

Empress Octavia

"He is strong," replied the other; "he will."

The wind had risen. The waves dashed higher; they rowed on behind the swimmer, and suddenly saw him turn. "Help me!" came faintly from his lips.

"Only keep on," shouted the centurion, "a few more strokes, and you will reach the shore."

Metellus's strength had failed; he felt a relaxation of the nerves, against which it was impossible to struggle. The terror of death had affected his muscles too powerfully. The chill of the water was robbing him of breath. To divert his thoughts, he counted from one to one hundred, and often murmured: "Stephanus, help me!" or, "Octavia, where are you?" With his eyes fixed intently upon a dark clump of bushes on the shore, he strained his arms to the utmost; but the outer world was already vanishing. He began to swallow the water. Then it seemed as though a voice was droning incessantly in his ear: "I will not die!" but another voice, with an icy laugh, responded: "You must."

Slower and slower grew the swimmer's movements, more and more languid, again a half-stifled: "Help me!" floated over the waves,