

Empress Octavia

that the rower called to the centurion in a low tone: "Here?" The other muttered: "Not yet! Farther!" and the man rowed on.

They were now about a hundred feet from the shore; the villa seemed close at hand. Metellus could no longer remain seated in the boat; he rose and eagerly inhaled the cool sea-breeze that fanned his brow. Just at that moment a pang pierced his soul at the thought that, in the bewilderment of the moment, he had entirely forgotten Stephanus. Poor, forsaken boy! If he left Italy with Octavia, where would the lad, who had already become dearer than a brother, find protection? "Oh, Stephanus, come!" he murmured, and was turning to tell the centurion that they must row back to the shore again; but to his surprise the centurion was standing directly behind him.

"Row—" the betrayed youth could say no more; a blow in the back robbed him of speech and destroyed his balance so that he only saved himself from falling overboard by hastily grasping the edge of the boat.

"What clumsiness!" he gasped; "take care."