

AD 450. Attila the Hun conquers his way across Europe and threatens the Roman Empire. Torn between duty and passion, Arria Felix, a Roman senator's daughter, must choose between her duty to Rome or her forbidden love-Garic, a barbarian noble, as they fight together to save the empire and stop Attila.

On The Edge Of Sunrise

by Cynthia Ripley Miller

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On the Edge of Sunrise

BOOK ONE OF THE LONG-HAIR SAGA

The background of the cover is a detailed illustration of a medieval landscape at sunrise. In the foreground, two riders on horseback are silhouetted against the bright, hazy light of the rising sun. The middle ground features a large, stone-walled castle or manor house with several towers and crenellations. The landscape is filled with green fields, scattered trees, and a few smaller buildings. The sky is a mix of warm orange and yellow tones, with soft clouds and a bright sun partially obscured by the horizon.

CYNTHIA RIPLEY MILLER

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First Edition

EARLY PRAISE FOR

ON THE EDGE OF SUNRISE

“*On the Edge of Sunrise* is a compelling epic, sure to appeal to fans of historical fiction. Forbidden love, a turbulent time period, and world-changing events combine to produce a real page-turner.”

-India Edghill, author of *Queenmaker*,
Wisdom's Daughter, and *Delilah*.

“*On the Edge of Sunrise* is a passionate and intriguing take on the often overlooked clash of three brutal and powerful empires: the Romans, Franks, and Huns. A Compelling read!”

-Stephanie Thornton, author of
The Secret History and *The Tiger Queens*

“Cynthia Ripley Miller chooses A.D. 451 as the year of her romantic historical novel. Perhaps a fifth century recognizable name to readers will be Attila the Hun, who has invaded Gaul (France.) Roman commander Aetius enlists Arria, a Roman senator's feisty daughter, as a secret courier with a message to Attila, but she becomes a political hostage. A developing romance between Arria and Garic, an elite Frank warrior, entails avoiding her forced marriage to repugnant Tribune Drusus, Garic's attempt to rescue her, and his injuries by a vengeful witch and those suffered in the battle against Attila. Readers will be absorbed by a setting of barbarian Gaul and the constancy of Arria's and Garic's destined love amid the strife of a dying Roman Empire.”

-Albert Noyer, author of
The Getorius and Arcadia Mysteries

“From cover to cover a gripping read – in all senses of the word! Grips your interest and imagination, your held breath and your pounding heart! A thumping good novel!”

-Helen Hollick USA Today bestselling
author of *The Sea Witch Voyages*

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Prima Lux: First Light

GERMANIA: Month of Junius, A.D. 448

Arria no longer possessed the strength to turn the bodies. Fighting nausea, she covered her mouth with the fold of her dress and staggered through the tangled corpses. Slaughtered men stretched across the battlefield of red-stained grass; their blood-matted hair clung to dented helmets. Fixed, empty eyes stared at the blinding sun while flies claimed the banquet before them. *He is here*, she thought and steeled herself. Wounded or dead, she would find him and have him placed on his warrior's shield.

Ahead, a Roman soldier slumped against a dead horse, a spear stuck in his chest. *Is it Marcian?* No. Relieved, Arria wiped the tears from her eyes and whispered a prayer for her husband. A barbarian slave yanked at his dead master's boots, his blond plaits swinging with each tug. Arria stepped past, but kept the bandit in her sight. A horse snorted behind her, diverting her attention. Marcus Furius Severus, her husband's comrade-in-arms, appeared silhouetted by the burning sun.

"Come, Arria. My men and I will find Marcian. I promise you. No barbarian in all Germania and on this broken battlefield will keep Roman legionaries from finding our wounded, dead or... dying."

Arria brushed a damp curl behind her ear. "I cannot stop. My husband lies waiting for me." She pushed forward, tears welling in her eyes. "He is my life, Severus. He lives."

A sudden reflection skimmed the mosaic of corpses and caught Arria's attention. She wove her way toward a glittering helmet. A bright yellow plume matted with blood jutted from a tangle of bodies fallen on a lifeless horse. Beneath the shiny metal, a familiar shock of brown hair poked outward, wet and limp. Arria scrambled across bent and broken shields and dead men, toward the silver glow.

Severus slid from his mount and caught her arm. "Lucius Valerius Marcian led the VIII Augusta Equites. We rode side by side. I have the strength to free him."

Arria met his gaze and nodded. Severus heaved several dead Germans one by one to the side. The gap revealed the Roman soldier's back. Partially trapped beneath the horse, he slumped over its neck, his face buried in the shiny black mane. "It's Apollo," she gasped, "Marcian's horse."

Severus dragged the limp soldier onto his back.

"Husband," Arria groaned and rushed to his side. Gently, she lifted the helmet from his head and pressed her fingers beneath his jaw. Severus

crouched beside Arria and watched. Oblivious to the blood pooled below his sternum, she laid her head on his chest. "He lives. Give me water!"

Severus bolted toward his horse.

"My love, I will help you. Stay with me," Arria implored.

Marcian's breath grew deep and fast. His eyelids fluttered open.

Arria caressed his brow and fought her fear. His eyes, so brown, glistened. "We will bring you to safety. Be strong."

Severus returned and knelt beside Marcian. He held a water pouch to his lips.

Marcian took several gulps then turned away.

"I will carry you to the physicians," Severus said.

"No time," Marcian rasped and clutched Arria's hand. "I love you. If heaven is kind, I will watch ..." he coughed and a red line trickled from the corner of his mouth, "over ... you."

Arria dabbed away the blood with her fingers. "You will live."

Marcian reached for her cheek, but his hand melted to his side, his gaze fading.

A tender breeze caressed Arria's face. She sensed his spirit rising like ashes from a dying fire. Marcian's eyes fixed skyward. Arria grasped his shoulders and her body shook. "My dearest," she sobbed and buried her face in his neck. "Don't go."

Severus tore her away.

"No!" Arria cried. Breaking from his grip, she returned to Marcian's side. Her fingers floated over his curls and his softened brow. She gently closed his eyes. Then one last time, she cradled his face and kissed his warm lips.

PROVINCE OF TUSCIA, ITALIA: Month of Julius, A.D. 450

"Lovely? Why do you not sleep?" Senator Quintus Arrius Felix stood beside his daughter in his villa's garden retreat, the moon a silent observer. "Does the battlefield and Marcian's death still haunt you?"

Arria turned to greet her father's concern and nodded. The night almost gone, the torches burned softer, casting a glow on his kind features.

"You and Marcian lived your lives undivided. When duty brought him to Germania, you followed. These dreams may disconcert, but do not despair. He rests peacefully."

Tiny beads of perspiration covered Arria's brow. She took a deep breath, wiped her forehead and knelt, dipping her hand into the marble fountain. Cool water welcomed her, and she quenched her thirst. Unbound, her hair fell in dark brown waves about her shoulders and her sleeping robe

clung to her body. Sitting on the garden bench, she rested her palms on its edge and gazed at the stars.

Her father sat beside her and wrapped his arm around her shoulders. “These dreams will ebb or one day comfort. Your mother has been gone almost twelve years; and yet, there are times when we meet in the realm guarded by sleep.”

Arria clutched the cross hanging from her neck. Nothing could bring her husband back from the dead.

“Now, Lovely, you must rest. Tomorrow is your birthday, a time of celebration and perhaps, some thought to a new beginning, a betrothal.”

Arria sighed. “I will consider your wish Father. Return to your bed. Allow me just a few more moments alone.”

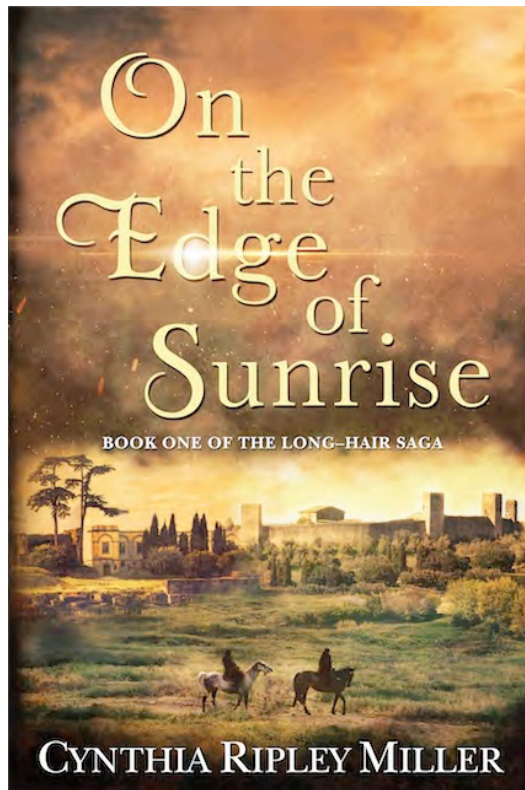
Her father rose, but paused. “Do you still desire to represent me in Gaul as Rome’s envoy?”

“Your health will not permit your travel, and I seek a purpose.”

He bent and kissed her forehead.

Arria fondly watched as her father walked the path to his chamber. In an hour’s time, she would be twenty-two. Perfume from the roses along the passage mingled with the night and tangled her in an invisible web. Tears spilled down her cheeks and she covered her face with her hands. *Another sunrise without you, my love.*





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