

# A Day in the Life of...

## A Vestal Virgin at the Gladiator Games

By E. Stillwell

The time has come. Your first attendance of the Gladiator Games with your sisters and the Emperor. Before now, you had been too young and still had to learn your duties as a Virgin of the goddess Vesta. Laurentia, the oldest of the six, was putting your hair back into the seni crines you must wear under your infula and suffibulum. As she braided your hair into sections, she told you how you must behave during the games.

“We will enter after the main procession, after the decorated carts and dancers. Remember to keep your head down and don’t look around at the spectators, simply walk to the box and sit. Hand, here.” You hold the vittae in place as she wrapd your front section of hair around it. “During the games, you must watch the gladiators fight. If you look away, it will be seen as weakness. There will be blood, more than you could imagine, but you must keep watching. Make sure you drink lots of water before we leave so you don’t throw up. Hold here now.” You switch your hands and hold the hair by your ear in place as Laurentia moves to the other side to continue working. “Sit next to Cassia, she was in your position only a few months ago and can help you.” She continues with the hairstyle and gives reminders on how to carry yourself in front of the spectators. Soon, you will be ready to fulfill your duties as a Vestal Virgin.

Your follow behind your sisters through the main entrance, heads bowed. As the youngest Vestal, you are the last to enter. Your heart races. You have no idea what to expect. Laurentia told you how to behave and what would happen, but being there, in front of the tens of thousands of people, everything is surreal. Your eyes peak at the stands around you, hoping the drappings of the suffibulum would cover your curiosity.

Once you take your places in the Podium, the Emperor comes out with fanfare surrounding him and sits in the Imperial Box. You are free to look around, but you must maintain the neutral demeanor of the Vestals. Now, the gladiators make their entrance. The crowd cheers louder than you thought possible, louder even than when the Emperor entered. Some of them had cloaks that seemed to glitter against the sun and were reflected against their armor and weapons. Some had tridents and nets, or a sword and shield. Even bows and arrows for some. After taking their place, the army turned towards the Emperor and cried the words you so often heard from the temple: *Ave imperato morituri te salutant!*

The games begin, and with them, your life as a Vestal Virgin.