

Empress Octavia

irresolute, stepped forward, and then came slowly back as his eyes chanced to fall upon the white marble bust of Nero, which stood beside the entrance.

"I am a friend of the Emperor," he muttered in a hollow tone, listening to hear whether the Prætorians had commenced their work or even completed it.

While this scene was taking place in the lower part of the house, Metellus was sitting on the flat vine-covered roof at a table, busily engaged in reading. Stephanus lay asleep beside his chair; the reed-flute on which he had been playing still rested between his half-parted lips.

"How refreshing is this stillness, this peace," murmured the youth, "after the days of excitement!" He let his head droop dreamily and closed his eyes. The cool breeze, blowing from the moonlit water, played with his hair, and bore with the perfume of the flowers blooming on the distant hills visions of half-forgotten days. His passion had been partially crowded out of his heart during the terror of the flight; the love of life, so powerful at his age, had awakened in him; and though he confessed with shame that the love of the noble woman had far surpassed his in strength and endurance,