GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL
AGRIPPINA

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an opera by George Frideric Handel
illustrations by Diana Schoenbrun

Rome, 1st century CE

The Roman empress Agrippina is desperate to see her son, Nerone, crowned emperor. There's just one problem: The current emperor (her husband Claudio) is still on the throne—and he has promised to make the brave soldier Ottone his successor.

Agrippina is undaunted by this setback. She knows that Claudio and Ottone are both in love with a beautiful noblewoman named Poppea, and she thinks she can use their jealousy to destroy them. But when Poppea uncovers Agrippina's wicked plot, she quickly figures out a way to give everyone a happy ending.

Main Characters

Agrippina

Claudio

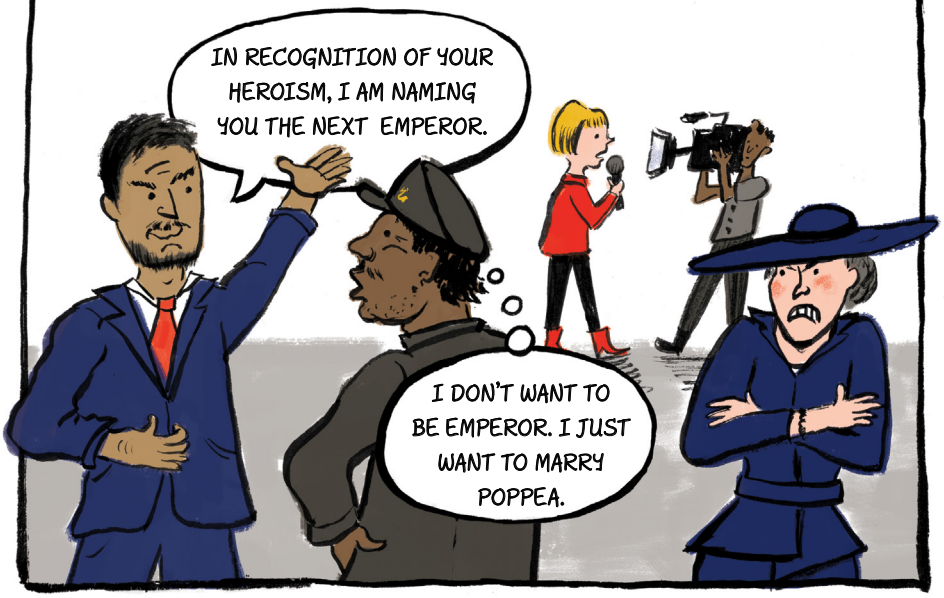
Poppea

Ottone

Nerone

Agrippina hears that her husband, the emperor Claudio, has died at sea. She decides to make her son, Nerone, the new emperor of Rome.

There's just one problem: Claudio isn't dead. He was saved from drowning by the heroic soldier Ottone. Agrippina is furious.



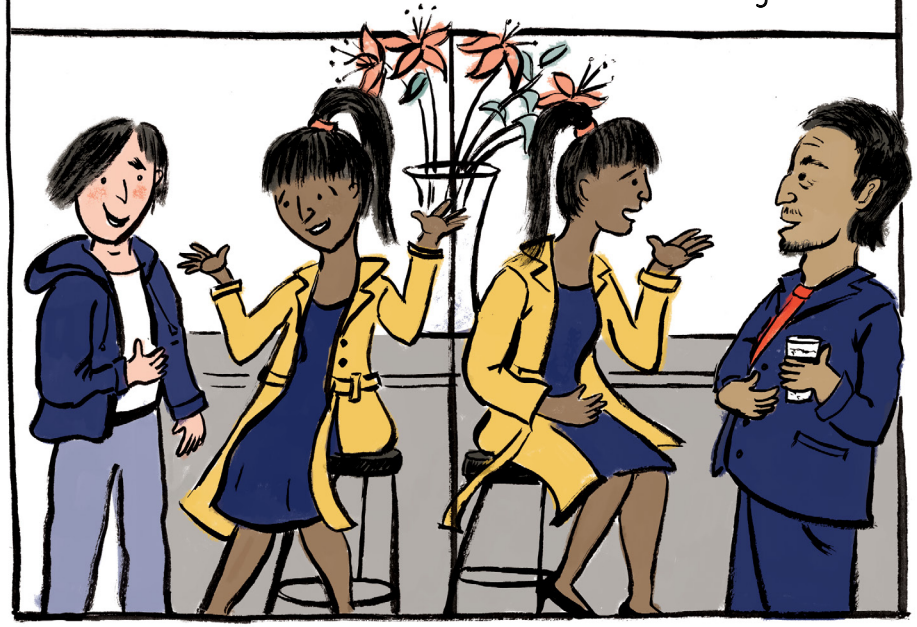
Agrippina visits Ottone's girlfriend, Poppea, and tells her a vicious lie. Poppea is understandably upset.
OTTONE SAID CLAUDIO COULD HAVE YOU IF HE COULD BE EMPEROR . . .

Agrippina suggests that Poppea get back at Ottone by lying about him to Claudio.
THAT DOUBLE-CROSSER! I'LL NEVER MAKE HIM EMPEROR NOW.
OTTONE ORDERED ME NOT TO SEE YOU. SINCE HE'S GOING TO BE EMPEROR, I HAVE TO DO WHAT HE SAYS.
WELCOME

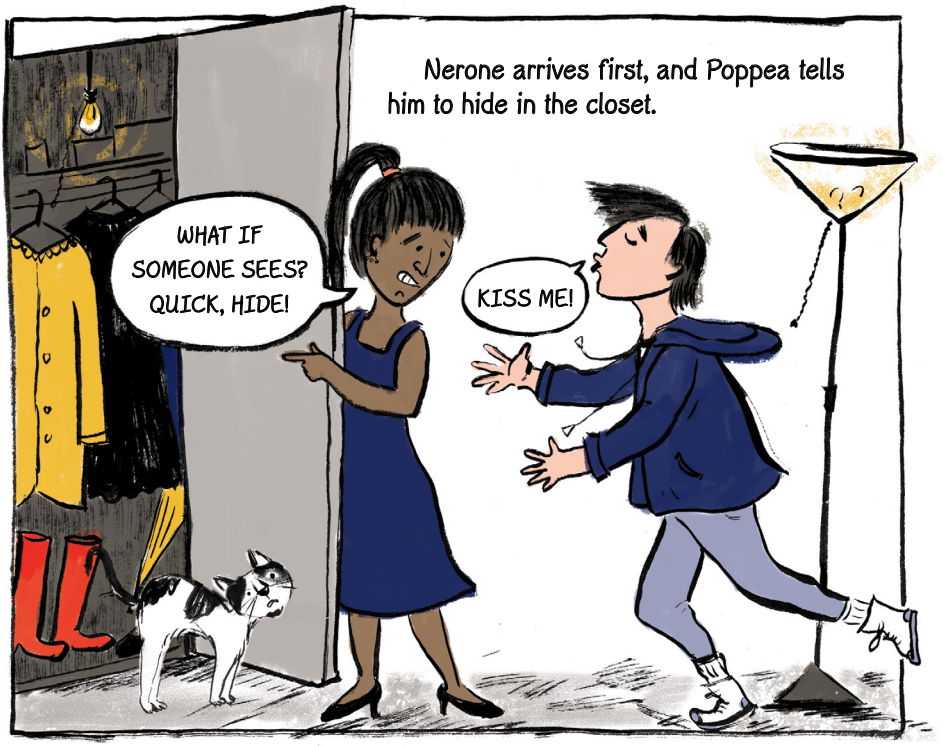
The whole city gathers to celebrate Claudio's return. Ottone asks when he will become emperor, and Claudio flies into a rage.
REVENGE IS SWEET!
YOU TREACHEROUS VILLAIN! I SHOULD KILL YOU—BUT SINCE YOU SAVED MY LIFE, I'LL LET YOU LIVE.

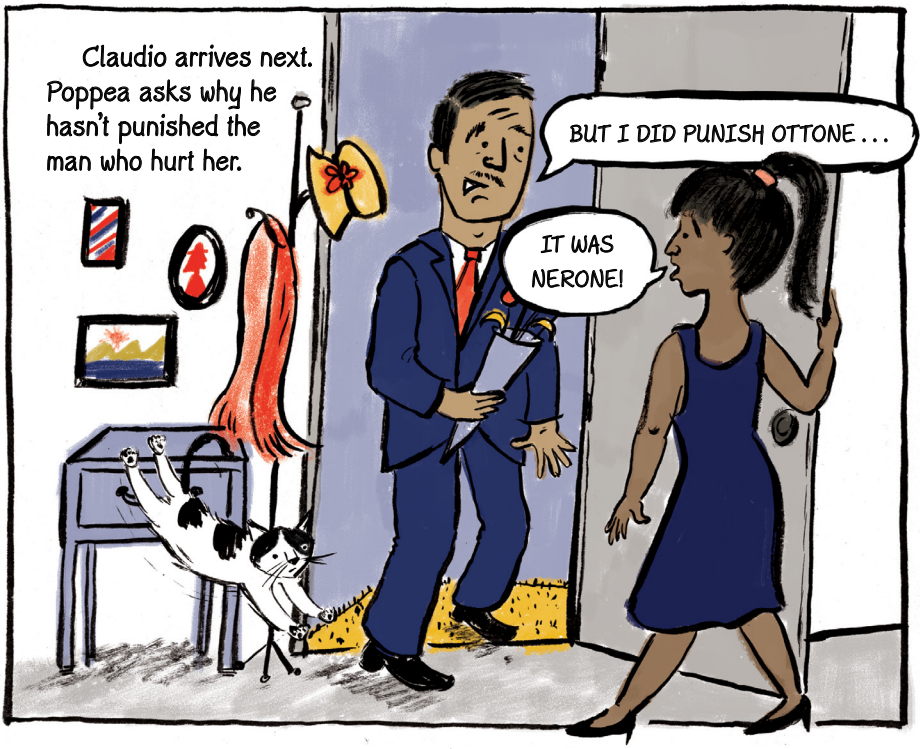
Poppea wonders if Ottone really betrayed her. She pretends to be asleep and dreaming—just to see how he'll respond.
POPPEA, WAKE UP! I WOULD NEVER DUMP YOU!
I CAN'T BELIEVE OTTONE DUMPED ME TO GET THE CROWN.
AGRIPPINA MUST HAVE LIED TO ME . . .

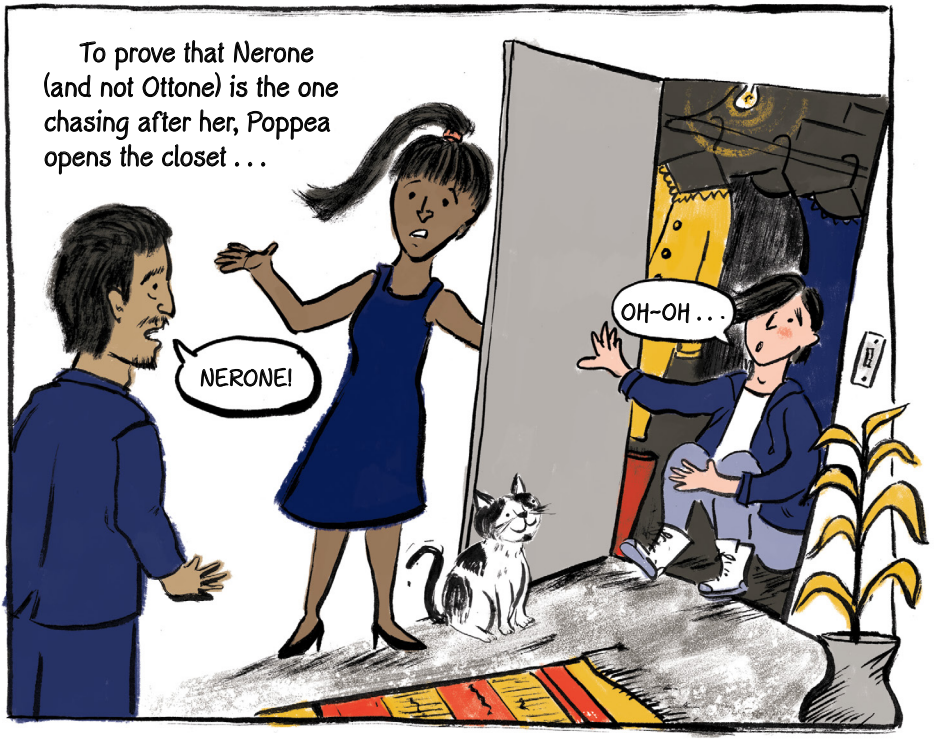
Poppea has a plan to prove Agrippina's treachery, but it requires tricking Nerone and Claudio. She invites them both to visit her that evening.

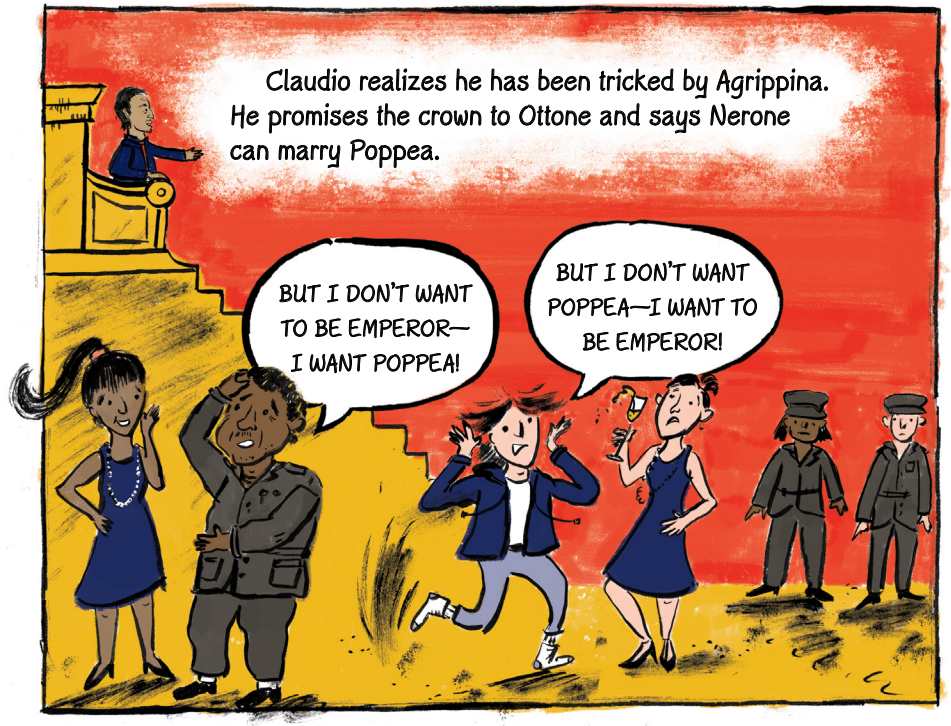


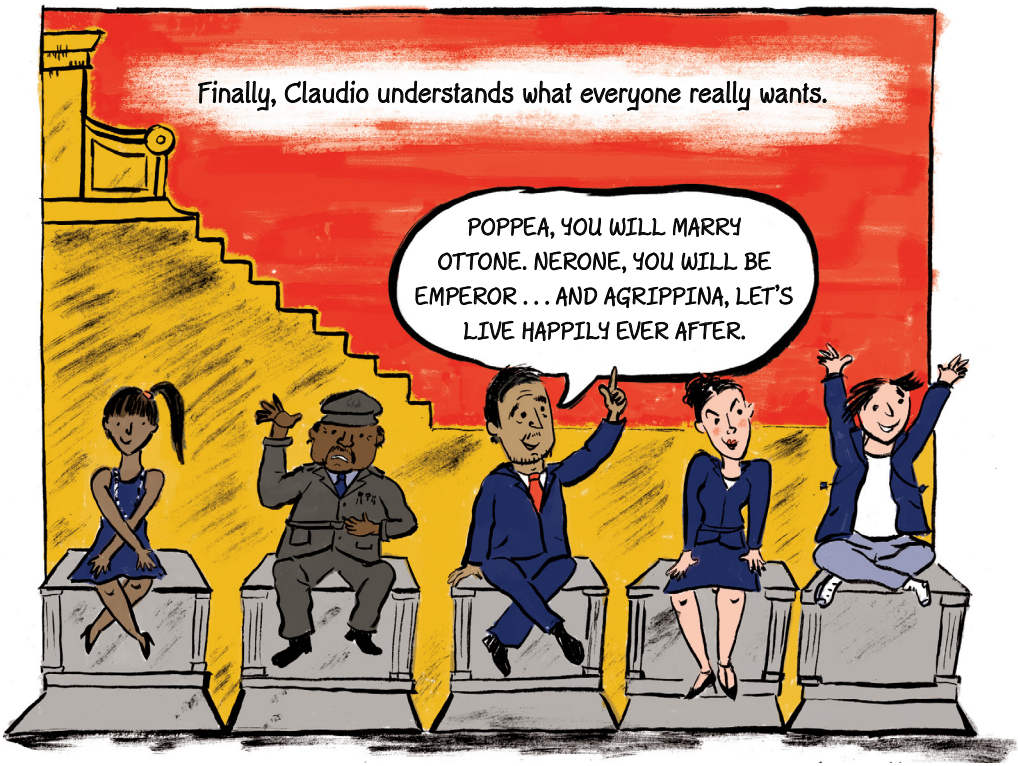
Nerone arrives first, and Poppea tells him to hide in the closet.




Claudio arrives next. Poppea asks why he hasn't punished the man who hurt her.
BUT I DID PUNISH OTTONE . . .
IT WAS NERONE!


To prove that Nerone (and not Ottone) is the one chasing after her, Poppea opens the closet . . .
NERONE!
OH-OH . . .


Claudio realizes he has been tricked by Agrippina. He promises the crown to Ottone and says Nerone can marry Poppea.
BUT I DON'T WANT TO BE EMPEROR— I WANT POPPEA!
BUT I DON'T WANT POPPEA—I WANT TO BE EMPEROR!


Finally, Claudio understands what everyone really wants.
POPPEA, YOU WILL MARRY OTTONE. NERONE, YOU WILL BE EMPEROR . . . AND AGRIPPINA, LET'S LIVE HAPPILY EVER AFTER.