

Faustina Junior as seen by Marcus Aurelius

Although it has been almost five years since the last time I set eyes on her, I remember her like it was yesterday. Her elegance and motherly figure were the true marks of an empress. Her appearance and love earned her the name of *mater castrorum*, the mother of the camps, from our soldiers. Truer she was the Mother of the Country.

From the time of her birth on February 16, 130, she was destined to be in a place of power. Since she was born to the great emperor Antoninus Pius and Annia Galeria Faustina the Elder, she was to be wed to a man of greatness. She was the only one of the four children born to her beloved parents to survive past childhood. Her great-uncle, a great man in his own right, the emperor Hadrian, had arranged for her to marry Lucius Verus, my future co-emperor and son of his adopted son. Unfortunately Lucius Verus' father died before the wedding and this led to an opening for emperor. Hadrian adopted Antoninus Pius, Lucius Verus, and me, and pledged Faustina to me. The day her father died in 151 was the day that Verus and I took the highest seat in Rome. It was also the day that she, like her mother, was named Augusta, Empress of Rome.

May 13, 145, was one of the best days in my life for it was the day we were married. I was her maternal cousin, and she was my love. Not one day of our 30 years together did my feelings for her ever grow thin. Together we had thirteen children, two of whom rose to imperial power. Our son, Commodus, will most likely succeed me. His twin Antoninus however died at the age of four. His elder sister of eleven years, our daughter Lucilla, married Verus, the former fiancé of her mother.

Mother of the Camps, they called her. There was never a more fitting title. For years she traveled on campaigns with me, making a home where there could never be one. A military camp is no place for an empress, but nevertheless her unwavering will to come on my conquests could not be denied. Many times we fought the Germans, and all those times she accompanied me. She earned her nickname on one such occasion with the Germans. It was a very cold day; the snow was falling so hard that it was difficult to see twenty feet ahead. We had just been defeated but somehow Faustina was able to go through the camp rallying the men. Battle cries ran through the camp like never before. They were so loud that it probably shook more snow from the sky, so loud that the enemy could hear them across the Danube. After that she went to the field hospital. Just her presence raised the wounded men's spirits twofold. Her beauty was all they needed to remember their lost loves back in the city. Her motherly looks of concern and grief reminded them of the women that gave birth to and nurtured them in times of sickness or injury. By the end of the day the soldiers, both injured and well, were shouting chants of Augusta and Rome. At the next battle we trounced the enemy.

She did her daily rounds of checking the sick every day while on the endless campaigns. She brightened all their spirits and reminded them of all the good that would await them when they returned home after the battles. Her overall attitude raised spirits everywhere. Although she always lived a life of dignity and respect, people continued to say very untrue things about her. These things ranged from infidelity to assisting in overthrowing me.

For some extremely absurd reason, she was accused of not being faithful to me on numerous occasions. I remember the first. It was probably the first time she didn't come with me on a campaign in Cappadocia. A messenger arrived very early in the morning.

He said that my wife had been caught with another man and that I should return to Rome at once. When I returned, she was under house arrest by order of the Senate. Infuriated I went to the Curia demanding an answer. The senators said she had done this many times and now it had to end. They said she should be executed with my permission. Of course I said they were insane and that my wife would never do such things because we were faithful to each other. I returned home and we remained together to the end.

This happened many times. The people of Rome always had a suspicious attitude when she was around. They said she had been caught numerous times even with sailors and gladiators. However these accusations were not the most absurd to come against her.

Avidius Cassius was one of my top generals. He controlled the eastern provinces. In 166 he revolted against me claiming that he was the emperor. If not for the loyalty of Marcus Verus, he might have gained control. After the revolt was put down, senators and citizens discussed whether she had encouraged him to oust me from power. Again I said no for they had no case against my wife. My wife would never do such things as previous empresses had done. They had been immoral people who suffered for not living better lives.

Faustina died in the cold winter of 175 in a military camp in Halala. Halala was in the Taurus Mountains in Cappadocia. I think her death had to do with me. For so many years she traveled through harsh conditions with me, through extremely cold winters, through hot deserts. How many times she suffered diseases that she never would have gotten if she had stayed in Rome. She must have become very weak after all our travels.

It was in the early winter morning. She was taking her customary morning ride through the countryside. Most days she rode fast, but on this day, they said, she took the ride at a leisurely pace. Suddenly her horse went mad, bucking and galloping all around the field. Her escorts were unable to keep up with her and her wild horse. They said she was hanging onto the horse with all her might but she was not strong enough to hold on until help could get there. She was flung off the horse like I would throw a rock. They said she went head first into the ground. That was the last time she was awake.

I was in Rome at the time. When I heard the news, I grieved for her endlessly. Her body was returned to her birthplace. She was such an influence on my life that I put a statue of her in the Temple of Venus to remind people of her beauty. I had the most beautiful coins ever made with her face on them. All were struck perfectly; otherwise they were thrown out. Only perfection could represent her. Her body might not live for ten thousand years, but her beauty on coins will. In her honor, I renamed Halala, Faustinopolis. Finally I opened charities for orphaned girls in her name. I called them Girls of Faustina.

She was the Mother of the Camps, but also an inspiration to me and others. Her gracefulness and love will be unmatched for ten thousand years. The memory of her will live on for eternity.