

Empress Octavia

The last belated arrivals enter, and the slaves arrange cushions for them on the reserved seats. A youth, scarcely beyond boyhood, who has been here since before sunrise, takes his breakfast — consisting of a few peaches and some bread — out of his pocket, and a poor weaver tries to eat the sausage he has brought, while people crowding past him almost knock the mouthfuls from his lips. Men from the cook-shops offer their steaming pasties for sale, and the patrician dames in the front row of seats below flutter their fans, laugh, and nod to one another. Lovers seated close to each other sometimes receive a jesting admonition to move a little nearer, which calls forth a universal peal of laughter; an unmannerly boy throws fruit stones at girls sitting below him, and is roughly called to order by the soldier on guard with the handle of his lance. Now the Senators' chairs gradually fill; the crowd is growing more and more impatient. A moment's silence follows; helmeted warriors, on whose weapons the sun flashes, appear in the imperial box; soon *he* must enter, the Lord of the World, the Emperor of Rome, Nero. How intently the throng is watching; now the heavy hangings stir, black hands draw them aside; there is Spiculus beckoning to a stately