowed the bitter liquid, gagging as Sergius tucked the bottle back in his bag and drew out a bandage.

“I lost.” She stared over his bent head at the domus gate where Vesuvia and her handler had yet to emerge. They wouldn’t be coming out any time soon. Vesuvia would be paraded around the party, receiving coins and gifts from adoring fans. She would feast at the table with the hosts, eating far better fare than they served at the ludus. Adel knew this because in the past, it had always been her.

“A stupid mistake.” Sergius wrapped another band of cloth tightly around her bicep. “You best pray the gods show mercy or you may never fight again.”

His words struck fear to her core. Not fight again? It was incomprehensible. The only way to stop fighting forever was to prove herself worthy and earn a place among the *magistri*—or die trying. To be unable to even try . . . That offered a fate worse than death. She tried to respond, to argue that she had to fight, that there was no other option for her, but her mouth felt odd and heavy, words slurring.

He tied a knot in the bandage, tightening it with a tug that sent a lightning bolt of pain through her arm. She swung without thinking, her fist meeting his jaw in a blow that sent him sprawling in the street.

In an instant, one of the guards ducked inside the curtain, gripping her ankles and locking them into the shackles mounted to the litter. As if that would keep her fists contained.

“He’s trying to help you,” he growled.

Sergius spat and cursed, holding his jaw. “Hades take you, barbarian,” he muttered, glowering at her as the other guard pulled him to his feet. “You will pay for this.”