

CALIGULA



Pièce de théâtre

Albert Camus

Caligula, Albert Camus

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A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS

To my friends of the THÉÂTRE DE L'ÉQUIPE

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

CALIGULA

CÆSONIA

HELICON

SCIPIO

CHEREA

THE OLD PATRICIAN

METELLUS

LEPIDUS

INTENDANT

MEREIA

MUCIUS

MUCIUS' WIFE

PATRICIANS, KNIGHTS,

POETS, GUARDS, SERVANTS

CALIGULA was presented for the first time at the THÉÂTRE-HÉBERTOT, Paris, in 1945.

ACT I

A number of patricians, one a very old man, are gathered in a state room of the imperial palace. They are showing signs of nervousness.

FIRST PATRICIAN: Still no news.

THE OLD PATRICIAN: None last night, none this morning.

SECOND PATRICIAN: Three days without news. Strange indeed!

THE OLD PATRICIAN: Our messengers go out, our messengers return. And always they shake their heads and say: "Nothing."

SECOND PATRICIAN: They've combed the whole countryside. What more can be done?

FIRST PATRICIAN: We can only wait. It's no use meeting trouble halfway. Perhaps he'll return as abruptly as he left us.

THE OLD PATRICIAN: When I saw him leaving the palace, I noticed a queer look in his eyes.

FIRST PATRICIAN: Yes, so did I. In fact I asked him what was amiss.

SECOND PATRICIAN: Did he answer?

FIRST PATRICIAN: One word: "Nothing."

[A short silence. HELICON enters. He is munching onions.]

SECOND PATRICIAN [in the same nervous tone]: It's all very perturbing.

FIRST PATRICIAN: Oh, come now! All young fellows are like that.

THE OLD PATRICIAN: You're right there. They take things hard. But time smooths everything out.

SECOND PATRICIAN: Do you really think so?

THE OLD PATRICIAN: Of course. For one girl dead, a dozen living ones.

HELICON: Ah? So you think that there's a girl behind it?

FIRST PATRICIAN: What else should there be? Anyhow—thank goodness!—grief never lasts forever. Is any one of us here capable of mourning a loss for more than a year on end?

SECOND PATRICIAN: Not I, anyhow.

FIRST PATRICIAN: No one can do that.

THE OLD PATRICIAN: Life would be intolerable if one could.

FIRST PATRICIAN: Quite so. Take my case. I lost my wife last year. I shed many tears, and then I forgot. Even now I feel a pang of grief at times. But, happily, it doesn't amount to much.

THE OLD PATRICIAN: Yes, Nature's a great healer.

[CHEREA enters.]

FIRST PATRICIAN: Well ...?

CHEREA: Still nothing.

HELICON: Come, gentlemen! There's no need for consternation.

FIRST PATRICIAN: I agree.

HELICON: Worrying won't mend matters—and it's lunchtime.

THE OLD PATRICIAN: That's so. We mustn't drop the prey for the shadow.

CHEREA: I don't like the look of things. But all was going too smoothly. As an emperor, he was perfection's self.

SECOND PATRICIAN: Yes, exactly the emperor we wanted; conscientious and inexperienced.

FIRST PATRICIAN: But what's come over you? There's no reason for all these lamentations. We've no ground for assuming he will change. Let's say he loved Drusilla. Only natural; she was his sister. Or say his love for her was something more than brotherly; shocking enough, I grant you. But it's really going too far, setting all Rome in a turmoil because the girl has died.

CHEREA: Maybe. But, as I said, I don't like the look of things; this escapade alarms me.

THE OLD PATRICIAN: Yes, there's never smoke without fire.

FIRST PATRICIAN: In any case, the interests of the State should prevent his making a public tragedy of ... of, let's say, a regrettable attachment. No doubt such things happen; but the less said the better.

HELICON: How can you be sure Drusilla is the cause of all this trouble?

SECOND PATRICIAN: Who else should it be?

HELICON: Nobody at all, quite likely. When there's a host of explanations to choose from, why pick on the stupidest, most obvious one?

[Young SCIPIO enters. CHEREA goes toward him.]

CHEREA: Well?

SCIPIO: Still nothing. Except that some peasants think they saw him last night not far from Rome, rushing through the storm.

[CHEREA comes back to the patricians, SCIPIO following him.]

CHEREA: That makes three days, Scipio, doesn't it?

SCIPIO: Yes ... I was there, following him as I usually do. He went up to Drusilla's body. He stroked it with two fingers, and seemed lost in thought for a long while. Then he swung round and walked out, calmly enough.... And ever since we've been hunting for him—in vain.

CHEREA [shaking his head]: That young man was too fond of literature.

SECOND PATRICIAN: Oh, at his age, you know ...

CHEREA: At his age, perhaps; but not in his position. An artistic emperor is an anomaly. I grant you we've had one or two; misfits happen in the best of empires. But the others had the good taste to remember they were public servants.

FIRST PATRICIAN: It made things run more smoothly.

THE OLD PATRICIAN: One man, one job—that's how it should be.

SCIPIO: What can we do, Cherea?

CHEREA: Nothing.

SECOND PATRICIAN: We can only wait. If he doesn't return, a successor will have to be found. Between ourselves—there's no shortage of candidates.

FIRST PATRICIAN: No, but there's a shortage of the right sort.

CHEREA: Suppose he comes back in an ugly mood?

FIRST PATRICIAN: Oh, he's a mere boy; we'll make him see reason.

CHEREA: And what if he declines to see it?

FIRST PATRICIAN [laughing]: In that case, my friend, don't forget I once wrote a manual of revolutions. You'll find all the rules there.

CHEREA: I'll look it up—if things come to that. But I'd rather be left to my books.

SCIPIO: If you'll excuse me....

[Goes out.]

CHEREA: He's offended.

THE OLD PATRICIAN: Scipio is young, and young people always hang together.

HELICON: Scipio doesn't count, anyhow.

[Enter a member of the imperial bodyguard.]

THE GUARDSMAN: Caligula has been seen in the palace gardens.

[All leave the room. The stage is empty for some moments. Then CALIGULA enters stealthily from the left. His legs are caked with mud, his garments dirty; his hair is wet, his look distraught. He brings his hand to his mouth several times. Then he approaches a mirror, stopping abruptly when he catches sight of his reflected self. After muttering some unintelligible words, he sits down on the right, letting his arms hang limp between his knees. HELICON enters, left. On seeing

CALIGULA, he stops at the far end of the stage and contemplates him in silence. CALIGULA turns and sees him. A short silence.]

HELICON [across the stage]: Good morning, Caius.

CALIGULA [in quite an ordinary tone]: Good morning, Helicon.

[A short silence.]

HELICON: You're looking tired.

CALIGULA: I've walked a lot.

HELICON: Yes, you've been away for quite a while.

[Another short silence.]

CALIGULA: It was hard to find.

HELICON: What was hard to find?

CALIGULA: What I was after.

HELICON: Meaning?

CALIGULA [in the same matter-of-fact tone]: The moon.

HELICON: What?

CALIGULA: Yes, I wanted the moon.

HELICON: Ah... [Another silence. HELICON approaches CALIGULA.] And why did you want it?

CALIGULA: Well ... it's one of the things I haven't got.

HELICON: I see. And now—have you fixed it up to your satisfaction?

CALIGULA: No. I couldn't get it.

HELICON: Too bad!

CALIGULA: Yes, and that's why I'm tired. [Pauses. Then] Helicon!

HELICON: Yes, Caius?

CALIGULA: No doubt, you think I'm crazy.

HELICON: As you know well, I never think.

CALIGULA: Ah, yes.... Now, listen! I'm not mad; in fact I've never felt so lucid. What happened to me is quite simple; I suddenly felt a desire for the impossible. That's all. [Pauses.] Things as they are, in my opinion, are far from satisfactory.

HELICON: Many people share your opinion.

CALIGULA: That is so. But in the past I didn't realize it. Now I know. [Still in the same matter-of-fact tone] Really, this world of ours, the scheme of things as they call it, is quite intolerable. That's why I want the moon, or happiness, or eternal life—something, in fact, that may sound crazy, but which isn't of this world.

HELICON: That's sound enough in theory. Only, in practice one can't carry it through to its conclusion.

CALIGULA [rising to his feet, but still with perfect calmness]: You're wrong there. It's just because no one dares to follow up his ideas to the end that nothing is achieved. All that's needed, I should say, is to be logical right through, at all costs. [He studies HELICON'S face.] I can see, too, what you're thinking. What a fuss over a woman's death! But that's not it. True enough, I seem to remember that a woman died some days ago; a woman whom I loved. But love, what is it? A side issue. And I swear to you her death is not the point; it's no more than the symbol of a truth that makes the moon essential to me. A childishly simple, obvious, almost silly truth, but one that's hard to come by and heavy to endure.

HELICON: May I know what it is, this truth that you've discovered?

CALIGULA [his eyes averted, in a toneless voice]: Men die; and they are not happy.

HELICON [after a short pause]: Anyhow, Caligula, it's a truth with which one comes to terms, without much trouble. Only look at the people over there. This truth of yours doesn't prevent them from enjoying their meal.

CALIGULA [with sudden violence]: All it proves is that I'm surrounded by lies and self-deception. But I've had enough of that; I wish men to live by the light of truth. And I've the power to make them do so. For I know what they need and haven't got. They're without understanding and they need a teacher; someone who knows what he's talking about.

HELICON: Don't take offense, Caius, if I give you a word of advice.... But that can wait. First, you should have some rest.

CALIGULA [sitting down. His voice is gentle again]: That's not possible, Helicon. I shall never rest again.

HELICON: But—why?

CALIGULA: If I sleep, who'll give me the moon?

HELICON [after a short silence]: That's true.

CALIGULA [rising to his feet again, with an effort]: Listen, Helicon ... I hear footsteps, voices. Say nothing—and forget you've seen me.

HELICON: I understand.

CALIGULA [looking back, as he moves toward the door]: And please help me, from now on.

HELICON: I've no reason not to do so, Caius. But I know very few things, and few things interest me. In what way can I help you?

CALIGULA: In the way of ... the impossible.

HELICON: I'll do my best.

[CALIGULA goes out. SCIPIO and CÆSONIA enter hurriedly.]

SCIPIO: No one! Haven't you seen him?

HELICON: No.

CÆSONIA: Tell me, Helicon. Are you quite sure he didn't say anything to you before he went away?

HELICON: I'm not a sharer of his secrets, I'm his public. A mere onlooker. It's more prudent.

CÆSONIA: Please don't talk like that.

HELICON: My dear Cæsonia, Caius is an idealist as we all know. He follows his bent, and no one can foresee where it will take him.... But, if you'll excuse me, I'll go to lunch.

[Exit HELICON.]

CÆSONIA [sinking wearily onto a divan]: One of the palace guards saw him go by. But all Rome sees Caligula everywhere. And Caligula, of course, sees nothing but his own idea.

SCIPIO: What idea?

CÆSONIA: How can I tell, Scipio?

SCIPIO: Are you thinking of Drusilla?

CÆSONIA: Perhaps. One thing is sure; he loved her. And it's a cruel thing to have someone die today whom only yesterday you were holding in your arms.

SCIPIO [timidly]: And you ...?

CÆSONIA: Oh, I'm the old, trusted mistress. That's my role.

SCIPIO: Cæsonia, we must save him.

CÆSONIA: So you, too, love him?

SCIPIO: Yes. He's been very good to me. He encouraged me; I shall never forget some of the things he said. He told me life isn't easy, but it has consolations: religion, art, and the love one inspires in others. He often told me that the only mistake one makes in life is to cause others suffering. He tried to be a just man.

CÆSONIA [rising]: He's only a child. [She goes to the glass and scans herself.] The only god I've ever had is my body, and now I shall pray this god of mine to give Caius back to me.

[CALIGULA enters. On seeing CÆSONIA and SCIPIO he hesitates, and takes a backward step. At the same moment several men enter from the opposite side of the room: patricians and the INTENDANT of the palace. They stop short when they see CALIGULA. CÆSONIA turns. She and SCIPIO hurry toward CALIGULA, who checks them with a gesture.]

INTENDANT [in a rather quavering voice]: We ... we've been looking for you, Cæsar, high and low.

CALIGULA [in a changed, harsh tone]: So I see.

INTENDANT: We ... I mean ...

CALIGULA [roughly]: What do you want?

INTENDANT: We were feeling anxious, Cæsar.

CALIGULA [going toward him]: What business had you to feel anxious?

INTENDANT: Well ... er ... [He has an inspiration.] Well, as you know, there are points to be settled in connection with the Treasury.

CALIGULA [bursting into laughter]: Ah, yes. The Treasury! That's so. The Treasury's of prime importance.

INTENDANT: Yes, indeed.

CALIGULA [still laughing, to CÆSONIA]: Don't you agree, my dear? The Treasury is all-important.

CÆSONIA: No, Caligula. It's a secondary matter.

CALIGULA: That only shows your ignorance. We are extremely interested in our Treasury. Everything's important: our fiscal system, public morals, foreign policy, army equipment, and agrarian laws. Everything's of cardinal importance, I assure you. And everything's on an equal footing: the grandeur of Rome and your attacks of arthritis.... Well, well, I'm going to apply my mind to all that. And, to begin with ... Now listen well, Intendant.

INTENDANT: We are listening, sir.

[The patricians come forward.]

CALIGULA: You're our loyal subjects, are you not?

INTENDANT [in a reproachful tone]: Oh, Cæsar ...!

CALIGULA: Well, I've something to propose to you. We're going to make a complete change in our economic system. In two moves. Drastic and abrupt. I'll explain, Intendant ... when the patricians have left. [The patricians go out. CALIGULA seats himself beside CÆSONIA, with his arm around her waist.] Now mark my words. The first move's this. Every patrician, everyone in the Empire who has any capital—small

or large, it's all the same thing—is ordered to disinherit his children and make a new will leaving his money to the State.

INTENDANT: But Cæsar ...

CALIGULA: I've not yet given you leave to speak. As the need arises, we shall have these people die; a list will be drawn up by us fixing the order of their deaths. When the fancy takes us, we may modify that order. And, of course, we shall step into their money.

CÆSONIA [freeing herself]: But—what's come over you?

CALIGULA [imperturbably]: Obviously the order of their going has no importance. Or, rather, all these executions have an equal importance—from which it follows that none has any. Really all those fellows are on a par, one's as guilty as another. [To the INTENDANT, peremptorily] You are to promulgate this edict without a moment's delay and see it's carried out forthwith. The wills are to be signed by residents in Rome this evening; within a month at the latest by persons in the provinces. Send out your messengers.

INTENDANT: Cæsar, I wonder if you realize ...

CALIGULA: Do I realize ...? Now, listen well, you fool! If the Treasury has paramount importance, human life has none. That should be obvious to you. People who think like you are bound to admit the logic of my edict, and since money is the only thing that counts, should set no value on their lives or anyone else's. I have resolved to be logical, and I have the power to enforce my will. Presently you'll see what logic's going to cost you? I shall eliminate contradictions and contradicters. If necessary, I'll begin with you.

INTENDANT: Cæsar, my good will can be relied on, that I swear.

CALIGULA: And mine, too; that I guarantee. Just see how ready I am to adopt your point of view, and give the Treasury the first place in my

program. Really you should be grateful to me; I'm playing into your hand, and with your own cards. [He pauses, before continuing in a flat, unemotional tone] In any case there is a touch of genius in the simplicity of my plan—which clinches the matter. I give you three seconds in which to remove yourself. One ...

[The INTENDANT hurries out.]

CÆSONIA: I can't believe it's you! But it was just a joke, wasn't it?—all you said to him.

CALIGULA: Not quite that, Cæsonia. Let's say, a lesson in statesmanship.

SCIPIO: But, Caius, it's ... it's impossible!

CALIGULA: That's the whole point.

SCIPIO: I don't follow.

CALIGULA: I repeat—that is my point. I'm exploiting the impossible. Or, more accurately, it's a question of making the impossible possible.

SCIPIO: But that game may lead to—to anything! It's a lunatic's pastime.

CALIGULA: No, Scipio. An emperor's vocation. [He lets himself sink back wearily among the cushions.] Ah, my dears, at last I've come to see the uses of supremacy. It gives impossibilities a run. From this day on, so long as life is mine, my freedom has no frontier.

CÆSONIA [sadly]: I doubt if this discovery of yours will make us any happier.

CALIGULA: So do I. But, I suppose, we'll have to live it through.

[CHEREA enters.]

CHEREA: I have just heard of your return. I trust your health is all it should be.

CALIGULA: My health is duly grateful. [A pause. Then, abruptly] Leave us, Cherea. I don't want to see you.

CHEREA: Really, Caius, I'm amazed ...

CALIGULA: There's nothing to be amazed at. I don't like literary men, and I can't bear lies.

CHEREA: If we lie, it's often without knowing it. I plead Not Guilty.

CALIGULA: Lies are never guiltless. And yours attribute importance to people and to things. That's what I cannot forgive you.

CHEREA: And yet—since this world is the only one we have, why not plead its cause?

CALIGULA: Your pleading comes too late, the verdict's given.... This world has no importance; once a man realizes that, he wins his freedom. [He has risen to his feet.] And that is why I hate you, you and your kind; because you are not free. You see in me the one free man in the whole Roman Empire. You should be glad to have at last among you an emperor who points the way to freedom. Leave me, Cherea; and you, too, Scipio, go—for what is friendship? Go, both of you, and spread the news in Rome that freedom has been given her at last, and with the gift begins a great probation.

[They go out. CALIGULA has turned away, hiding his eyes.]

CÆSONIA: Crying?

CALIGULA: Yes, Cæsonia.

CÆSONIA: But, after all, what's changed in your life? You may have loved Drusilla, but you loved many others—myself included—at the same time. Surely that wasn't enough to set you roaming the

countryside for three days and nights and bring you back with this ... this cruel look on your face?

CALIGULA [swinging round on her]: What nonsense is this? Why drag in Drusilla? Do you imagine love's the only thing that can make a man shed tears?

CÆSONIA: I'm sorry, Caius. Only I was trying to understand.

CALIGULA: Men weep because ... the world's all wrong. [She comes toward him.] No, Cæsonia. [She draws back.] But stay beside me.

CÆSONIA: I'll do whatever you wish. [Sits down.] At my age one knows that life's a sad business. But why deliberately set out to make it worse?

CALIGULA: No, it's no good; you can't understand. But what matter? Perhaps I'll find a way out. Only, I feel a curious stirring within me, as if undreamed of things were forcing their way up into the light—and I'm helpless against them. [He moves closer to her.] Oh, Cæsonia, I knew that men felt anguish, but I didn't know what that word anguish meant. Like everyone else I fancied it was a sickness of the mind—no more. But no, it's my body that's in pain. Pain everywhere, in my chest, in my legs and arms. Even my skin is raw, my head is buzzing, I feel like vomiting. But worst of all is this queer taste in my mouth. Not blood, or death, or fever, but a mixture of all three. I've only to stir my tongue, and the world goes black, and everyone looks ... horrible. How hard, how cruel it is, this process of becoming a man!

CÆSONIA: What you need, my dear, is a good, long sleep. Let yourself relax and, above all stop thinking. I'll stay by you while you sleep. And when you wake, you'll find the world's got back its savor. Then you must use your power to good effect—for loving better what you still find lovable. For the possible, too, deserves to be given a chance.

CALIGULA: Ah but for that I'd need to sleep, to let myself go—and that's impossible.

CÆSONIA: So one always thinks when one is overtired. A time comes when one's hand is firm again.

CALIGULA: But one must know where to place it. And what's the use to me of a firm hand, what use is the amazing power that's mine, if I can't have the sun set in the east, if I can't reduce the sum of suffering and make an end of death? No, Cæsonia, it's all one whether I sleep or keep awake, if I've no power to tamper with the scheme of things.

CÆSONIA: But that's madness, sheer madness. It's wanting to be a god on earth.

CALIGULA: So you, too, think I'm mad. And yet—what is a god that I should wish to be his equal? No, it's something higher, far above the gods, that I'm aiming at, longing for with all my heart and soul. I am taking over a kingdom where the impossible is king.

CÆSONIA: You can't prevent the sky from being the sky, or a fresh young face from aging, or a man's heart from growing cold.

CALIGULA [with rising excitement]: I want ... I want to drown the sky in the sea, to infuse ugliness with beauty, to wring a laugh from pain.

CÆSONIA [facing him with an imploring gesture]: There's good and bad, high and low, justice and injustice. And I swear to you these will never change.

CALIGULA [in the same tone]: And I'm resolved to change them ... I shall make this age of ours a kingly gift—the gift of equality. And when all is leveled out, when the impossible has come to earth and the moon is in my hands—then, perhaps, I shall be transfigured and the world renewed; then men will die no more and at last be happy.

CÆSONIA [with a little cry]: And love? Surely you won't go back on love!

CALIGULA [in a wild burst of anger]: Love, Cæsonia! [He grips her shoulders and shakes her.] I've learned the truth about love; it's nothing, nothing! That fellow was quite right—you heard what he said, didn't you?—it's only the Treasury that counts. The fountainhead of all. Ah, now at last I'm going to live, really live. And living, my dear, is the opposite of loving. I know what I'm talking about—and I invite you to the most gorgeous of shows, a sight for gods to gloat on, a whole world called to judgment. But for that I must have a crowd—spectators, victims, criminals, hundreds and thousands of them. [He rushes to the gong and begins hammering on it, faster and faster.] Let the accused come forward. I want my criminals, and they all are criminals. [Still striking the gong.] Bring in the condemned men. I must have my public. Judges, witnesses, accused—all sentenced to death without a hearing. Yes, Cæsonia, I'll show them something they have never seen before, the one free man in the Roman Empire. [To the clangor of the gong the palace has been gradually filling with noises; the clash of arms, voices, footsteps slow or hurried, coming nearer, growing louder. Some soldiers enter, and leave hastily.] And you, Cæsonia, shall obey me. You must stand by me to the end. It will be marvelous, you'll see. Swear to stand by me, Cæsonia.

CÆSONIA [wildly, between two gong strokes]: I needn't swear. You know I love you.

CALIGULA [in the same tone]: You'll do all I tell you.

CÆSONIA: All, all, Caligula—but do, please, stop....

CALIGULA [still striking the gong]: You will be cruel.

CÆSONIA [sobbing]: Cruel.

CALIGULA [still beating the gong]: Cold and ruthless.

CÆSONIA: Ruthless.

CALIGULA: And you will suffer, too.

CÆSONIA: Yes, yes—oh, no, please ... I'm—I'm going mad, I think!

[Some patricians enter, followed by members of the palace staff. All look bewildered and perturbed. CALIGULA bangs the gong for the last time, raises his mallet, swings round and summons them in a shrill, half-crazy voice.]

CALIGULA: Come here. All of you. Nearer. Nearer still. [He is quivering with impatience.] Your Emperor commands you to come nearer. [They come forward, pale with terror.] Quickly. And you, Cæsonia, come beside me. [He takes her hand, leads her to the mirror, and with a wild sweep of his mallet effaces a reflection on its surface. Then gives a sudden laugh.] All gone. You see, my dear? An end of memories; no more masks. Nothing, nobody left. Nobody? No, that's not true. Look, Cæsonia. Come here, all of you, and look ...

[He plants himself in front of the mirror in a grotesque attitude.]

CÆSONIA [staring, horrified, at the mirror]: Caligula! [CALIGULA lays a finger on the glass. His gaze steadies abruptly and when he speaks his voice has a new, proud ardor.]

CALIGULA: Yes ... Caligula.

CURTAIN

ACT II

Three years later.

A room in Cherea's house, where the patricians have met in secret.

FIRST PATRICIAN: It's outrageous, the way he's treating us.

THE OLD PATRICIAN: He calls me "darling"! In public, mind you—just to make a laughingstock of me. Death's too good for him.

FIRST PATRICIAN: And fancy making us run beside his litter when he goes into the country.

SECOND PATRICIAN: He says the exercise will do us good.

THE OLD PATRICIAN: Conduct like that is quite inexcusable.

THIRD PATRICIAN: You're right. That's precisely the sort of thing one can't forgive.

FIRST PATRICIAN: He confiscated your property, Patricius. He killed your father, Scipio. He's taken your wife from you, Octavius, and forced her to work in his public brothel. He has killed your son, Lepidus. I ask you, gentlemen, can you endure this? I, anyhow, have made up my mind. I know the risks, but I also know this life of abject fear is quite unbearable. Worse than death, in fact. Yes, as I said, my mind's made up.

SCIPIO: He made my mind up for me when he had my father put to death.

FIRST PATRICIAN: Well? Can you still hesitate?

A KNIGHT: No. We're with you. He's transferred our stalls at the Circus to the public, and egged us on to fight with the rabble—just to have a pretext for punishing us, of course.

THE OLD PATRICIAN: He's a coward.

SECOND PATRICIAN: A bully.

THIRD PATRICIAN: A buffoon.

THE OLD PATRICIAN: He's impotent—that's his trouble, I should say.

[A scene of wild confusion follows, weapons are brandished, a table is overturned, and there is a general rush toward the door. Just at this moment CHEREA strolls in, composed as usual, and checks their onrush.]

CHEREA: What's all this about? Where are you going?

A PATRICIAN: To the palace.

CHEREA: Ah, yes. And I can guess why. But do you think you'll be allowed to enter?

THE PATRICIAN: There's no question of asking leave.

CHEREA: Lepidus, would you kindly shut that door? [The door is shut. CHEREA goes to the overturned table and seats himself on a corner of it. The others turn toward him.] It's not so simple as you think, my friends. You're afraid, but fear can't take the place of courage and deliberation. In short, you're acting too hastily.

A KNIGHT: If you're not with us, go. But keep your mouth shut.

CHEREA: I suspect I'm with you. But make no mistake. Not for the same reasons.

A VOICE: That's enough idle talk.

CHEREA [standing up]: I agree. Let's get down to facts. But, first, let me make myself clear. Though I am with you, I'm not for you. That, indeed, is why I think you're going about it the wrong way. You haven't taken your enemy's measure; that's obvious, since you attribute petty motives to him. But there's nothing petty about Caligula, and you're

riding for a fall. You'd be better placed to fight him if you would try to see him as he really is.

A VOICE: We see him as he is—a crazy tyrant.

CHEREA: No. We've had experience of mad emperors. But this one isn't mad enough. And what I loathe in him is this: that he knows what he wants.

FIRST PATRICIAN: And we, too, know it; he wants to murder us all.

CHEREA: You're wrong. Our deaths are only a side issue. He's putting his power at the service of a loftier, deadlier passion; and it imperils everything we hold most sacred. True, it's not the first time Rome has seen a man wielding unlimited power; but it's the first time he sets no limit to his use of it, and counts mankind, and the world we know, for nothing. That's what appalls me in Caligula; that's what I want to fight. To lose one's life is no great matter; when the time comes I'll have the courage to lose mine. But what's intolerable is to see one's life being drained of meaning, to be told there's no reason for existing. A man can't live without some reason for living.

FIRST PATRICIAN: Revenge is a good reason.

CHEREA: Yes, and I propose to share it with you. But I'd have you know that it's not on your account, or to help you to avenge your petty humiliations. No, if I join forces with you, it's to combat a big idea—an ideal, if you like—whose triumph would mean the end of everything. I can endure your being made a mock of, but I cannot endure Caligula's carrying out his theories to the end. He is converting his philosophy into corpses and—unfortunately for us—it's a philosophy that's logical from start to finish. And where one can't refute, one strikes.

A VOICE: Yes. We must act.

CHEREA: We must take action, I agree. But a frontal attack's quite useless when one is fighting an imperial madman in the full flush of his power. You can take arms against a vulgar tyrant, but cunning is needed to fight down disinterested malice. You can only urge it on to follow its bent, and bide your time until its logic founders in sheer lunacy. As you see, I prefer to be quite frank, and I warn you I'll be with you only for a time. Afterward, I shall do nothing to advance your interests; all I wish is to regain some peace of mind in a world that has regained a meaning. What spurs me on is not ambition but fear, my very reasonable fear of that inhuman vision in which my life means no more than a speck of dust.

FIRST PATRICIAN [approaching him]: I have an inkling of what you mean, Cherea. Anyhow, the great thing is that you, too, feel that the whole fabric of society is threatened. You, gentlemen, agree with me, I take it, that our ruling motive is of a moral order. Family life is breaking down, men are losing their respect for honest work, a wave of immorality is sweeping the country. Who of us can be deaf to the appeal of our ancestral piety in its hour of danger? Fellow conspirators, will you tolerate a state of things in which patricians are forced to run, like slaves, beside the Emperor's litter?

THE OLD PATRICIAN: Will you allow them to be addressed as "darling"?

A VOICE: And have their wives snatched from them?

ANOTHER VOICE: And their money?

ALL TOGETHER: No!

FIRST PATRICIAN: Cherea, your advise is good, and you did well to calm our passion. The time is not yet ripe for action; the masses would still be against us. Will you join us in watching for the best moment to strike—and strike hard?

CHEREA: Yes—and meanwhile let Caligula follow his dream. Or, rather, let's actively encourage him to carry out his wildest plans. Let's put method into his madness. And then, at last, a day will come when he's alone, a lonely man in an empire of the dead and kinsmen of the dead.

[A general uproar. Trumpet calls outside. Then silence, but for whispers of a name: "CALIGULA!" CALIGULA enters with CÆSONIA, followed by HELICON and some soldiers. Pantomime. CALIGULA halts and gazes at the conspirators. Without a word he moves from one to the other, straightens a buckle on one man's shoulder, steps back to contemplate another, sweeps them with his gaze, then draws his hand over his eyes and walks out, still without a word.]

CÆSONIA [ironically, pointing to the disorder of the room]: Were you having a fight?

CHEREA: Yes, we were fighting.

CÆSONIA [in the same tone]: Really? Might I know what you were fighting about?

CHEREA: About ... nothing in particular.

CÆSONIA: Ah? Then it isn't true.

CHEREA: What isn't true?

CÆSONIA: You were not fighting.

CHEREA: Have it your own way. We weren't fighting.

CÆSONIA [smiling]: Perhaps you'd do better to tidy up the place. Caligula hates untidiness.

HELICON [to the OLD PATRICIAN]: You'll end by making him do something out of character.

THE OLD PATRICIAN: Pardon ... I don't follow. What have we done to him?

HELICON: Nothing. Just nothing. It's fantastic being futile to that point; enough to get on anybody's nerves. Try to put yourselves in Caligula's place. [A short pause.] I see; doing a bit of plotting, weren't you now?

THE OLD PATRICIAN: Really, that's too absurd. I hope Caligula doesn't imagine ...

HELICON: He doesn't imagine. He knows. But, I suppose, at bottom, he rather wants it.... Well, we'd better set to tidying up.

[All get busy. CALIGULA enters and watches them.]

CALIGULA [to the OLD PATRICIAN]: Good day, darling. [To the others] Gentlemen, I'm on my way to an execution. But I thought I'd drop in at your place, Cherea, for a light meal. I've given orders to have food brought here for all of us. But send for your wives first. [A short silence.] Rufius should thank his stars that I've been seized with hunger. [Confidentially] Rufius, I may tell you, is the knight who's going to be executed. [Another short silence.] What's this? None of you asks me why I've sentenced him to death? [No one speaks. Meanwhile slaves lay the table and bring food.] Good for you! I see you're growing quite intelligent. [He nibbles an olive.] It has dawned on you that a man needn't have done anything for him to die. [He stops eating and gazes at his guests with a twinkle in his eye.] Soldiers, I am proud of you. [Three or four women enter.] Good! Let's take our places. Anyhow. No order of precedence today. [All are seated.] There's no denying it, that fellow Rufius is in luck. But I wonder if he appreciates this short reprieve. A few hours gained on death, why, they're worth their weight in gold! [He begins eating; the others follow suit. It becomes clear that CALIGULA'S table manners are deplorable. There is no need for him to flick his olive stones onto his neighbors' plates, or to spit out bits of gristle over the dish, or to pick his teeth with his nails, or to scratch his head furiously. However, he indulges in these practices throughout the

meal, without the least compunction. At one moment he stops eating, stares at LEPIDUS, one of the guests, and says roughly] You're looking grumpy, Lepidus. I wonder, can it be because I had your son killed?

LEPIDUS [thickly]: Certainly not, Caius. Quite the contrary.

CALIGULA [beaming at him]: "Quite the contrary!" It's always nice to see a face that hides the secrets of the heart. Your face is sad. But what about your heart? Quite the contrary—isn't that so, Lepidus?

LEPIDUS [doggedly]: Quite the contrary, Cæsar.

CALIGULA [more and more enjoying the situation]: Really, Lepidus, there's no one I like better than you. Now let's have a laugh together, my dear friend. Tell me a funny story.

LEPIDUS [who has overrated his endurance]: Please ...

CALIGULA: Good! Very good! Then it's I who'll tell the story. But you'll laugh, won't you, Lepidus? [With a glint of malice.] If only for the sake of your other son. [Smiling again.] In any case, as you've just told us, you're not in a bad humor. [He takes a drink, then says in the tone of a teacher prompting a pupil] Quite ... quite the ...

LEPIDUS [wearily]: Quite the contrary, Cæsar.

CALIGULA: Splendid! [Drinks again.] Now listen. [In a gentle, faraway tone] Once upon a time there was a poor young emperor whom nobody loved. He loved Lepidus, and to root out of his heart his love for Lepidus, he had his youngest son killed. [In a brisker tone] Needless to say, there's not a word of truth in it. Still it's a funny story, eh? But you're not laughing. Nobody's laughing. Now listen! [In a burst of anger] I insist on everybody's laughing. You, Lepidus, shall lead the chorus. Stand up, every one of you, and laugh. [He thumps the table.] Do you hear what I say? I wish to see you laughing, all of you. [All rise to

their feet. During this scene all the players, CALIGULA and CÆSONIA excepted, behave like marionettes in a puppet play. CALIGULA sinks back on his couch, beaming with delight, and bursts into a fit of laughter.] Oh, Cæsonia! Just look at them! The game is up; honor, respectability, the wisdom of the nations, gone with the wind! The wind of fear has blown them all away. Fear, Cæsonia—don't you agree?—is a noble emotion, pure and simple, self-sufficient, like no other; it draws its patent of nobility straight from the guts. [He strokes his forehead and drinks again. In a friendly tone] Well, well, let's change the subject. What have you to say, Cherea? You've been very silent.

CHEREA: I'm quite ready to speak, Caius. When you give me leave.

CALIGULA: Excellent. Then—keep silent. I'd rather have a word from our friend Mucius.

MUCIUS [reluctantly]: As you will, Caius.

CALIGULA: Then tell us something about your wife. And begin by sending her to this place, on my right. [MUCIUS' WIFE seats herself beside CALIGULA.] Well, Mucius? We're waiting.

MUCIUS [hardly knowing what he says]: My wife ... but ... I'm very fond of her.

[General laughter.]

CALIGULA: Why, of course, my friend, of course. But how ordinary of you! So unoriginal! [He is leaning toward her, tickling her shoulder playfully with his tongue.] By the way, when I came in just now, you were hatching a plot, weren't you? A nice bloody little plot?

OLD PATRICIAN: Oh, Caius, how can you ...?

CALIGULA: It doesn't matter in the least, my pet. Old age will be served. I won't take it seriously. Not one of you has the spunk for an heroic act.... Ah, it's just come to my mind, I have some affairs of state to

settle. But, first, let the imperious desires that nature creates in us have their way.

[He rises and leads MUCIUS' WIFE into an adjoining room. MUCIUS starts up from his seat.]

CÆSONIA [amiably]: Please, Mucius. Will you pour me out another glass of this excellent wine. [MUCIUS complies; his movement of revolt is quelled. Everyone looks embarrassed. Chairs creak noisily. The ensuing conversation is in a strained tone. CÆSONIA turns to CHEREA.] Now, Cherea, suppose you tell me why you people were fighting just now?

CHEREA [coolly]: With pleasure, my dear Cæsonia. Our quarrel arose from a discussion whether poetry should be bloodthirsty or not.

CÆSONIA: An interesting problem. Somewhat beyond my feminine comprehension, of course. Still it surprises me that your passion for art should make you come to blows.

CHEREA [in the same rather stilted tone]: That I can well understand. But I remember Caligula's telling me the other day that all true passion has a spice of cruelty.

CÆSONIA [helping herself from the dish in front of her]: There's truth in that. Don't you agree, gentlemen?

THE OLD PATRICIAN: Ah, yes. Caligula has a rare insight into the secret places of the heart.

FIRST PATRICIAN: And how eloquently he spoke just now of courage!

SECOND PATRICIAN: Really, he should put his ideas into writing. They would be most instructive.

CHEREA: And, what's more, it would keep him busy. It's obvious he needs something to occupy his leisure.

CÆSONIA [still eating]: You'll be pleased to hear that Caligula shares your views; he's working on a book. Quite a big one, I believe.

[CALIGULA enters, accompanied by MUCIUS' WIFE.]

CALIGULA: Mucius, I return your wife, with many thanks. But excuse me, I've some orders to give.

[He hurries out. MUCIUS has gone pale and risen to his feet.]

CÆSONIA [to MUCIUS, who is standing]: This book of his will certainly rank among our Latin Classics. Are you listening, Mucius?

MUCIUS [his eyes still fixed on the door by which CALIGULA went out]: Yes. And what's the book about, Cæsonia?

CÆSONIA [indifferently]: Oh, it's above my head, you know.

CHEREA: May we assume it deals with the murderous power of poetry?

CÆSONIA: Yes, something of that sort, I understand.

THE OLD PATRICIAN [cheerfully]: Well anyhow, as our friend Cherea said, it will keep him busy.

CÆSONIA: Yes, my love. But I'm afraid there's one thing you won't like quite so much about this book, and that's its title.

CHEREA: What is it?

CÆSONIA: Cold Steel.

[Caligula hurries in.]

CALIGULA: Excuse me, but I've some urgent public work in hand. [To the INTENDANT] Intendant, you are to close the public granaries. I have signed a decree to that effect; you will find it in my study.

INTENDANT: But, sire ...

CALIGULA: Famine begins tomorrow.

INTENDANT: But ... but heaven knows what may happen—perhaps a revolution.

CALIGULA [firmly and deliberately]: I repeat; famine begins tomorrow. We all know what famine means—a national catastrophe. Well, tomorrow there will be a catastrophe, and I shall end it when I choose. After all, I haven't so many ways of proving I am free. One is always free at someone else's expense. Absurd perhaps, but so it is. [With a keen glance at MUCIUS] Apply this principle to your jealousy—and you'll understand better. [In a meditative tone] Still, what an ugly thing is jealousy! A disease of vanity and the imagination. One pictures one's wife.... [MUCIUS clenches his fists and opens his mouth to speak. Before he can get a word out, CALIGULA cuts in] Now, gentlemen, let's go on with our meal.... Do you know, we've been doing quite a lot of work, with Helicon's assistance? Putting the final touches to a little monograph on execution—about which you will have much to say.

HELICON: Assuming we ask your opinion.

CALIGULA: Why not be generous, Helicon, and let them into our little secrets? Come now, give them a sample. Section Three, first paragraph.

HELICON [standing, declaims in a droning voice]: "Execution relieves and liberates. It is universal, tonic, just in precept and in practice. A man dies because he is guilty. A man is guilty because he is one of Caligula's subjects. Now all men are Caligula's subjects. Ergo, all men are guilty and shall die. It is only a matter of time and patience."

CALIGULA [laughing]: There's logic for you, don't you agree? That bit about patience was rather neat, wasn't it? Allow me to tell you, that's the quality I most admire in you ... your patience. Now, gentlemen, you can disperse. Cherea doesn't need your presence any longer. Cæsonia, I wish you to stay. You too, Lepidus. Also our old friend Mereia. I want to

have a little talk with you about our National Brothel. It's not functioning too well; in fact, I'm quite concerned about it.

[The others file out slowly. CALIGULA follows MUCIUS with his eyes.]

CHEREA: At your orders, Caius. But what's the trouble? Are the staff unsatisfactory?

CALIGULA: No, but the takings are falling off.

MEREIA: Then you should raise the entrance fee.

CALIGULA: There, Mereia, you missed a golden opportunity of keeping your mouth shut. You're too old to be interested in the subject, and I don't want your opinion.

MEREIA: Then why ask me to stay?

CALIGULA: Because, presently, I may require some cool, dispassionate advice.

[MEREIA moves away.]

CHEREA: If you wish to hear my views on the subject, Caius, I'd say, neither coolly nor dispassionately, that it would be a blunder to raise the scale of charges.

CALIGULA: Obviously. What's needed is a bigger turnover. I've explained my plan of campaign to Cæsonia, and she will tell you all about it. As for me, I've had too much wine, I'm feeling sleepy.

[He lies down and closes his eyes.]

CÆSONIA: It's very simple. Caligula is creating a new order of merit.

CHEREA: Sorry, I don't see the connection.

CÆSONIA: No? But there is one. It will be called the Badge of Civic Merit and awarded to those who have patronized Caligula's National Brothel most assiduously.

CHEREA: A brilliant idea!

CÆSONIA: I agree. Oh, I forgot to mention that the badge will be conferred each month, after checking the admission tickets. Any citizen who has not obtained the badge within twelve months will be exiled, or executed.

CHEREA: Why "or executed"?

CÆSONIA: Because Caligula says it doesn't matter which—but it's important he should have the right of choosing.

CHEREA: Bravo! The Public Treasury will wipe out its deficit in no time

[CALIGULA has half opened his eyes and is watching old MEREIA who, standing in a corner, has produced a small flask and is sipping its contents.]

CALIGULA [still lying on the couch]: What's that you're drinking, Mereia?

MEREIA: It's for my asthma, Caius.

CALIGULA [rises, and thrusting the others aside, goes up to MEREIA and sniffs his mouth]: No, it's an antidote.

MEREIA: What an idea, Caius! You must be joking. I have choking fits at night and I've been in the doctor's hands for months.

CALIGULA: So you're afraid of being poisoned?

MEREIA: My asthma ...

CALIGULA: No. Why beat about the bush? You're afraid I'll poison you. You suspect me. You're keeping an eye on me.

MEREIA: Good heavens, no!

CALIGULA: You suspect me. I'm not to be trusted, eh?

MEREIA: Caius!

CALIGULA [roughly]: Answer! [In a cool, judicial tone] If you take an antidote, it follows that you credit me with the intention of poisoning you. Q.E.D.

MEREIA: Yes ... I mean ... no!

CALIGULA: And thinking I intend to poison you, you take steps to frustrate my plan. [He falls silent. Meanwhile CÆSONIA and CHEREA have moved away, backstage. LEPIDUS is watching the speakers with an air of consternation.] That makes two crimes, Mereia, and a dilemma from which you can't escape. Either I have no wish to cause your death; in which case you are unjustly suspecting me, your emperor. Or else I desire your death; in which case, vermin that you are, you're trying to thwart my will. [Another silence. CALIGULA contemplates the old man gloatingly.] Well, Mereia, what have you to say to my logic?

MEREIA: It ... it's sound enough, Caius. Only it doesn't apply to the case.

CALIGULA: A third crime. You take me for a fool. Now sit down and listen carefully. [To LEPIDUS] Let everyone sit down. [To MEREIA] Of these three crimes only one does you honor; the second one—because by crediting me with a certain wish and presuming to oppose it you are deliberately defying me. You are a rebel, a leader of revolt. And that needs courage. [Sadly] I've a great liking for you Mereia. And that is why you'll be condemned for crime number two, and not for either of the others. You shall die nobly, a rebel's death. [While he talks MEREIA is shrinking together on his chair.] Don't thank me. It's quite natural.

Here. [Holds out a phial. His tone is amiable.] Drink this poison.
[MEREIA shakes his head. He is sobbing violently. CALIGULA shows signs of impatience.] Don't waste time. Take it. [MEREIA makes a feeble attempt to escape. But CALIGULA with a wild leap is on him, catches him in the center of the stage and after a brief struggle pins him down on a low couch. He forces the phial between his lips and smashes it with a blow of his fist. After some convulsive movements MEREIA dies. His face is streaming with blood and tears. CALIGULA rises, wipes his hands absent-mindedly, then hands MEREIA'S flask to CÆSONIA.] What was it? An antidote?

CÆSONIA [calmly]: No, Caligula. A remedy for asthma.

[A short silence.]

CALIGULA [gazing down at MEREIA]: No matter. It all comes to the same thing in the end. A little sooner, a little later....

[He goes out hurriedly, still wiping his hands.]

LEPIDUS [in a horrified tone]: What ... what shall we do?

CÆSONIA [coolly]: Remove that body to begin with, I should say. It's rather a beastly sight.

[CHEREA and LEPIDUS drag the body into the wings.]

LEPIDUS [to CHEREA]: We must act quickly.

CHEREA: We'll need to be two hundred.

[Young SCIPIO enters. Seeing CÆSONIA, he makes as if to leave.]

CÆSONIA: Come.

SCIPIO: What do you want?

CÆSONIA: Come nearer. [She pushes up his chin and looks him in the eyes. A short silence. Then, in a calm, unemotional voice] He killed your father, didn't he?

SCIPIO: Yes.

CÆSONIA: Do you hate him?

SCIPIO: Yes.

CÆSONIA: And you'd like to kill him?

SCIPIO: Yes.

CÆSONIA [withdrawing her hand]: But—why tell me this?

SCIPIO: Because I fear nobody. Killing him or being killed—either way out will do. And anyhow you won't betray me.

CÆSONIA: That's so. I won't betray you. But I want to tell you something—or, rather, I'd like to speak to what is best in you.

SCIPIO: What's best in me is—my hatred.

CÆSONIA: Please listen carefully to what I'm going to say. It may sound hard to grasp, but it's as clear as daylight, really. And it's something that would bring about the one real revolution in this world of ours, if people would only take it in.

SCIPIO: Yes? What is it?

CÆSONIA: Wait! Try to call up a picture of your father's death, of the agony on his face as they were tearing out his tongue. Think of the blood streaming from his mouth, and recall his screams, like a tortured animal's.

SCIPIO: Yes.

CÆSONIA: And now think of Caligula.

SCIPIO [his voice rough with hatred]: Yes.

CÆSONIA: Now listen. Try to understand him.

[She goes out, leaving SCIPIO gaping after her in bewilderment.

HELICON enters.]

HELICON: Caligula will be here in a moment. Suppose you go for your meal, young poet?

SCIPIO: Helicon, help me.

HELICON: Too dangerous, my lamb. And poetry means nothing to me.

SCIPIO: You can help me. You know ... so many things.

HELICON: I know that the days go by—and growing boys should have their meals on time ... I know, too, that you could kill Caligula ... and he wouldn't greatly mind it.

[HELICON goes out. CALIGULA enters.]

CALIGULA: Ah, it's you, Scipio. [He pauses. One has the impression that he is somewhat embarrassed.] It's quite a long time since I saw you last. [Slowly approaches SCIPIO.] What have you been up to? Writing more poems, I suppose. Might I see your latest composition?

SCIPIO [likewise ill at ease, torn between hatred and some less defined emotion]: Yes, Cæsar, I've written some more poems.

CALIGULA: On what subject?

SCIPIO: Oh, on nothing in particular. Well, on Nature in a way.

CALIGULA: A fine theme. And a vast one. And what has Nature done for you?

SCIPIO [pulling himself together, in a somewhat truculent tone]: It consoles me for not being Cæsar.

CALIGULA: Really? And do you think Nature could console me for being Cæsar?

SCIPIO [in the same tone]: Why not? Nature has healed worse wounds than that.

CALIGULA [in a curiously young, unaffected voice]: Wounds, you said? There was anger in your voice. Because I put your father to death?... That word you used—if you only knew how apt it is! My wounds! [In a different tone] Well, well, there's nothing like hatred for developing the intelligence.

SCIPIO [stiffly]: I answered your question about Nature.

[CALIGULA sits down, gazes at SCIPIO, then brusquely grips his wrists and forces him to stand up. He takes the young man's face between his hands.]

CALIGULA: Recite your poem to me, please.

SCIPIO: No, please, don't ask me that.

CALIGULA: Why not?

SCIPIO: I haven't got it on me.

CALIGULA: Can't you remember it?

SCIPIO: No.

CALIGULA: Anyhow you can tell me what it's about.

SCIPIO [still hostile; reluctantly]: I spoke of a ... a certain harmony ...

CALIGULA [breaking in; in a pensive voice]:... between one's feet and the earth.

SCIPIO [looking surprised]: Yes, it's almost that ... and it tells of the wavy outline of the Roman hills and the sudden thrill of peace that twilight brings to them ...

CALIGULA: And the cries of swifts winding through the green dusk.

SCIPIO [yielding more and more to his emotion]: Yes, yes! And that fantastic moment when the sky all flushed with red and gold swings round and shows its other side, spangled with stars.

CALIGULA: And the faint smell of smoke and trees and streams that mingles with the rising mist.

SCIPIO [in a sort of ecstasy]: Yes, and the chirr of crickets, the coolness veining the warm air, the rumble of carts and the farmers' shouts, dogs barking ...

CALIGULA: And the roads drowned in shadow winding through the olive groves ...

SCIPIO: Yes, yes. That's it, exactly.... But how did you know?

CALIGULA [drawing SCIPIO to his breast]: I wonder! Perhaps because the same eternal truths appeal to us both.

SCIPIO [quivering with excitement, burying his head on CALIGULA'S breast]: Anyhow, what does it matter! All I know is that everything I feel or think of turns to love.

CALIGULA [stroking his hair]: That, Scipio, is a privilege of noble hearts—and how I wish I could share your ... your limpidity! But my appetite for life's too keen; Nature can never sate it. You belong to

quite another world, and you can't understand. You are single-minded for good; and I am single-minded—for evil.

SCIPIO: I do understand.

CALIGULA: No. There's something deep down in me—an abyss of silence, a pool of stagnant water, rotting weeds. [With an abrupt change of manner] Your poem sounds very good indeed, but, if you really want my opinion....

SCIPIO [his head on CALIGULA'S breast, murmurs]: Yes?

CALIGULA: All that's a bit ... anemic.

SCIPIO [recoiling abruptly, as if stung by a serpent, and gazing, horrified, at CALIGULA, he cries hoarsely]: Oh, you brute! You loathsome brute! You've fooled me again. I know! You were playing a trick on me, weren't you? And now you're gloating over your success.

CALIGULA [with a hint of sadness]: There's truth in what you say. I was playing a part.

SCIPIO [in the same indignant tone]: What a foul, black heart you have! And how all that wickedness and hatred must make you suffer!

CALIGULA [gently]: That's enough.

SCIPIO: How I loathe you! And how I pity you!

CALIGULA [angrily]: Enough, I tell you.

SCIPIO: And how horrible a loneliness like yours must be!

CALIGULA [in a rush of anger, gripping the boy by the collar, and shaking him]: Loneliness! What do you know of it? Only the loneliness of poets and weaklings. You prate of loneliness, but you don't realize

that one is never alone. Always we are attended by the same load of the future and the past. Those we have killed are always with us. But they are no great trouble. It's those we have loved, those who loved us and whom we did not love; regrets, desires, bitterness and sweetness, whores and gods, the celestial gang! Always, always with us! [He releases SCIPIO and moves back to his former place.] Alone! Ah, if only in this loneliness, this ghoulish haunted wilderness of mine, I could know, but for a moment, real solitude, real silence, the throbbing stillness of a tree! [Sitting down, in an access of fatigue.] Solitude? No, Scipio, mine is full of gnashings of teeth, hideous with jarring sounds and voices. And when I am with the women I make mine and darkness falls on us and I think, now my body's had its fill, that I can feel myself my own at last, poised between death and life—ah, then my solitude is fouled by the stale smell of pleasure from the woman sprawling at my side.

[A long silence. CALIGULA seems weary and despondent. SCIPIO moves behind him and approaches hesitantly. He slowly stretches out a hand toward him, from behind, and lays it on his shoulder. Without looking round, CALIGULA places his hand on SCIPIO'S.]

SCIPIO: All men have a secret solace. It helps them to endure, and they turn to it when life has wearied them beyond enduring.

CALIGULA: Yes, Scipio.

SCIPIO: Have you nothing of the kind in your life, no refuge, no mood that makes the tears well up, no consolation?

CALIGULA: Yes, I have something of the kind.

SCIPIO: What is it?

CALIGULA [very quietly]: Scorn.

CURTAIN

ACT III

A room in the imperial palace.

Before the curtain rises a rhythmic clash of cymbals and the thudding of a drum have been coming from the stage, and when it goes up we see a curtained-off booth, with a small proscenium in front, such as strolling players use at country fairs. On the little stage are CÆSONIA and HELICON, flanked by cymbal players. Seated on benches, with their backs to the audience, are some patricians and young SCIPIO.

HELICON [in the tone of a showman at a fair]: Walk up! Walk up! [A clash of cymbals.] Once more the gods have come to earth. They have assumed the human form of our heaven-born emperor, known to men as Caligula. Draw near, mortals of common clay; a holy miracle is taking place before your eyes. By a divine dispensation peculiar to Caligula's hallowed reign, the secrets of the gods will be revealed to you.
[Cymbals.]

CÆSONIA: Come, gentlemen. Come and adore him—and don't forget to give your alms. Today heaven and its mysteries are on show, at a price to suit every pocket.

HELICON: For all to see, the secrets of Olympus, revelations in high places, featuring gods in undress, their little plots and pranks. Step this way! The whole truth about your gods! [Cymbals.]

CÆSONIA: Adore him, and give your alms. Come near, gentlemen. The show's beginning.

[Cymbals. Slaves are placing various objects on the platform.]

HELICON: An epoch-making reproduction of the life celestial, warranted authentic in every detail. For the first time the pomp and splendor of the gods are presented to the Roman public. You will relish our novel, breathtaking effects: flashes of lightning [slaves light Greek fires], peals of thunder [they roll a barrel filled with stones], the divine event on its triumphal way. Now watch with all your eyes. [He draws aside the curtain. Grotesquely attired as Venus, CALIGULA beams down on them from a pedestal.]

CALIGULA [amiably]: I'm Venus today.

CÆSONIA: Now for the adoration. Bow down. [All but SCIPIO bend their heads.] And repeat after me the litany of Venus called Caligula.

"Our Lady of pangs and pleasures ..."

THE PATRICIANS: "Our Lady of pangs and pleasures ..."

CÆSONIA: "Born of the waves, bitter and bright with seafoam ..."

THE PATRICIANS: "Born of the waves, bitter and bright with seafoam ..."

CÆSONIA: "O Queen whose gifts are laughter and regrets ..."

THE PATRICIANS: "O Queen whose gifts are laughter and regrets ..."

CÆSONIA: "Rancors and raptures ..."

THE PATRICIANS: "Rancors and raptures ..."

CÆSONIA: "Teach us the indifference that kindles love anew ..."

THE PATRICIANS: "Teach us the indifference that kindles love anew ..."

CÆSONIA: "Make known to us the truth about this world—which is that it has none ..."

THE PATRICIANS: "Make known to us the truth about this world—which is that it has none ..."

CÆSONIA: “And grant us strength to live up to this verity of verities.”

THE PATRICIANS: “And grant us strength to live up to this verity of verities.”

CÆSONIA: Now, pause.

THE PATRICIANS: Now, pause.

CÆSONIA [after a short silence]: “Bestow your gifts on us, and shed on our faces the light of your impartial cruelty, your wanton hatred; unfold above our eyes your arms laden with flowers and murders ...”

THE PATRICIANS: “... your arms laden with flowers and murders.”

CÆSONIA: “Welcome your wandering children home, to the bleak sanctuary of your heartless, thankless love. Give us your passions without object, your griefs devoid of reason, your raptures that lead nowhere ...”

THE PATRICIANS: “... your raptures that lead nowhere ...”

CÆSONIA [raising her voice]: “O Queen, so empty yet so ardent, inhuman yet so earthly, make us drunk with the wine of your equivalence, and surfeit us forever in the brackish darkness of your heart.”

THE PATRICIANS: “Make us drunk with the wine of your equivalence, and surfeit us forever in the brackish darkness of your heart.” [When the patricians have said the last response, CALIGULA, who until now has been quite motionless, snorts and rises.]

CALIGULA [in a stentorian voice]: Granted, my children. Your prayer is heard. [He squats cross-legged on the pedestal. One by one the patricians make obeisance, deposit their alms, and line up on the right. The last, in his flurry, forgets to make an offering. CALIGULA bounds to

his feet.] Steady! Steady on! Come here, my lad. Worship's very well, but almsgiving is better. Thank you. We are appeased. Ah, if the gods had no wealth other than the love you mortals give them, they'd be as poor as poor Caligula. Now, gentlemen, you may go, and spread abroad the glad tidings of the miracle you've been allowed to witness. You have seen Venus, seen her godhead with your fleshly eyes, and Venus herself has spoken to you. Go, most favored gentlemen. [The patricians begin to move away.] Just a moment. When you leave, mind you take the exit on your left. I have posted sentries in the others, with orders to kill you.

[The patricians file out hastily, in some disorder. The slaves and musicians leave the stage.]

HELICON [pointing a threatening finger at SCIPIO]: Naughty boy, you've been playing the anarchist again.

SCIPIO [to CALIGULA]: You spoke blasphemy, Caius.

CALIGULA: Blasphemy? What's that?

SCIPIO: You're befouling heaven, after bloodying the earth.

HELICON: How this youngster loves big words!

[He stretches himself on a couch.]

CÆSONIA [composedly]: You should watch your tongue, my lad. At this moment men are dying in Rome for saying much less.

SCIPIO: Maybe—but I've resolved to tell Caligula the truth.

CÆSONIA: Listen to him, Caligula! That was the one thing missing in your Empire—a bold young moralist.

CALIGULA [giving SCIPIO a curious glance]: Do you really believe in the gods, Scipio?

SCIPIO: No.

CALIGULA: Then I fail to follow. If you don't believe, why be so keen to scent out blasphemy?

SCIPIO: One may deny something without feeling called on to besmirch it, or deprive others of the right of believing in it.

CALIGULA: But that's humility, the real thing, unless I'm much mistaken. Ah, my dear Scipio, how glad I am on your behalf—and a trifle envious, too. Humility's the one emotion I may never feel.

SCIPIO: It's not I you're envious of; it's the gods.

CALIGULA: If you don't mind, that will remain our secret—the great enigma of our reign. Really, you know, there's only one thing for which I might be blamed today—and that's this small advance I've made upon the path of freedom. For someone who loves power the rivalry of the gods is rather irksome. Well, I've proved to these imaginary gods that any man, without previous training, if he applies his mind to it, can play their absurd parts to perfection.

SCIPIO: That, Caius, is what I meant by blasphemy.

CALIGULA: No, Scipio, it's clear-sightedness. I've merely realized that there's only one way of getting even with the gods. All that's needed is to be as cruel as they.

SCIPIO: All that's needed is to play the tyrant.

CALIGULA: Tell me, my young friend. What exactly is a tyrant?

SCIPIO: A blind soul.

CALIGULA: That's a moot point. I should say the real tyrant is a man who sacrifices a whole nation to his ideal or his ambition. But I have no ideal, and there's nothing left for me to covet by way of power or glory. If I use this power of mine, it's to compensate.

SCIPIO: For what?

CALIGULA: For the hatred and stupidity of the gods.

SCIPIO: Hatred does not compensate for hatred. Power is no solution. Personally I know only one way of countering the hostility of the world we live in.

CALIGULA: Yes? And what is it?

SCIPIO: Poverty.

CALIGULA [bending over his feet and scrutinizing his toes]: I must try that, too.

SCIPIO: Meanwhile many men round you are dying.

CALIGULA: Oh, come! Not so many as all that. Do you know how many wars I've refused to embark on?

SCIPIO: No.

CALIGULA: Three. And do you know why I refused?

SCIPIO: Because the grandeur of Rome means nothing to you.

CALIGULA: No. Because I respect human life.

SCIPIO: You're joking, Caius.

CALIGULA: Or, anyhow, I respect it more than I respect military triumphs. But it's a fact that I don't respect it more than I respect my

own life. And if I find killing easy, it's because dying isn't hard for me. No, the more I think about it, the surer I feel that I'm no tyrant.

SCIPIO: What does it matter, if it costs us quite as dear as if you were one?

CALIGULA [with a hint of petulance]: If you had the least head for figures you'd know that the smallest war a tyrant—however levelheaded he might be—indulged in would cost you a thousand times more than all my vagaries (shall we call them?) put together.

SCIPIO: Possibly. But at least there'd be some sense behind a war; it would be understandable—and to understand makes up for much.

CALIGULA: There's no understanding fate; therefore I choose to play the part of fate. I wear the foolish, unintelligible face of a professional god. And that is what the men who were here with you have learned to adore.

SCIPIO: That, too, Caius, is blasphemy.

CALIGULA: No, Scipio, it's dramatic art. The great mistake you people make is not to take the drama seriously enough. If you did, you'd know that any man can play lead in the divine comedy and become a god. All he needs do is to harden his heart.

SCIPIO: You may be right, Caius. But I rather think you've done everything that was needed to rouse up against you a legion of human gods, ruthless as yourself, who will drown in blood your godhead of a day.

CÆSONIA: Really, Scipio!

CALIGULA [peremptorily]: No, don't stop him, Cæsonia. Yes, Scipio, you spoke truer than you knew; I've done everything needed to that end. I find it hard to picture the event you speak of—but I sometimes dream it. And in all those faces surging up out of the angry darkness, convulsed with fear and hatred, I see, and I rejoice to see, the only god I've worshipped on this earth; foul and craven as the human heart. [Irritably] Now go. I've had enough of you, more than enough. [In a different tone] I really must attend to my toenails; they're not nearly red enough, and I've no time to waste. [All go, with the exception of HELICON. He hovers round CALIGULA, who is busy examining his toes.] Helicon!

HELICON: Yes?

CALIGULA: Getting on with your task?

HELICON: What task?

CALIGULA: You know ... the moon.

HELICON: Ah yes, the moon.... It's a matter of time and patience. But I'd like to have a word with you.

CALIGULA: I might have patience; only I have not much time. So you must make haste.

HELICON: I said I'd do my utmost. But, first, I have something to tell you. Very serious news.

CALIGULA [as if he has not heard]: Mind you, I've had her already.

HELICON: Whom?

CALIGULA: The moon.

HELICON: Yes, yes.... Now listen, please. Do you know there's a plot being hatched against your life?

CALIGULA: What's more, I had her thoroughly. Only two or three times, to be sure. Still, I had her all right.

HELICON: For the last hour I've been trying to tell you about it, only—

CALIGULA: It was last summer. I'd been gazing at her so long, and stroking her so often on the marble pillars in the gardens that evidently she'd come to understand.

HELICON: Please stop trifling, Caius. Even if you refuse to listen, it's my duty to tell you this. And if you shut your ears, it can't be helped.

CALIGULA [applying red polish to his toenails]: This varnish is no good at all. But, to come back to the moon—it was a cloudless August night. [HELICON looks sulkily away, and keeps silence.] She was coy, to begin with. I'd gone to bed. First she was blood-red, low on the horizon. Then she began rising, quicker and quicker, growing brighter and brighter all the while. And the higher she climbed, the paler she grew, till she was like a milky pool in a dark wood rustling with stars. Slowly, shyly she approached, through the warm night air, soft, light as gossamer, naked in beauty. She crossed the threshold of my room, glided to my bed, poured herself into it, and flooded me with her smiles and sheen.... No, really this new varnish is a failure.... So you see, Helicon, I can say, without boasting, that I've had her.

HELICON: Now will you listen, and learn the danger that's threatening you?

CALIGULA [ceasing to fiddle with his toes, and gazing at him fixedly]: All I want, Helicon, is—the moon. For the rest, I've always known what will kill me. I haven't yet exhausted all that is to keep me living. That's why I

want the moon. And you must not return till you have secured her for me.

HELICON: Very well.... Now I'll do my duty and tell you what I've learned. There's a plot against you. Cherea is the ringleader. I came across this tablet which tells you all you need to know. See, I put it here.

[He places the tablet on one of the seats and moves away.]

CALIGULA: Where are you off to, Helicon?

HELICON [from the threshold]: To get the moon for you.

[There is a mouselike scratching at the opposite door. CALIGULA swings round and sees the OLD PATRICIAN.]

THE OLD PATRICIAN [timidly]: May I, Caius ...

CALIGULA [impatiently]: Come in! Come in! [Gazes at him.] So, my pet, you've returned to have another look at Venus.

THE OLD PATRICIAN: Well ... no. It's not quite that. Ssh! Oh, sorry, Caius! I only wanted to say.... You know I'm very, very devoted to you—and my one desire is to end my days in peace.

CALIGULA: Be quick, man. Get it out!

THE OLD PATRICIAN: Well, it's ... it's like this. [Hurriedly] It's terribly serious, that's what I meant to say.

CALIGULA: No, it isn't serious.

THE OLD PATRICIAN: But—I don't follow. What isn't serious?

CALIGULA: But what are we talking about, my love?

THE OLD PATRICIAN [glancing nervously round the room]: I mean to say.... [Wriggles, shuffles, then bursts out with it.] There's a plot afoot, against you.

CALIGULA: There! You see. Just as I said; it isn't serious.

THE OLD PATRICIAN: But, Caius, they mean to kill you.

CALIGULA [approaching him and grasping his shoulders]: Do you know why I can't believe you?

THE OLD PATRICIAN [raising an arm, as if to take an oath]: The gods bear witness, Caius, that ...

CALIGULA [gently but firmly pressing him back toward the door]: Don't swear. I particularly ask you not to swear. Listen, instead. Suppose it were true, what you are telling me—I'd have to assume you were betraying your friends, isn't that so?

THE OLD PATRICIAN [flustered]: Well, Caius, considering the deep affection I have for you ...

CALIGULA [in the same tone as before]: And I cannot assume that. I've always loathed baseness of that sort so profoundly that I could never restrain myself from having a betrayer put to death. But I know the man you are, my worthy friend. And I'm convinced you neither wish to play the traitor nor to die.

THE OLD PATRICIAN: Certainly not, Caius. Most certainly not.

CALIGULA: So you see I was right in refusing to believe you. You wouldn't stoop to baseness, would you?

THE OLD PATRICIAN: Oh, no, indeed!

CALIGULA: Nor betray your friends?

THE OLD PATRICIAN: I need hardly tell you that, Caius.

CALIGULA: Therefore it follows that there isn't any plot. It was just a joke—between ourselves, rather a silly joke—what you've just been telling me, eh?

THE OLD PATRICIAN [feebly]: Yes, yes. A joke, merely a joke.

CALIGULA: Good. So now we know where we are. Nobody wants to kill me.

THE OLD PATRICIAN: Nobody. That's it. Nobody at all.

CALIGULA [drawing a deep breath; in measured tones]: Then—leave me, sweetheart. A man of honor is an animal so rare in the present-day world that I couldn't bear the sight of one too long. I must be left alone to relish this unique experience. [For some moments he gazes, without moving, at the tablet. He picks it up and reads it. Then, again, draws a deep breath. Then summons a palace guard.]

CALIGULA: Bring Cherea to me. [The man starts to leave.] Wait! [The man halts.] Treat him politely. [The man goes out. CALIGULA falls to pacing the room. After a while he approaches the mirror.] You decided to be logical, didn't you, poor simpleton? Logic for ever! The question now is: Where will that take you? [Ironically] Suppose the moon were brought here, everything would be different. That was the idea, wasn't it? Then the impossible would become possible, in a flash the Great Change come, and all things be transfigured. After all, why shouldn't Helicon bring it off? One night, perhaps, he'll catch her sleeping in a lake, and carry her here, trapped in a glistening net, all slimy with weeds and water, like a pale bloated fish drawn from the depths. Why

not, Caligula? Why not, indeed? [He casts a glance round the room.] Fewer and fewer people round me; I wonder why. [Addressing the mirror, in a muffled voice] Too many dead, too many dead—that makes an emptiness.... No, even if the moon were mine, I could not retrace my way. Even were those dead men thrilling again under the sun's caress, the murders wouldn't go back underground for that. [Angrily] Logic, Caligula; follow where logic leads. Power to the uttermost; willfulness without end. Ah, I'm the only man on earth to know the secret—that power can never be complete without a total self-surrender to the dark impulse of one's destiny. No, there's no return. I must go on and on, until the consummation.

[CHEREA enters. CALIGULA is slumped in his chair, the cloak drawn tightly round him.]

CHEREA: You sent for me, Caius?

CALIGULA [languidly]: Yes, Cherea.

[A short silence.]

CHEREA: Have you anything particular to tell me?

CALIGULA: No, Cherea.

[Another silence.]

CHEREA [with a hint of petulance]: Are you sure you really need my presence?

CALIGULA: Absolutely sure, Cherea. [Another silence. Then, as if suddenly recollecting himself] I'm sorry for seeming so inhospitable. I was following up my thoughts, and—Now do sit down, we'll have a friendly little chat. I'm in a mood for some intelligent conversation. [CHEREA sits down. For the first time since the play began, CALIGULA gives the impression of being his natural self.] Do you think, Cherea, that it's possible for two men of much the same temperament and

equal pride to talk to each other with complete frankness—if only once in their lives? Can they strip themselves naked, so to speak, and shed their prejudices, their private interests, the lies by which they live?

CHEREA: Yes, Caius, I think it possible. But I don't think you'd be capable of it.

CALIGULA: You're right. I only wished to know if you agreed with me. So let's wear our masks, and muster up our lies. And we'll talk as fencers fight, padded on all the vital parts. Tell me, Cherea, why don't you like me?

CHEREA: Because there's nothing likable about you, Caius. Because such feelings can't be had to order. And because I understand you far too well. One cannot like an aspect of oneself which one always tries to keep concealed.

CALIGULA: But why is it you hate me?

CHEREA: There, Caius, you're mistaken. I do not hate you. I regard you as noxious and cruel, vain and selfish. But I cannot hate you, because I don't think you are happy. And I cannot scorn you, because I know you are no coward.

CALIGULA: Then why wish to kill me?

CHEREA: I've told you why; because I regard you as noxious, a constant menace. I like, and need, to feel secure. So do most men. They resent living in a world where the most preposterous fancy may at any moment become a reality, and the absurd transfix their lives, like a dagger in the heart. I feel as they do; I refuse to live in a topsy-turvy world. I want to know where I stand, and to stand secure.

CALIGULA: Security and logic don't go together.

CHEREA: Quite true. My plan of life may not be logical, but at least it's sound.

CALIGULA: Go on.

CHEREA: There's no more to say. I'll be no party to your logic. I've a very different notion of my duties as a man. And I know that the majority of your subjects share my view. You outrage their deepest feelings. It's only natural that you should ... disappear.

CALIGULA: I see your point, and it's legitimate enough. For most men, I grant you, it's obvious. But you, I should have thought, would have known better. You're an intelligent man, and given intelligence, one has a choice: either to pay its price or to disown it. Why do you shirk the issue and neither disown it nor consent to pay its price?

CHEREA: Because what I want is to live, and to be happy. Neither, to my mind, is possible if one pushes the absurd to its logical conclusions. As you see, I'm quite an ordinary sort of man. True, there are moments when, to feel free of them, I desire the death of those I love, or I hanker after women from whom the ties of family or friendship debar me. Were logic everything, I'd kill or fornicate on such occasions. But I consider that these passing fancies have no great importance. If everyone set to gratifying them, the world would be impossible to live in, and happiness, too, would go by the board. And these, I repeat, are the things that count, for me.

CALIGULA: So, I take it, you believe in some higher principle?

CHEREA: Certainly I believe that some actions are—shall I say?—more praiseworthy than others.

CALIGULA: And I believe that all are on an equal footing.

CHEREA: I know it, Caius, and that's why I don't hate you. I understand, and, to a point, agree with you. But you're pernicious, and you've got to go.

CALIGULA: True enough. But why risk your life by telling me this?

CHEREA: Because others will take my place, and because I don't like lying.

[A short silence.]

CALIGULA: Cherea!

CHEREA: Yes, Caius?

CALIGULA: Do you think that two men of similar temperament and equal pride can, if only once in their lives, open their hearts to each other?

CHEREA: That, I believe, is what we've just been doing.

CALIGULA: Yes, Cherea. But you thought I was incapable of it.

CHEREA: I was wrong, Caius. I admit it, and I thank you. Now I await your sentence.

CALIGULA: My sentence? Ah, I see. [Producing the tablet from under his cloak.] You know what this is, Cherea?

CHEREA: I knew you had it.

CALIGULA [passionately]: You knew I had it! So your frankness was all a piece of play acting. The two friends did not open their hearts to each other. Well, well! It's no great matter. Now we can stop playing at sincerity, and resume life on the old footing. But first I'll ask you to make just one more effort; to bear with my caprices and my

tactlessness a little longer. Listen well, Cherea. This tablet is the one and only piece of evidence against you.

CHEREA: Caius, I'd rather go. I'm sick and tired of all these antics. I know them only too well, and I've had enough. Let me go, please.

CALIGULA [in the same tense, passionate voice]: No, stay. This tablet is the only evidence. Is that clear?

CHEREA: Evidence? I never knew you needed evidence to send a man to his death.

CALIGULA: That's true. Still, for once I wish to contradict myself. Nobody can object to that. It's so pleasant to contradict oneself occasionally; so restful. And I need rest, Cherea.

CHEREA: I don't follow ... and, frankly, I've no taste for these subtleties.

CALIGULA: I know, Cherea, I know. You're not like me; you're an ordinary man, sound in mind and body. And naturally you've no desire for the extraordinary. [With a burst of laughter] You want to live and to be happy. That's all!

CHEREA: I think, Caius, we'd better leave it at that.... Can I go?

CALIGULA: Not yet. A little patience, if you don't mind—I shall not keep you long. You see this thing—this piece of evidence? I choose to assume that I can't sentence you to death without it. That's my idea ... and my repose. Well! See what becomes of evidence in an emperor's hands. [He holds the tablet to a torch. CHEREA approaches. The torch is between them. The tablet begins to melt.] You see, conspirator! The tablet's melting, and as it melts a look of innocence is dawning on your face. What a handsome forehead you have, Cherea! And how rare, how beautiful a sight is an innocent man! Admire my power. Even the gods

cannot restore innocence without first punishing the culprit. But your emperor needs only a torch flame to absolve you and give you a new lease of hope. So carry on, Cherea; follow out the noble precepts we've been hearing, wherever they may take you. Meanwhile your emperor awaits his repose. It's his way of living and being happy.

[CHEREA stares, dumfounded, at CALIGULA. He makes a vague gesture, seems to understand, opens his mouth to speak—and walks abruptly away. Smiling, holding the tablet to the flame, CALIGULA follows the receding figure with his gaze.]

CURTAIN

ACT IV

A room in the imperial palace.

The stage is in semidarkness. CHEREA and SCIPIO enter. CHEREA crosses to the right, then comes back left to SCIPIO.

SCIPIO [sulkily]: What do you want of me?

CHEREA: There's no time to lose. And we must know our minds, we must be resolute.

SCIPIO: Who says I'm not resolute?

CHEREA: You didn't attend our meeting yesterday.

SCIPIO [looking away]: That's so, Cherea.

CHEREA: Scipio, I am older than you, and I'm not in the habit of asking others' help. But, I won't deny it, I need you now. This murder needs

honorable men to sponsor it. Among all these wounded vanities and sordid fears, our motives only, yours and mine, are disinterested. Of course I know that, if you leave us, we can count on your silence. But that is not the point. What I want is—for you to stay with us.

SCIPIO: I understand. But I can't, oh, no, I cannot do as you wish.

CHEREA: So you are with him?

SCIPIO: No. But I cannot be against him. [Pauses; then in a muffled voice] Even if I killed him, my heart would still be with him.

CHEREA: And yet—he killed your father!

SCIPIO: Yes—and that's how it all began. But that, too, is how it ends.

CHEREA: He denies what you believe in. He tramples on all that you hold sacred.

SCIPIO: I know, Cherea. And yet something inside me is akin to him. The same fire burns in both our hearts.

CHEREA: There are times when a man must make his choice. As for me, I have silenced in my heart all that might be akin to him.

SCIPIO: But—I—I cannot make a choice. I have my own sorrow, but I suffer with him, too; I share his pain. I understand all—that is my trouble.

CHEREA: So that's it. You have chosen to take his side.

SCIPIO [passionately]: No, Cherea. I beg you, don't think that. I can never, never again take anybody's side.

CHEREA [affectionately; approaching SCIPIO]: Do you know, I hate him even more for having made of you—what he has made.

SCIPIO: Yes, he has taught me to expect everything of life.

CHEREA: No, he has taught you despair. And to have instilled despair into a young heart is fouler than the foulest of the crimes he has committed up to now. I assure you, that alone would justify me in killing him out of hand.

[He goes toward the door. HELICON enters.]

HELICON: I've been hunting for you high and low, Cherea. Caligula's giving a little party here, for his personal friends only. Naturally he expects you to attend it. [To SCIPIO] You, my boy, aren't wanted. Off you go!

SCIPIO [looking back at CHEREA as he goes out]: Cherea.

CHEREA [gently]: Yes, Scipio?

SCIPIO: Try to understand.

CHEREA [in the same gentle tone]: No, Scipio.

[SCIPIO and HELICON go out. A clash of arms in the wings. Two soldiers enter at right, escorting the OLD PATRICIAN and the FIRST PATRICIAN, who show signs of alarm.]

FIRST PATRICIAN [to one of the soldiers, in a tone which he vainly tries to steady]: But ... but what can he want with us at this hour of the night?

SOLDIER: Sit there. [Points to the chairs on the right.]

FIRST PATRICIAN: If it's only to have us killed—like so many others—why all these preliminaries?

SOLDIER: Sit down, you old mule.

THE OLD PATRICIAN: Better do as he says. It's clear he doesn't know anything.

SOLDIER: Yes, darling, quite clear. [Goes out.]

FIRST PATRICIAN: We should have acted sooner; I always said so. Now we're in for the torture chamber.

[The SOLDIER comes back with CHEREA, then goes out.]

CHEREA [seating himself. He shows no sign of apprehension]: Any idea what's happening?

FIRST PATRICIAN AND THE OLD PATRICIAN [speaking together]: He's found out about the conspiracy.

CHEREA: Yes? And then?

THE OLD PATRICIAN [shuddering]: The torture chamber for us all.

CHEREA [still unperturbed]: I remember that Caligula once gave eighty-one thousand sesterces to a slave who, though he was tortured nearly to death, wouldn't confess to a theft he had committed.

FIRST PATRICIAN: A lot of consolation that is—for us!

CHEREA: Anyhow, it shows that he appreciates courage. You ought to keep that in mind. [To the OLD PATRICIAN] Would you very much mind not chattering with your teeth? It's a noise I particularly dislike.

THE OLD PATRICIAN: I'm sorry, but—

FIRST PATRICIAN: Enough trifling! Our lives are at stake.

CHEREA [coolly]: Do you know Caligula's favorite remark?

THE OLD PATRICIAN [on the verge of tears]: Yes. He says to the executioner: "Kill him slowly, so that he feels what dying's like!"

CHEREA: No, there's a better one. After an execution he yawns, and says quite seriously: "What I admire most is my imperturbability."

FIRST PATRICIAN: Do you hear ...?

[A clanking of weapons is heard off stage.]

CHEREA: That remark betrays a weakness in his make-up.

THE OLD PATRICIAN: Would you be kind enough to stop philosophizing? It's something I particularly dislike.

[A slave enters and deposits a sheaf of knives on a seat.]

CHEREA [who has not noticed him]: Still, there's no denying it's remarkable, the effect this man has on all with whom he comes in contact. He forces one to think. There's nothing like insecurity for stimulating the brain. That, of course, is why he's so much hated.

THE OLD PATRICIAN [pointing a trembling finger]: Look!

CHEREA [noticing the knives, in a slightly altered tone]: Perhaps you were right.

FIRST PATRICIAN: Yes, waiting was a mistake. We should have acted at once.

CHEREA: I agree. Wisdom's come too late.

THE OLD PATRICIAN: But it's ... it's crazy. I don't want to die.

[He rises and begins to edge away. Two soldiers appear, and, after slapping his face, force him back onto his seat. The FIRST PATRICIAN squirms in his chair. CHEREA utters some inaudible words. Suddenly a queer music begins behind the curtain at the back of the stage; a thrumming and tinkling of zithers and cymbals. The patricians gaze at

each other in silence. Outlined on the illuminated curtain, in shadow play, CALIGULA appears, makes some grotesque dance movements, and retreats from view. He is wearing ballet dancer's skirts and his head is garlanded with flowers. A moment later a SOLDIER announces gravely: "Gentlemen, the performance is over." Meanwhile CÆSONIA has entered soundlessly behind the watching patricians. She speaks in an ordinary voice, but none the less they give a start on hearing it.]

CÆSONIA: Caligula has instructed me to tell you that, whereas in the past he always summoned you for affairs of state, today he invited you to share with him an artistic emotion. [A short pause. Then she continues in the same tone] He added, I may say, that anyone who has not shared in it will be beheaded. [They keep silent.] I apologize for insisting, but I must ask you if you found that dance beautiful.

FIRST PATRICIAN [after a brief hesitation]: Yes, Cæsonia. It was beautiful.

THE OLD PATRICIAN [effusively]: Lovely! Lovely!

CÆSONIA: And you, Cherea?

CHEREA [icily]: It was ... very high art.

CÆSONIA: Good. Now I can describe your artistic emotions to Caligula.

[CÆSONIA goes out.]

CHEREA: And now we must act quickly. You two stay here. Before the night is out there'll be a hundred of us.

[He goes out.]

THE OLD PATRICIAN: No, no. You stay. Let me go, instead. [Sniffs the air.] It smells of death here.

FIRST PATRICIAN: And of lies. [Sadly] I said that dance was beautiful!

THE OLD PATRICIAN [conciliatingly]: And so it was, in a way. Most original.

[Some patricians and knights enter hurriedly.]

SECOND PATRICIAN: What's afoot? Do you know anything? The Emperor's summoned us here.

THE OLD PATRICIAN [absent-mindedly]: For the dance, maybe.

SECOND PATRICIAN: What dance?

THE OLD PATRICIAN: Well, I mean ... er ... the artistic emotion.

THIRD PATRICIAN: I've been told Caligula's very ill.

FIRST PATRICIAN: He's a sick man, yes....

THIRD PATRICIAN: What's he suffering from? [In a joyful tone] By God, is he going to die?

FIRST PATRICIAN: I doubt it. His disease is fatal—to others only.

THE OLD PATRICIAN: That's one way of putting it.

SECOND PATRICIAN: Quite so. But hasn't he some other disease less serious, and more to our advantage?

FIRST PATRICIAN: No. That malady of his excludes all others.

[He goes out. CAESONIA enters. A short silence.]

CAESONIA [in a casual tone]: If you want to know, Caligula has stomach trouble. Just now he vomited blood.

[The patricians crowd round her.]

SECOND PATRICIAN: O mighty gods, I vow, if he recovers, to pay the Treasury two hundred thousand sesterces as a token of my joy.

THIRD PATRICIAN [with exaggerated eagerness]: O Jupiter, take my life in place of his!

[CALIGULA has entered, and is listening.]

CALIGULA [going up to the SECOND PATRICIAN]: I accept your offer, Lucius. And I thank you. My Treasurer will call on you tomorrow. [Goes to the THIRD PATRICIAN and embraces him.] You can't imagine how touched I am. [A short silence. Then, tenderly] So you love me, Cassius, as much as that?

THIRD PATRICIAN [emotionally]: Oh, Cæsar, there's nothing, nothing I wouldn't sacrifice for your sake.

CALIGULA [embracing him again]: Ah, Cassius, this is really too much; I don't deserve all this love. [CASSIUS makes a protesting gesture.] No, no, really I don't! I'm not worthy of it. [He beckons to two soldiers.] Take him away. [Gently, to CASSIUS] Go, dear friend, and remember that Caligula has lost his heart to you.

THIRD PATRICIAN [vaguely uneasy]: But—where are they taking me?

CALIGULA: Why, to your death, of course. Your generous offer was accepted, and I feel better already. Even that nasty taste of blood in my mouth has gone. You've cured me, Cassius. It's been miraculous, and how proud you must feel of having worked the miracle by laying your life down for your friend—especially when that friend's none other than Caligula! So now you see me quite myself again, and ready for a festive night.

THIRD PATRICIAN [shrieking, as he is dragged away]: No! No! I don't want to die. You can't be serious!

CALIGULA [in a thoughtful voice, between the shrieks]: Soon the sea roads will be golden with mimosas. The women will wear their lightest dresses. And the sky! Ah, Cassius, what a blaze of clean, swift sunshine! The smiles of life. [CASSIUS is near the door. CALIGULA gives him a gentle push. Suddenly his tone grows serious] Life, my friend, is something to be cherished. Had you cherished it enough, you wouldn't have gambled it away so rashly. [CASSIUS is led off. CALIGULA returns to the table.] The loser must pay. There's no alternative. [A short silence.] Come, Cæsonia. [He turns to the others] By the way, an idea has just waylaid me, and it's such an apt one that I want to share it with you. Until now my reign has been too happy. There's been no world-wide plague, no religious persecution, not even a rebellion—nothing in fact to make us memorable. And that, I'd have you know, is why I try to remedy the stinginess of fate. I mean—I don't know if you've followed me—that, well [he gives a little laugh], it's I who replace the epidemics that we've missed. [In a different tone] That's enough. I see Cherea's coming. Your turn, Cæsonia. [CALIGULA goes out. CHEREA and the FIRST PATRICIAN enter. CÆSONIA hurries toward CHEREA.]

CÆSONIA: Caligula is dead.

[She turns her head, as if to hide her tears; her eyes are fixed on the others, who keep silence. Everyone looks horrified, but for different reasons.]

FIRST PATRICIAN: You ... you're sure this dreadful thing has happened? It seems incredible. Only a short while ago he was dancing.

CÆSONIA: Quite so—and the effort was too much for him. [CHEREA moves hastily from one man to the other. No one speaks.] You've nothing to say, Cherea?

CHEREA [in a low voice]: It's a great misfortune for us all, Cæsonia.

[CALIGULA bursts in violently and goes up to CHEREA.]

CALIGULA: Well played, Cherea. [He spins round and stares at the others. Petulantly] Too bad! It didn't come off. [To CÆSONIA] Don't forget what I told you.

[CALIGULA goes out. CÆSONIA stares after him without speaking.]

THE OLD PATRICIAN [hoping against hope]: Is he ill, Cæsonia?

CÆSONIA [with a hostile look]: No, my pet. But what you don't know is that the man never has more than two hours' sleep and spends the best part of the night roaming about the corridors in his palace. Another thing you don't know—and you've never given a thought to—is what may pass in this man's mind in those deadly hours between midnight and sunrise. Is he ill? No, not ill—unless you invent a name and medicine for the black ulcers that fester in his soul.

CHEREA [seemingly affected by her words]: You're right, Cæsonia. We all know that Caius ...

CÆSONIA [breaking in emotionally]: Yes, you know it—in your fashion. But, like all those who have none, you can't abide anyone who has too much soul. Healthy people loathe invalids. Happy people hate the sad. Too much soul! That's what bites you, isn't it? You prefer to label it a disease; that way all the dolts are justified and pleased. [In a changed tone] Tell me, Cherea. Has love ever meant anything to you?

CHEREA [himself again]: I'm afraid we're too old now, Cæsonia, to learn the art of love-making. And anyhow it's highly doubtful if Caligula will give us time to do so.

CÆSONIA [who has recovered her composure]: True enough. [She sits down.] Oh, I was forgetting.... Caligula asked me to impart some news to you. You know, perhaps, that it's a red-letter day today, consecrated to art.

THE OLD PATRICIAN: According to the calendar?

CÆSONIA: No, according to Caligula. He's convoked some poets. He will ask them to improvise a poem on a set theme. And he particularly wants those of you who are poets to take part in the competition. He specially mentioned young Scipio and Metellus.

METELLUS: But we're not ready.

CÆSONIA [in a level tone, as if she has not heard him]: Needless to say there are prizes. There will be penalties, too. [Looks of consternation.] Between ourselves, the penalties won't be so very terrible.

[CALIGULA enters, looking gloomier than ever.]

CALIGULA: All ready?

CÆSONIA: Yes. [To a soldier] Bring in the poets.

[Enter, two by two, a dozen poets, keeping step; they line up on the right of the stage.]

CALIGULA: And the others?

CÆSONIA: Metellus! Scipio!

[They cross the stage and take their stand beside the poets. CALIGULA seats himself, backstage on the left, with CÆSONIA and the patricians. A short silence.]

CALIGULA: Subject: death. Time limit: one minute.

[The poets scribble feverishly on their tablets.]

THE OLD PATRICIAN: Who will compose the jury?

CALIGULA: I. Isn't that enough?

THE OLD PATRICIAN: Oh, yes, indeed. Quite enough.

CHEREA: Won't you take part in the competition, Caius?

CALIGULA: Unnecessary. I made my poem on that theme long ago.

THE OLD PATRICIAN [eagerly]: Where can one get a copy of it?

CALIGULA: No need to get a copy. I recite it every day, after my fashion.
[CÆSONIA eyes him nervously. CALIGULA rounds on her almost savagely] Is there anything in my appearance that displeases you?

CÆSONIA [gently]: I'm sorry....

CALIGULA: No meekness, please. For heaven's sake, no meekness. You're exasperating enough as it is, but if you start being humble ...
[CÆSONIA slowly moves away. CALIGULA turns to CHEREA.] I continue. It's the only poem I have made. And it's proof that I'm the only true artist Rome has known—the only one, believe me—to match his inspiration with his deeds.

CHEREA: That's only a matter of having the power.

CALIGULA: Quite true. Other artists create to compensate for their lack of power. I don't need to make a work of art; I live it. [Roughly] Well, poets, are you ready?

METELLUS: I think so.

THE OTHERS: Yes.

CALIGULA: Good. Now listen carefully. You are to fall out of line and come forward one by one. I'll whistle. Number One will start reading his poem. When I whistle, he must stop, and the next begin. And so on.

The winner, naturally, will be the one whose poem hasn't been cut short by the whistle. Get ready. [Turning to CHEREA, he whispers] You see, organization's needed for everything, even for art.

[Blows his whistle.]

FIRST POET: Death, when beyond thy darkling shore ...

[A blast of the whistle. The poet steps briskly to the left. The others will follow the same procedure, these movements should be made with mechanical precision.]

SECOND POET: In their dim cave, the Fatal Sisters Three ...

[Whistle.]

THIRD POET: Come to me death, beloved ...

[A shrill blast of the whistle. The FOURTH POET steps forward and strikes a dramatic posture. The whistle goes before he has opened his mouth.]

FIFTH POET: When I was in my happy infancy ...

CALIGULA [yelling]: Stop that! What earthly connection has a blockhead's happy infancy with the theme I set? The connection! Tell me the connection!

FIFTH POET: But, Caius, I've only just begun, and ... [Shrill blast.]

SIXTH POET [in a high-pitched voice]: Ruthless, he goes his hidden ways ...

[Whistle]

SEVENTH POET [mysteriously]: Oh, long, abstruse orison ...

[Whistle, broken off as SCIPIO comes forward without a tablet.]

CALIGULA: You haven't a tablet?

SCIPIO: I do not need one.

CALIGULA: Well, let's hear you. [He chews at his whistle.]

SCIPIO [standing very near CALIGULA, he recites listlessly, without looking at him]:

Pursuit of happiness that purifies the heart,

Skies rippling with light,

O wild, sweet, festal joys, frenzy without hope!

CALIGULA [gently]: Stop, please. The others needn't compete. [To SCIPIO] You're very young to understand so well the lessons we can learn from death.

SCIPIO [gazing straight at CALIGULA]: I was very young to lose my father.

CALIGULA [turning hastily]: Fall in, the rest of you. No, really a sham poet is too dreadful an infliction. Until now I'd thought of enrolling you as my allies; I sometimes pictured a gallant band of poets defending me in the last ditch. Another illusion gone! I shall have to relegate you to my enemies. So now the poets are against me—and that looks much like the end of all. March out in good order. As you go past you are to lick your tablets so as to efface the atrocities you scrawled on them. Attention! Forward! [He blows his whistle in short rhythmic jerks. Keeping step, the poets file out by the right, tonguing their immortal tablets. CALIGULA adds in a lower tone] Now leave me, everyone.

[In the doorway, as they are going out, CHEREA touches the FIRST PATRICIAN'S shoulder, and speaks in his ear.]

CHEREA: Now's our opportunity.

[SCIPIO, who has overheard, halts on the threshold and walks back to CALIGULA.]

CALIGULA [acidly]: Can't you leave me in peace—as your father's doing?

SCIPIO: No, Caius, all that serves no purpose now. For now I know, I know that you have made your choice.

CALIGULA: Won't you leave me in peace!

SCIPIO: Yes, you shall have your wish; I am going to leave you, for I think I've come to understand you. There's no way out left to us, neither to you nor to me—who am like you in so many ways. I shall go away, far away, and try to discover the meaning of it all. [He gazes at CALIGULA for some moments. Then, with a rush of emotion] Good-by, dear Caius. When all is ended, remember that I loved you. [He goes out. CALIGULA makes a vague gesture. Then, almost savagely, he pulls himself together and takes some steps toward CÆSONIA.]

CÆSONIA: What did he say?

CALIGULA: Nothing you'd understand.

CÆSONIA: What are thinking about?

CALIGULA: About him. And about you, too. But it amounts to the same thing.

CÆSONIA: What is the matter?

CALIGULA [staring at her]: Scipio has gone. I am through with his friendship. But you, I wonder why you are still here....

CÆSONIA: Why, because you're fond of me.

CALIGULA: No. But I think I'd understand—if I had you killed.

CÆSONIA: Yes, that would be a solution. Do so, then.... But why, oh, why can't you relax, if only for a moment, and live freely, without constraint?

CALIGULA: I have been doing that for several years; in fact I've made a practice of it.

CÆSONIA: I don't mean that sort of freedom. I mean—Oh, don't you realize what it can be to live and love quite simply, naturally, in ... in purity of heart?

CALIGULA: This purity of heart you talk of—every man acquires it, in his own way. Mine has been to follow the essential to the end.... Still all that needn't prevent me from putting you to death. [Laughs.] It would round off my career so well, the perfect climax. [He rises and swings the mirror round toward himself. Then he walks in a circle, letting his arms hang limp, almost without gestures; there is something feral in his gait as he continues speaking.] How strange! When I don't kill, I feel alone. The living don't suffice to people my world and dispel my boredom. I have an impression of an enormous void when you and the others are here, and my eyes see nothing but empty air. No, I'm at ease only in the company of my dead. [He takes his stand facing the audience, leaning a little forward. He has forgotten CÆSONIA'S presence.] Only the dead are real. They are of my kind. I see them waiting for me, straining toward me. And I have long talks with this man or that, who screamed to me for mercy and whose tongue I had cut out.

CÆSONIA: Come. Lie down beside me. Put your head on my knees. [CALIGULA does so.] That's better, isn't it? Now rest. How quiet it is here!

CALIGULA: Quiet? You exaggerate, my dear. Listen! [Distant metallic tinklings, as of swords or armor.] Do you hear those thousands of small sounds all around us, hatred stalking its prey? [Murmuring voices, footsteps.]

CÆSONIA: Nobody would dare....

CALIGULA: Yes, stupidity.

CÆSONIA: Stupidity doesn't kill. It makes men slow to act.

CALIGULA: It can be murderous, Cæsonia. A fool stops at nothing when he thinks his dignity offended. No, it's not the men whose sons or fathers I have killed who'll murder me. They, anyhow, have understood. They're with me, they have the same taste in their mouths. But the others—those I made a laughingstock of—I've no defense against their wounded vanity.

CÆSONIA [passionately]: We will defend you. There are many of us left who love you.

CALIGULA: Fewer every day. It's not surprising. I've done all that was needed to that end. And then—let's be fair—it's not only stupidity that's against me. There's the courage and the simple faith of men who ask to be happy.

CÆSONIA [in the same tone]: No, they will not kill you. Or, if they tried, fire would come down from heaven and blast them, before they laid a hand on you.

CALIGULA: From heaven! There is no heaven, my poor dear woman! [He sits down.] But why this sudden access of devotion? It wasn't provided for in our agreement, if I remember rightly.

CÆSONIA [who has risen from the couch and is pacing the room]: Don't you understand? Hasn't it been enough to see you killing others, without my also knowing you'll be killed as well? Isn't it enough to feel you hard and cruel, seething with bitterness, when I hold you in my arms; to breathe a reek of murder when you lie on me? Day after day I see all that's human in you dying out, little by little. [She turns toward him.] Oh, I know. I know I'm getting old, my beauty's on the wane. But it's you only I'm concerned for now; so much so that I've ceased troubling whether you love me. I only want you to get well, quite well again. You're still a boy, really; you've a whole life ahead of you. And, tell me, what greater thing can you want than a whole life?

CALIGULA [rising, looks at her fixedly]: You've been with me a long time now, a very long time.

CÆSONIA: Yes.... But you'll keep me, won't you?

CALIGULA: I don't know. I only know that, if you're with me still, it's because of all those nights we've had together, nights of fierce, joyless pleasure; it's because you alone know me as I am. [He takes her in his arms, bending her head back a little with his right hand.] I'm twenty-nine. Not a great age really. But today when none the less my life seems so long, so crowded with scraps and shreds of my past selves, so complete in fact, you remain the last witness. And I can't avoid a sort of shameful tenderness for the old woman that you soon will be.

CÆSONIA: Tell me that you mean to keep me with you.

CALIGULA: I don't know. All I know—and it's the most terrible thing of all—is that this shameful tenderness is the one sincere emotion that my life has given up to now. [CÆSONIA frees herself from his arms.

CALIGULA follows her. She presses her back to his chest and he puts his

arms round her.] Wouldn't it be better that the last witness should disappear?

CÆSONIA: That has no importance. All I know is: I'm happy. What you've just said has made me very happy. But why can't I share my happiness with you?

CALIGULA: Who says I'm unhappy?

CÆSONIA: Happiness is kind. It doesn't thrive on bloodshed.

CALIGULA: Then there must be two kinds of happiness, and I've chosen the murderous kind. For I am happy. There was a time when I thought I'd reached the extremity of pain. But, no, one can go farther yet. Beyond the frontier of pain lies a splendid, sterile happiness. Look at me. [She turns toward him.] It makes me laugh, Cæsonia, when I think how for years and years all Rome carefully avoided uttering Drusilla's name. Well, all Rome was mistaken. Love isn't enough for me; I realized it then. And I realize it again today, when I look at you. To love someone means that one's willing to grow old beside that person. That sort of love is right outside my range. Drusilla old would have been far worse than Drusilla dead. Most people imagine that a man suffers because out of the blue death snatches away the woman he loves. But his real suffering is less futile; it comes from the discovery that grief, too, cannot last. Even grief is vanity.

You see, I had no excuses, not the shadow of a real love, neither bitterness nor profound regret. Nothing to plead in my defense! But today—you see me still freer than I have been for years; freed as I am from memories and illusion. [He laughs bitterly.] I know now that nothing, nothing lasts. Think what that knowledge means! There have been just two or three of us in history who really achieved this freedom, this crazy happiness. Well, Cæsonia, you have seen out a most unusual drama. It's time the curtain fell, for you.

[He stands behind her again, linking his forearm round CÆSONIA'S neck.]

CÆSONIA [terrified]: No, it's impossible! How can you call it happiness, this terrifying freedom?

CALIGULA [gradually tightening his grip on CÆSONIA'S throat]: Happiness it is, Cæsonia; I know what I'm saying. But for this freedom I'd have been a contented man. Thanks to it, I have won the godlike enlightenment of the solitary. [His exaltation grows as little by little he strangles CÆSONIA, who puts up no resistance, but holds her hands half opened, like a suppliant's, before her. Bending his head, he goes on speaking, into her ear] I live, I kill, I exercise the rapturous power of a destroyer, compared with which the power of a creator is merest child's play. And this, this is happiness; this and nothing else—this intolerable release, devastating scorn, blood, hatred all around me; the glorious isolation of a man who all his life long nurses and gloats over the ineffable joy of the unpunished murderer; the ruthless logic that crushes out human lives [he laughs], that's crushing yours out, Cæsonia, so as to perfect at last the utter loneliness that is my heart's desire.

CÆSONIA [struggling feebly]: Oh, Caius ...

CALIGULA [more and more excitedly]: No. No sentiment. I must have done with it, for the time is short. My time is very short, dear Cæsonia. [CÆSONIA is gasping, dying. CALIGULA drags her to the bed and lets her fall on it. He stares wildly at her; his voice grows harsh and grating.] You, too, were guilty. But killing is not the solution. [He spins round and gazes crazily at the mirror.] Caligula! You, too; you, too, are guilty. Then what of it—a little more, a little less? Yet who can condemn me in this world where there is no judge, where nobody is innocent? [He brings

his eyes close to his reflected face. He sounds genuinely distressed] You see, my poor friend. Helicon has failed you. I won't have the moon.

Never, never, never! But how bitter it is to know all, and to have to go through to the consummation! Listen! That was a sound of weapons. Innocence arming for the fray—and innocence will triumph. Why am I not in their place, among them? And I'm afraid. That's cruelest of all, after despising others, to find oneself as cowardly as they. Still, no matter. Fear, too, has an end. Soon I shall attain that emptiness beyond all understanding, in which the heart has rest. [He steps back a few paces, then returns to the mirror. He seems calmer. When he speaks again his voice is steadier, less shrill.]

Yet, really, it's quite simple. If I'd had the moon, if love were enough, all might have been different. But where could I quench this thirst? What human heart, what god, would have for me the depth of a great lake? [Kneeling, weeping] There's nothing in this world, or in the other, made to my stature. And yet I know, and you, too, know [still weeping, he stretches out his arms toward the mirror] that all I need is for the impossible to be. The impossible! I've searched for it at the confines of the world, in the secret places of my heart. I've stretched out my hands [his voice rises to a scream]; see, I stretch out my hands, but it's always you I find, you only, confronting me, and I've come to hate you. I have chosen a wrong path, a path that leads to nothing.

My freedom isn't the right one.... Nothing, nothing yet. Oh, how oppressive is this darkness! Helicon has not come; we shall be forever guilty. The air tonight is heavy as the sum of human sorrows. [A clash of arms and whisperings are heard in the wings. CALIGULA rises, picks up a stool, and returns to the mirror, breathing heavily. He contemplates himself, makes a slight leap forward, and, watching the symmetrical movement of his reflected self, hurls the stool at it, screaming] To

history, Caligula! Go down to history! [The mirror breaks and at the same moment armed conspirators rush in. CALIGULA swings round to face them with a mad laugh. SCIPIO and CHEREA, who are in front, fling themselves at him and stab his face with their daggers. CALIGULA'S laughter turns to gasps. All strike him, hurriedly, confusedly. In a last gasp, laughing and choking, CALIGULA shrieks] I'm still alive!

CURTAIN

The End