

BILIUS 1

BILIUS *(entering)* Make way! Make way for the Emperor!
SOME CHORUS Caesar! Caesar!
OTHER CHORUS Mean old Geezer!
BILIUS The Emperor walks this way! *(does funny walks to side of stage)*

Emperor pokes his head round proscenium arch and watches the funny walk.

NERO Oh no he doesn't!

Emperor enters wearing laurel wreath and a purple toga. More chorus enter keen to see the Emperor.

NERO Make way for someone important!

Chorus look round for someone important.

NERO Me, you fools! Fanfare! Fanfare!

Pianist plays a chord, or a recorded feeble fanfare plays.

NERO Is that it? Huh! *(to audience with thumbs up)* I am Nero. Everyone calls me Nero the Hero. When you see me you all shout, 'Caesar! Caesar! Can you do that?'

AUDIENCE Yes!

NERO Right. Let's hear you - Caesar! Caesar!

CHORUS and AUDIENCE *(shout)* Caesar! Caesar!

CHORUS *(adding)* Mean old Geezer!

NERO *(looking round)* Who said that? Music! Music! *(makes as if to sing)*

Someone in chorus pushes Bilius forward and he bumps into Nero.

NERO Careful! You nearly damaged my vocal apparatus!
BILIUS Humble apologies, great Nero. Welcome to Pompeii. I'm Bilius.
NERO Well take some Alka Seltzer.
BILIUS Bilius the Senator...

Enter Furius and Atrocius trying to conceal drawn daggers. They spot the emperor and point him out, miming stabbing with daggers to each other. Bilius is trying to signal 'not now' to them during the following. As they get behind Nero, he moves away. Opportunity here for some comic fumbling, frantic signalling, falling over and getting in each other's way etc.

NERO Well why didn't you say so. *(looking round)* My daughter, Fabula, is here somewhere.

BILIUS I'm sure she's become absorbed with one of the many attractions of Pompeii, sire.

NERO *(taking Bilius to one side)* Now, Bilius, are my subjects all loyal?

BILIUS Oh yes, Emperor.

NERO Not seen anyone sharpening any knives?

BILIUS Nothing of that kind, sire. *(frantic signal to Furius and Atrocius to desist)*

NERO No unpleasant graffiti?

BILIUS No graffiti since Queen Nefertiti!

NERO Good, good. No more mutiny?

BILIUS Not since Mark Anthony.

NERO Nothing out of hand at all?

BILIUS Not since Hannibal.

NERO Glad to hear it. Now be a good fellow, run along and prepare the Senate for my visit. Tell them I shall honour them with one of my longest speeches.

BILIUS *(pulling face)* Very well, sire.

NERO Yes. The one starting 'Friends, Romans and countrymen...' about how grateful they should all be to have me as Emperor.

BILIUS *(aside)* Not for much longer.

NERO What?

BILIUS I said, 'a great honour, sire'.

BILIUS 2

FABULA Let me go!
BILIUS Ah! Let me see. (*walks round her, looking at her*)
FABULA What are you doing? How dare you! Let me go at once! (*swings shopping bags at them*)
BILIUS Spirited little thing, isn't she? I hope you've got a nice wedding dress in there. Yes, she'll brighten up the imperial palace no end when we're married. Well, there's not a lot to do when we're not conquering people. (*looking at Fabula*) A few improvements, a few little touches here and there... (*makes as if he is about to touch her*)
FABULA Don't you touch anything!
BILIUS Cheer up, girl, for goodness sake, it's supposed to be a pantomime.
FABULA (*struggling and hitting out with the bags*) Let me go! You'll be sorry.
BILIUS Now, now. You must accept your destiny. (*goes to put arm around Fabula but she backs away*) You are to be my new bride. We will walk together into the sunset – and on to greatness.
FABULA Are you sure you can manage that far without your Zimmer frame?
BILIUS Ooh, cheeky!
FABULA Let me go. I've met someone else... He's lovely! Better than you. (*to audience*) Isn't he?
AUDIENCE Yes!
BILIUS He can't be, you silly girl.
FABULA Oh yes he is! And I'll never be married to you.
BILIUS Oh yes you will.
FABULA (*encouraging audience*) Oh, no I won't!
BILIUS Oh, yes you will!
FABULA (*with audience*) Oh, no I won't!
BILIUS You should be grateful that a wonderful, important man like me wants to marry you. (*to audience*) She should be grateful, shouldn't she?
AUDIENCE NO!
BILIUS Yes she should!
AUDIENCE No she shouldn't!
BILIUS Belt up.

FABULA There are so many others that you could marry. Someone more your type...
BILIUS Someone distinguished and noble, you mean?
FABULA No, someone old and ugly.
BILIUS Watch it! (*to audience*) She's pushing her luck. (*to Fabula*) I've chosen you, my dear. You don't know how lucky you are.
FABULA I refuse to marry you.
BILIUS It's either me or the lions – you choose.
FABULA The difficult questions first, eh?
BILIUS (*to guards*) Oh, lock her up until I have time to deal with her.
FABULA How dare you! Let me go!

Guards drag a protesting Fabula off.

BILIUS Now I must prepare this fashion parade for the Emperor. Over there will do, outside the Temple, I think. (*goes over to back of stage*)

Enter Vesta, Canasta and Pasta, sultry, casual, laid back temple maidens.

VESTA Hallo. I'm Vesta. We are the maidens who attend the temple of Neptune. (*indicating behind her*)
PASTA I'm Pasta. We set the candles.
CANASTA And I'm Canasta. We trim the wicks.
VESTA It's very boring...
PASTA It gets on our wick...
CANASTA You expect jokes like that in a pantomime, don't you?
VESTA We keep out the riff raff.
CANASTA Do some food tasting.
VESTA A bit of escort work for the VIPs. The tips are good.
PASTA We do chants and stuff.
VESTA We sort of dance about a bit.
PASTA We can even dance and chant at the same time... You know, like... (*modern pop*)

VESTA

group)
Like this...

They do a casual, sophisticated turn of the stage.

PASTA

Pretty good, eh?

CANASTA

Then there's the rough work...

VESTA

Polishing statues.

PASTA

Dusting columns. Scrubbing floors.

CANASTA

There's a panto joke in there somewhere, as well.

VESTA

Lots of parties.

PASTA

Yes! The parties are great.

CANASTA

Posh an' Beckius (*or whoever*) were at the last one.

BILIUS 3

*At end of song Furius and Atracius shoo the chorus away. They return to buying and selling
At their market stalls etc.*

BILIUS Come here you two.

Furius and Atracius return to Bilius

BILIUS Now listen, The Emperor is visiting Pompeii today...

ATROCIUS *(rubbing his hands)* Oh goody. Can we have a picnic?

BILIUS A what?

ATROCIUS We always have a picnic when my Aunty visits.

BILIUS Huh! This is going to be no picnic! There's dirty work to do.

ATROCIUS *(to Furius)* We've got to clean out the public toilets again. *(walking round, holding nose)*

FURIUS *(hitting Atracius)* Will you pay attention!

ATROCIUS Ow! That hurt!

FURIUS *(to Bilius)* Sorry boss.

ATROCIUS Great! He hits me and says sorry to him! *(walks round holding head)*

BILIUS Listen carefully. When Nero arrives, there's some DIRTY work to do! *(draws finger across throat)*

ATROCIUS *(to Furius)* He wants us to take his tonsils out. *(draws sword and walks around making practise lunges)*

FURIUS Put that away!

ATROCIUS It'll be just like that 'Casualty' on the telly. *(as surgeon, puts hand out to Furius)* Scalpel please, nurse.

FURIUS You'll be a casualty in a minute!

BILIUS Streuth! I'll take his tonsils out in a minute, with me bare hands. *(goes for throat of Atracius)* Pay attention! The Emperor visits Pompeii today on a state visit...

ATROCIUS Why is he in a state, boss? Is it his tonsils playing up?

FURIUS You fool! He meant 'state' not, 'state'!

ATROCIUS *(not understanding)* Oh.

BILIUS Will you shut up! I've started so I'll finish...

Bilius signals to Furius to put hands over mouth of Atracius to stop him speaking.

BILIUS The Emperor visits Pompeii today, and this is my big chance. We get rid of him – and – guess who becomes the new Emperor? *(struts about proudly)*

Atracius and Furius pay no attention to Bilius. Atracius is almost suffocating. Furius releases his grip.

ATROCIUS *(gasps, collapses, now free to speak)* You stopped me breathing there!

BILIUS *(annoyed that he is being ignored, prods Atracius)* I said, 'Guess who becomes the new Emperor?'

ATROCIUS What? Oh, er, give in, boss.

FURIUS Can we phone a friend?

BILIUS I do, you fools.

ATROCIUS Oh congratulations, boss. *(shakes Bilius' hand)*

FURIUS Well done!

ATROCIUS *(calling out)* He's the new emperor everyone!

BILIUS Shut up, you fool! *(looking round nervously)* Don't congratulate me yet! You've got to get rid of Nero first.

FURIUS Who has?

BILIUS You. That's the easy part. You've only got to kill him. I'll have to run a whole empire.

ATROCIUS We can help you there.

BILIUS How?

ATROCIUS If we don't kill him, you won't have to bother.

BILIUS No, no. It's my destiny. I can hear the people calling me on to greatness. I must accept the burden of high office.

FURIUS *(to audience)* He thinks he's Tony Blair *(or whoever)*

BILIUS Now, I want you to use your initiative and get rid of him.

ATROCIUS Who? Tony Blair?

BILIUS No! The Emperor, you fool! *(thoughtful)* Well, Tony Blair as well would be nice...

Furius and Atracius look at each other blankly.

BILIUS And, one last thing...

FURIUS Yes, boss?

BILIUS Not a word to my son, Decius. He's such a goody-goody.

ATROCIUS Yes, he is. We saw him helping an old lady across the street today.

FURIUS Even though she didn't want to go.

ATROCIUS He gave some sweets to some kids and told them it wasn't nice to fight.