

NERO 1

Enter Furius and Atracius 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 Atracius 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'.

NERO 2

Furius and Atracius pick themselves up, making a pretence of keeping crowd away.

NERO Ah good, very thoughtful.

Enter Dame. Nero and Bilius stop to watch her.

VANILLA *(to audience)* What Flavia!

AUDIENCE Vanilla!

VANILLA Great! Ooh! They tell me the Emperor is arriving today. They say he's horrible and ugly...

NERO *(reacts)* What!

VANILLA I want to throw something at him. He'll be along here soon. *(looks around for him)*

NERO *(moves towards her)* Woman! What did you say?

VANILLA Don't you 'woman' me! *(turns and pokes him in the chest as he backs away)* I'm here to throw some rotten eggs at the Emperor. *(to audience)* You can easily spot him... he wears a silly laurel wreath... up on his... *(points to head, looks at Emperor and slowly realises)* and a purple... Oh dear! I've done it now. *(kneels and tugs at his toga)* Forgive me, Great Circumference, a silly mistake... my eyesight you know...

NERO What's wrong wit your eyesight?

VANILLA I keep seeing blobs and squiggles...

NERO Have you seen an optician?

VANILLA No! Just the blobs and squiggles you silly old...

NERO Tell me, old crone...

VANILLA *(getting up)* Old crone! I'm not that old... Still a few miles on the clock! *(nudges up to Nero, suggestively)* You naughty boy.

NERO Silence when you speak to me!

VANILLA Sorry. *(kneels down again and tugs at toga)*

NERO Careful! You'll have that off me in a minute! It's a family show, you know! Tell me, oh ugly one, how are you at fighting lions?

VANILLA Well I went to a Harrods sale once... Alright... I'm going... I'm going...

She moves away to apron as Nero and Bilius continue to talk together.

VANILLA I think he fancies me, don't you girls? Oh yes, there was a gleam in his eye, did you see it? I can always tell.

(preens) Mrs Emperor, yes, it has a nice ring to it!

NERO *(bellowing at her)* You still here!

VANILLA Oh, so masterful! Just think, I could soon have me hands on the Imperial Mint!

NERO Guards!

VANILLA Just going... *(exits waving to audience)* I'll have to think of something to help him make up his mind. Bye!

AUDIENCE Bye!

NERO *(thumbs up as exiting)* Caesar! Caesar!