



# THE LADY

by Lucia Cox

THE LADY:

'Make sure you come, to make the day more enjoyable for me...'  
There. Oh, hello! You've just caught me finishing my invitations to the party we're having next month. My best friend Sulpicia lives so far away and I haven't seen her in such a long time.

Where are my manners? My name is Claudia and I'm twenty-one. Welcome to the garden of my big and beautiful home in Noviomagus, or Chichester as you might know it.

My husband Aelius and I are descended from the Britons – my father was an important member of the Iceni tribe I'll have you know and fought against the Romans at the time of Boudicca.

But...well, times have changed...and Aelius has just been appointed the town magistrate, which is a terribly important job. I suppose that makes us almost Romans now! And, because Aelius is a bit of a show off, we're going to celebrate in the Roman way. By having a party in the house! He's invited everyone who's anyone and that means boring old men and women so I want my best friend in the whole wide world to come and have fun with me.

The party will be a chance for Aelius to show off our new home. He's modelled it on Fishbourne Palace. Fishbourne? Don't tell me you haven't heard of Fishbourne? It's the most beautiful palace – built in the Roman style of course. I hate to admit how beautiful it is because deep down I'm still a Briton really and there's a part of me that is a little bit angry about the Romans taking over the way they have... whatever Aelius thinks!



|

After Aelius got his new magistrate's job he took me up to the capital – Londinium – said he'd need to get some new clothes, Roman clothes, so that he'd look the part. What a sight the city was! The buildings...the people...the noise! Many of the women had painted their faces white – they do it using chalk and cow fat – and apparently it's very fashionable right now. And oh, the arena! The arena was so exciting! There were acrobats and wrestlers...and, of course, the star attraction, Columbus the gladiator! We've sent him an invite to the party and if he comes, Sulpicia will faint! She is such a fan. Well, secretly, so am I.

When we came back Aelius had everything he needed: an expensive new *toga* to wear for the party and plenty of Roman ornaments to dot around the house. So, the party. There is so much to be done! I've got a list somewhere. Now, where is it..? Here it is...

1. Most important - my outfit! I bought a beautiful yellow *stola* or tunic in Londinium and a pale green *palla*, or shawl, which I'll wear when it turns chilly at night. Aelius will wear his new *toga* to impress all the important people, even though he's still struggling to put it on. He so wants to fit in now that he's so important.

Oh, listen to me, prattling on. Where was I? The list!

2. And second only in importance to my outfit, the food! It's the main reason Romans like to go to parties! If the food's not good, they'll complain. So it has to be right. To be honest it won't matter that much what we serve so long as there's plenty of sweet wine and plenty of fish sauce - which Romans love - the rest will be easy! But Aelius has insisted we buy in the best Roman delicacies so we'll be having goats' lungs, peacocks' brains, horse-meat sausages, snails fattened on sheep's milk, frogs and even some stuffed mice. Rich Romans like to eat thrushes as well - but I refuse to serve birds because I have four caged songbirds which I love and the thought of someone throwing my beautiful pets in an oven makes me very cross!



3. Flowers. My slave Anthusa and I have been planting in readiness for the party and now the garden is full of roses, violets and honeysuckle. The house will smell wonderful. And our trees have started to bear fruit so I thought we could have huge decorations in the middle of our table in the grand hall.

4. Staff to help me. Anthusa is a wonderful slave but she can't be expected to do everything. So I must make sure that cook knows what we want to eat in good time and tell the nurse what the baby needs and - yes! - we must have some entertainment. I know: we could hire some actors and have a play put on for the guests after our feast.

The party will last for several hours and it is bound to get chilly later so we must make sure the furnace of the *hypocaust* - or central heating - is kept stoked so the hot air keeps everyone happy and warm.

We'll be up celebrating all night. But when everyone finally leaves Sulpicia and I can take in some air in the garden and watch the sun rise together...while Anthusa can make a start on cleaning the house.

I thought it was going to be a horrid chore planning this party. But now I look at the list, I see it might just be rather fun – if a bit Roman! If the food gets cooked and if the wine flows...if the entertainment is excellent and if the house looks beautiful...and, most importantly, if Sulpicia comes to visit, I think this will not only be the talk of the town, but my favourite party ever.

