ALBERT CAMUS
The Misunderstanding
and
Caligula

Translated by
Christopher Williams
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THE TRANSLATOR, like the lexicographer, is a harmless drudge; along with the screen writer, the editor and the designer, his work takes place behind the scenes and is rarely considered by the reading public.

In translating these two rather difficult plays, Christopher Williams has toiled long and hard to get at the meaning of Camus’ text. Drama presents different challenges to the translator, in particular that of how much licence he should allow himself.

Unlike a novel, a play is dialogue stripped bare. There is little or no opportunity to use ‘author talk’ to describe character, place, atmosphere and cultural and political context, so the translator of drama has to work within much narrower confines than the translator of novels. Many translations are, in reality, artistic interpretations and often stray from the author’s intention.

Translation into English is especially problematic because it is a language of allusion and synonym, with an estimated 200,000 words in common usage and a habit of adapting them over time.

French has approximately half this number of words and, despite the officially deprecated readiness of popular French culture to pilfer useful words from other languages (especially English), a tradition of austere precision. Nuance performs the same function in French as does ambiguity in English.

Drama, for most of its history, has been written expressly to be interpreted and actors and directors have taken huge liberties with texts—witness how the dictatorial actor-managers of the nineteenth century rewrote Shakespeare to satisfy their desire for stardom and their audiences’ hunger for celebrity.

The relationship between the reader of a novel and its author is quite direct, with the reader almost as a participant. The only possible intermediary is a translator.

But with drama there are many interpreters between the author and the audience: the director, the producer who imposes constraints on the director, the greater or lesser talents of the actors, the stage and lighting designers and the special effects technicians, to say nothing of incidental music and theatrical machinery.

No two productions of a play are ever the same because of the many possible levels of interpretation, and Christopher Williams’ intention has been to remove at least the first stage of ambiguity from the process by electing to translate as plainly as possible rather than to impose his own world view on the text.

He believes that the plain meaning of Camus’ texts can stand by itself without the need for interpretation; unadorned translation alone is all the plays need for the theatre to carry his message.

—R G Mazurky
Knocklofty Press
Albert Camus wrote Le Malentendu (The Misunderstanding) in 1942 and 1943 in Chambon-sur-Lignon in Nazi-occupied France. It was staged for the first time at the Mathurins Theatre in Paris in June 1944. The inspiration for the play came from a true crime that Camus had read about in a newspaper.

The Misunderstanding was one of four works that focused on Camus’ idea of the absurd. The core of this idea is that human desire is in perpetual conflict with a world that is arbitrary, illogical and unfair. A central theme of this play is that life does not distinguish between those who pursue a ‘bad’ path and those who pursue a ‘good’ path. Life, as Camus sees it, is equally cruel to the innocent and the criminal; this is the absurdity of existence.

Originally the play was to have been entitled Budejovice after a city in the south of the Czech Republic close to the Austrian border where Camus stayed briefly during a European trip with his first wife, Simone Hie, and a teacher friend, Yves Bourgeois, in the summer of 1936. The two-month trip through France, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Germany and Italy precipitated the collapse of Albert and Simone’s marriage.

Camus wrote Le Malentendu during a two-year wartime separation from his second wife, Francine Faure, and the themes of separation and exile permeate the play. The character of Martha emphasises to her mother that she is “…anxious to find that country where the sun kills questions. My home isn’t here”. In explaining to his wife, Maria, why he has decided to return to his childhood home after an absence of twenty years, Jan says “Only, people cannot be happy in exile or oblivion. One can’t always remain a stranger. I want to recover my country, to make all those I love happy”.

After listening to Jan’s evocative description of spring in the African town he has come from, Martha confides to him “I no longer have patience to spare for this Europe where the autumn has the face of spring and spring the smell of misery. But I imagine with delight that other country where summer crushes everything, where the winter rains flood the towns and where, finally, things are what they are”.

Camus once described Le Malentendu to Francine as: “the play that resembles me the most”**. Certainly, in contrast to his other plays, Camus looks at himself and some of those closest to him through the characters of this one. Although seen by a number of critics as a bleak piece of work, Camus did not regard Le Malentendu as pessimistic. He said: “When the tragedy is done, it would be incorrect to think that this play argues for submission to fate. On the contrary, it is a play of revolt, perhaps even containing a moral of sincerity”**
CAMUS first pondered the idea of writing a play about the ill-fated Roman emperor Caligula in 1935 as he was completing his philosophy studies at the University of Algiers and by 1938 he had finished a first draft. At that point it comprised three acts. In the summer of 1939 Camus began to rework the play, telling a former girlfriend: “I feel that I can do better than that, and I must rewrite it”. During 1940 he continued to revise Caligula while at the same time writing his novel L’Étranger (The Outsider) and his essay Le Myth de Sisyphe (The Myth of Sisyphus). By February 1941 all three works were completed and in company with the later work, Le Malentendu, formed Camus’ quartet of works on the absurd.

With Caligula, Camus sought to portray the results of a powerful individual pursuing nihilism to its ultimate conclusion. The symbolic parallel with the deranged Führer whose nihilism almost shattered the world is clear.

The foundation of Camus’ research for this play was Lives of the Twelve Caesars by the Latin historian, Suetonius, who tells us that Caius Caesar Caligula, third of the twelve Caesars, came to power in 37AD at the age of twenty-five and ruled for four years until he was assassinated in 41AD. Caligula showed himself to be an open-minded and liberal ruler during the first eight months of his reign. Then he began to develop an incestuous attraction to his sister Drusilla and declared that he intended to marry her. With Drusilla’s sudden death shortly after, Caligula changed and Suetonius says he became “rather a monster than a man”.

Caligula killed or tortured many of his subjects and eventually his patricians rebelled and murdered him. Suetonius attributed the drastic shift in Caligula’s character to either epilepsy or the mind-altering effects of a philtre (an aphrodisiac drink) given to him by his mistress, Caesonia. Camus, however, used Drusilla’s death as a moment of epiphany for the grieving Caligula wherein he perceives the absurdity of human existence, an absurdity encapsulated in his line “Men are dying and they are not happy”. Caligula then drives this essential truth of the human condition to its logical and violent conclusion, believing that he will attain the omnipotent freedom of the gods whom he detests.

Camus’ friend, the poet Rene Leynaud, described the play as: “a lightning bolt, the revelation of the impossible in a soul”. Camus himself wrote the following about the play in program notes for the debut production at the Hebertot Theatre: “… if his integrity consists of his denial of the gods, his fault is to be found in his denial of men. Caligula is faithless towards humanity in order to keep faith with himself. He consents to die; having learned that no man can save himself alone and that one cannot be free by working against mankind. But at least he will have rescued some souls, including his own and that of his friend Scipio, from the dreamless sleep of mediocrity.”
Albert Camus was born on November 7, 1913, in Mondovi, Algeria. His mother was of Spanish extraction. His father was killed at the Battle of the Marne when Camus was just eight months old. From an impoverished background Camus rose to become arguably the greatest French writer of the twentieth century.

From 1932 to 1936 he studied philosophy at the University of Algiers. In 1934 he married Simone Hie, the daughter of a local doctor. The marriage collapsed in 1936 due in large part to Simone's morphine addiction.

In 1935 Camus joined the French Communist Party to campaign for the rights of working-class Algerians. Two years later he was expelled from the Party after being denounced as a Trotskyite agitator for his support of the Algerian Moslem political leader Messali Hadj, and his Algerian Popular Party.

After completing his diplome d'études superieures in 1936 Camus worked as a journalist for the paper Algèr Republicain where he achieved prominence for a series of articles revealing the poverty and suffering of the people of the Kabyle region. Earlier that same year, with the help of some friends, Camus founded Theatre du Travail (Workers' Theatre), an avant-garde dramatic group.

Renamed Theatre de l'Équipe in 1937, this group survived until 1939. Camus' first published works were two collections of lyric essays L'Envers et L'Endroit (The Wrong Side and The Right Side) and Noces (Nuptials) released locally in 1937 and 1939 respectively.

Rejected for military service at the start of World War II because of tuberculosis (a condition he contracted in 1930) Camus moved to Paris in early 1940 where he worked for Paris-Soir magazine. At the end of that year he married Francine Faure, a mathematics teacher.

Following the marriage the couple returned to Algeria and spent the next eighteen months living in Francine's home town of Oran. Camus' major works, the novel L'Étranger (The Outsider) and the critical essay Le Myth de Sisyphe (The Myth of Sisyphus) were published by Gallimard in 1942.

In the summer of that year Camus and his wife travelled to Chambon-sur-Lignon so that he could recuperate from a worsening of his tuberculosis.

It was the start of a two-year separation from Francine who was obliged to return to her teaching post in Oran. Camus moved from Chambon to Paris where he helped to establish and run the Resistance newspaper Combat. Le Malentendu and Caligula were staged in Paris in 1944 and 1945.

Reunited with his wife at the end of 1944, Camus chose to remain in France at the end of the war. His twin children, Catherine and Jean, were born in September 1945.

Following the war Camus rose to international prominence through novels such as La Peste (The Plague) and La Chute (The Fall) and his philosophical analysis of rebellion and revolution L'Homme Revolte (The Rebel) which made clear his rejection of communism.

Camus' strong public criticisms of communist doctrine led to him being ostracised by French left wing intellectuals. The hostile reception given to L'Homme Revolte depressed him and subsequently he turned his attention more towards theatre and translating plays.

His overtly political plays L'État de Siege (State of Siege) and Les Justes (The Just) were staged in 1948 and 1949; the former
a critical failure, the latter more successful, enjoying a run of over 400 performances at the Hebertot Theatre.

In 1956 Camus scored a major success with his theatrical adaptation of William Faulkner’s novel Requiem For A Nun. Camus was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1957, becoming the second youngest recipient of the award after Rudyard Kipling. In 1959 he directed a successful production of his adaptation of Dostoyevsky’s novel The Possessed.

On January 4 1960 he was killed in a car accident near Sens, just south of Paris. The manuscript of a novel he had been working on was recovered from the car wreck.

The novel, titled Le Premier Homme (The First Man) was eventually published to considerable critical acclaim in 1994.

** Quotations are from: Albert Camus: A Life by Olivier Todd (Carroll & Graf Publishers Inc. New York)

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**Note on the Translator**

CHRISTOPHER WILLIAMS has been a working professional in the Australian performing arts industry since 1979. Born in Sydney in 1959, Chris studied extensively during the 1980s with noted Aboriginal actor/director Brian Syron (a protégé of legendary American teacher Stella Adler). In 1987 Chris was one of six non-Aboriginal actors invited to participate in the First National Aboriginal Playwrights Conference held at the Australian National University in Canberra. Subsequently he performed in breakthrough productions at Sydney’s Belvoir Street Theatre for the Aboriginal National Theatre Trust.

Following his work for the Trust he travelled through Spain, Portugal, France, Italy and Belgium. In 1993 he and his family moved to Portsmouth, England where he pursued a social work career with the Hampshire Probation Service and Portsmouth Social Services.

Since returning to Australia in 1997 Chris has taught acting at tertiary drama colleges in Adelaide, South Australia. He has also run private workshops on plays by Bertholt Brecht and Tennessee Williams at various Adelaide secondary colleges and as part of the Youth Education Program for the 2004 Adelaide Fringe Festival.

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**Note for Actors and Directors**

THIS PUBLICATION has been designed specifically for the working theatre rather than as a literary document.

Act and scene tags are provided at the head of each page, together with a running line count. Line numbering at five-line intervals begins with the first spoken line in each scene and for simplicity includes blank lines above and below stage directions, except where these are at the foot of a page.

For the convenience of actors and directors, speeches are not broken at the foot of a page; where continuing a speech would have necessitated the turn of a page, it is moved in its entirety to the head of the next page, indicated by the symbol ▼ below the final number in the column of line numbers.

The end of a scene that finishes before the foot of a page is marked by the symbol ■.
Translator’s Foreword

IT’S TOO repetitive and doesn’t sound natural enough.” This was a description by one of my second year acting students about Stuart Gilbert’s translation of Le Malentendu (published by Penguin under the title Cross Purpose) after we had completed a first read-through of the play in July 2005.

The curriculum of the private tertiary drama college where I was teaching required the second year actors to perform a mid-twentieth century drama for their end-of-year production. I had chosen Le Malentendu as I am a great admirer of Camus’ work, having read the play some years before; I was still fascinated by it.

The second year students were unanimous in their appraisal of Cross Purpose. They liked the play and the characters and found the storyline intriguing but Gilbert’s style of language left them cold. I took the play home that night and re-read it.

MY STUDENTS were right. The intensity and power of the Camus that I first discovered when reading L’Étranger (in French) at secondary school were not there. So began my journey into retranslating Le Malentendu and, subsequently, Caligula. A very helpful antiquarian bookseller imported for me both editions of the two plays (a 1944 Gallimard NRF original and a 1958 reprint with Camus’ revisions to both works). I have incorporated Camus’ revisions in my translations because, in my view as a theatre practitioner, they enhance the originals.

As I worked on the plays I found myself more and more astounded by the lack of precision in Stuart Gilbert’s work. In the foreword to his retranslation of L’Étranger the American translator Matthew Ward referred to Gilbert’s rendering of L’Étranger as suffering from “paraphrastic earnestness”. From what I’ve discovered through examining Gilbert’s work on Le Malentendu and Caligula, I find myself in agreement with Matthew Ward. In my view, Stuart Gilbert succumbed to what I would call ‘spin translating’. He put his own spin on Camus’ intentions by approximating what he thought was the meaning of Camus’ writing rather than translating with exactitude the words Camus wrote.

To illustrate my point I offer the following examples:

In Act 1 Scene 4 of Le Malentendu Maria is fiercely attempting to dissuade her husband Jan from leaving her alone in their hotel so that he can spend one evening staying incognito with his mother and sister at their inn. At one point Maria shakes her head in disagreement with Jan’s assertion that what he is asking of her is “nothing much” and she says to him:

“…A separation is always something for those who love each other with a vengeance”.

Jan’s reply (in Camus’ original text) is: “Sauvage, tu sais bien que je t’aime comme il faut”.

Gilbert translated Jan’s response as: “But, you romantic little creature, you know quite well I love you with the right kind of love.” (To my ears that sounds perilously close to something you would expect to hear in a 1940’s Pinewood Studios C-grade melodrama.) To begin with, the word ‘Sauvage’ is as it appears to the naked eye; it means savage as well as wild, ferocious, uncivilised and shy. In my view it cannot be interpreted as ‘romantic’. The French words for romantic are romanesque and romantique – neither of which is in the line Camus wrote. Similarly with Gilbert’s use of the words ‘But’ and ‘little creature’. Neither French equivalent exists in what Camus wrote. As for ‘comme il faut’, this phrase has several possible meanings including: ‘as it
should be, ‘as one ought to do,’ ‘soundly hard’ and ‘with a vengeance.’ I chose to use ‘with a vengeance’ in order to capture the intensity of the exchange between the couple.

Near the end of Act 2 Scene 1 Jan says to Martha: “Il me semble que, pour la première fois, vous venez de me tenir un langage humain”. Gilbert turned this into: “It strikes me that, for the first time, you’ve been talking to me with—shall I say?—some human feeling”. The verb venir has a number of meanings but, to the best of my knowledge, ‘talking’ is not one of them and Gilbert’s insertion of ‘shall I say?’ is pure invention. A little further on in the same scene he completely ignores an original line from Martha: “C’est une raison qui ne vaut que pour moi”. This translates as: “That’s a reason that is only of worth to me”. Gilbert replaced Camus’ original with one of his own creations: “So, she hasn’t the same motives for wanting to keep you”.

RIGHT through his work on Le Malentendu, Stuart Gilbert was unable to restrain his penchant for playing fast and loose with Camus’ writing. One example that I regard as an all-time howler occurs in Martha’s monologue in Act 3 Scene 1 where she is describing to her mother what it felt like for her staying in their village after her brother left to go abroad. Camus wrote: “Je suis resté, petite et sombre, dans l’ennui enfoncé au cœur du continent et j’ai grandi dans l’épaisseur des terres”. My translation of this line was: “I remained, small and sullen, in the tedium, buried in the heart of the continent and I have grown in the density of these lands”. Stuart Gilbert’s translation of the same line was: “But I stayed here, eating my heart out in the shadows, small and insignificant, buried alive in a gloomy valley in the heart of Europe. Buried alive!”

Note how ‘buried’ and ‘heart’ are used twice even though the French words for them (i.e. enfoncée and coeur) appear just once in the line Camus wrote. Eating my heart out in the shadows? Buried alive in a gloomy valley in the heart of Europe? Camus wrote no such lines. I have often wondered whether Penguin Classics are aware of the appalling degree to which Stuart Gilbert overwrote Camus.

WITH Caligula it would seem that Gilbert, either consciously or unconsciously, pandered to the public conservatism of the audiences and the time he was writing in. In Act 1 Scene 1 the patricians are discussing the change in Caligula’s personality and the possible connection between this and his recently deceased sister Drusilla. The first patrician says: “Il aimait Drusilla, c’est entendu”. Gilbert translated this as: “Let’s say he loved Drusilla” which sounds like the patrician is hypothesising about the possibility of incest having occurred. Translated correctly the line is: “He loved Drusilla, that’s understood”.

Later in the same speech Gilbert continues to refer to Caligula’s sexual relationship with his sister in a timid, hypothetical way. The first patrician says: “Coucher avec elle, c’était déjà beaucoup. Mais bouleverser Rome parce qu’elle est morte, cela dépasse les bornes” Gilbert’s translation of this line was: “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”. In fact what Camus wrote was: “To sleep with her, that was already a great deal. But to destroy Rome because she is dead, that oversteps the boundaries”.

The first patrician speaks of the incest in a direct way; he doesn’t tiptoe around it. Gilbert does, and then compounds his error by failing to capture the caustic humour in the second line where the patrician illuminates his own skewed sense of values. A little further on in the same scene the first patrician says: “En tout cas, la raison d’État
ne peut admettre un incest qui prend l'allure des tragédies. L'inceste, soit, mais discret” This translates as: “In any case, State policy cannot allow an incest that assumes the demeanour of some tragedies. The incest, let it be so, but discreet”.

Compare this very cold and revealing assertion by the first patrician with Gilbert’s effort which was: “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”. Camus wrote the word ‘incest’ twice yet Gilbert ignored that fact and bowdlerised it into ‘a regrettable attachment’. ‘The less said, the better’ seems ironically to sum up Gilbert’s reluctance to be truthful to Camus and mention the taboo topic of incest.

In Act 2 Scene 14 Caligula joins in with Scipio’s recitation of his poem about nature and at one point he says: “Du cri des martinet dans le ciel vert” which translates as: “Of the cry of swifts in the green sky”. Once again, as with the creative fiction he employed in ‘The less said, the better’, Gilbert indulges himself with this effort: “And the cries of swifts thridding the green dusk”. The French words for dusk are brune and crépuscule. In Act 3 Scene 1 Gilbert’s capacity for inexact translation is in evidence again when he translates the word obole as alms. The correct French word for alms is aumône, which is not what Camus wrote. Camus wrote obole—which means ‘obolus’, a Roman coin of very small value in use at the time of Caligula’s reign. The examples that I have referred to are just a few of the many that permeate Gilbert’s work on Le Malentendu and Caligula.

MY AIM with this project was to strip away the veneer of approximation, overwriting and paraphrase that characterised Stuart Gilbert’s translating of these groundbreaking plays, then to locate (in English) the true voice of Camus the playwright. I leave it to the reader to assess how much I have achieved that aim.

I am a translator, not a Gilbertian adaptor, and my motivation in tackling this project was to provide a fundamental text upon which actors and directors can build more truthful interpretations.

IN CLOSING this foreword I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to the following people whose belief, encouragement, love and support have been invaluable to me over the last few years:

My daughter, Tuscany; my father, John; my mother, Penny; my sister, Caroline; Tania Larking; Christopher Bird; Debbie Gullick; Barbara Hatley; Catherine Healy; Alison Mason; John McCallum-Howell; Leonie Nivess; Janine Stuart; James Taylor; and Mark Woolmer.

My thanks also to the four young actors whose commitment and talent so brilliantly brought to life Camus’ words in the production of The Misunderstanding that I directed in November 2005. Thank you: Celeste Barone, Anna Bonetti, Cameron Hall and Rachel White.

Thanks also to Colin Williams of Adelaide Booksellers.

Finally, I’m deeply indebted to Fred Baker (editor/designer and wise counsel) and Kate Stewart (sub-editor and proofreader) for their Herculean work in bringing this book to fruition.
This book is for my daughter Tuscany
An admirer of Camus and a fellow free spirit
Characters:

Martha, the sister, aged 30
The Mother, aged 60
Jan, the son, aged 38
Maria, his wife, aged 30
The old manservant, no determinate age

The Misunderstanding was produced for the first time at the Mathurins Theatre in Paris in June 1944. It was directed by Marcel Herrand with the following cast:

Martha.......................................................... Maria Casares
Maria ............................................................ Helene Vercors
Mother............................................................ Marie Kalff
Jan ............................................................... Marcel Herrand
The old manservant................................. Paul Oettly

This translation is dedicated to the memory of Albert and Francine Camus
ACT ONE

SCENE 1

A small town in Bohemia. Midday. The parlour of an inn. It is tidy and bright. Everything there is neat.

1  THE MOTHER: He will return.
   MARTHA: He told you that?
   THE MOTHER: Yes. When you went out.
   MARTHA: He's coming back alone?
   THE MOTHER: I don't know.
   MARTHA: Is he wealthy?
   THE MOTHER: He isn't anxious about price.
   MARTHA: If he is rich, so much the better. But it's also important that he should be alone.

5  THE MOTHER: (with weariness) Alone and rich, yes. And then we must do it again.
   MARTHA: We will do it again, yes. But we'll be rewarded for our pains. (A silence. Martha looks at her mother.) Mother, you seem... peculiar. I've noticed this change in you for some time.

10 THE MOTHER: I'm tired, my girl, nothing more. I wish to rest.
   MARTHA: I can take on what still remains for you to do in the house. That way you'll have all your days free.
   THE MOTHER: It's not exactly that rest which I'm speaking of. No, it's an old woman's dream. I just aspire for peace, a little surrender. (She laughs weakly) This is silly to say, Martha, but there are some nights where I almost feel some inclination for religion.

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20 MARTHA: You're not so old, mother, that it needs to come to that. You have better things to do.
   THE MOTHER: You know quite well that I'm joking. But to speak plainly, at the end of a life perhaps one can let oneself go. A person can't always harden and become tough like you do, Martha. That isn't right for your age, either. And I know many girls, born the same year as you, who only dream of frolics.

25 MARTHA: Their frolics are nothing in comparison with ours, you know that.
   THE MOTHER: Leave that alone.
   MARTHA: (slowly) One would think there are now some words that burn your mouth.
   THE MOTHER: What can that matter to you, so long as I don't retreat from acts.

30 MARTHA: What of that! I just wanted to say that I'd like to see you smile sometimes.

35
MARTHA: That happens, I swear to you.

THE MOTHER: I have never seen you that way.

MARTHA: That’s because I smile in my room in the hours when I’m alone.

THE MOTHER: (looking carefully at her) What a hard face you have, Martha.

MARTHA: (coming closer and with calm) So you don’t like it then?

THE MOTHER: (still looking at her, after a silence) I believe so, nevertheless.

MARTHA: (with excitement) Ah, mother! When we have gathered a great deal of money and we’re able to abandon this land without horizon, when we leave behind us this inn and this rainy town and forget this country of darkness, the day when we’ll finally be in front of the sea that I have so often dreamt of, that will be the day when you see me smile. But we need a lot of money to live by the sea. It’s for that reason we mustn’t be afraid of words; it’s for that purpose we should take notice of this man who must come. If he is rich enough, perhaps my freedom will begin with him. Did he talk much to you, mother?

THE MOTHER: No, two sentences - that’s all.

MARTHA: How did he look as he asked you for his room?

THE MOTHER: I don’t know. I don’t see too well and I looked at him with difficulty. I know from experience that it is better not to look at them. It is much easier to kill what one doesn’t know. (A silence) You can rejoice, I have no fear of words now.

MARTHA: That’s so much better. I don’t like allusions. Crime is crime; one must know one’s own mind about it. And it seems to me that you knew it just now since you thought of it while replying to that traveller.

THE MOTHER: I hadn’t thought of it. I responded from habit.

MARTHA: Habit? Yet you know the opportunities have been scarce.

THE MOTHER: Without doubt. But the habit begins with the second crime. With the first nothing starts, it’s something that ends. And then, if the opportunities have been scarce, they have been spread out over many years and the habit is strengthened from remembrance. Yes, it’s clearly the habit that prompted me to respond, that warned me not to look at this man and assured me he had the look of a victim.

MARTHA: Mother, we will have to kill him.

THE MOTHER: (in a lower tone) No doubt, we should kill him.

MARTHA: You say that in a strange way.

THE MOTHER: I’m tired, in fact, and above all, I’d like that man to be the last. To kill is terribly tiring. I care little about dying in front of the sea or in the middle of our fields, but I wish that afterwards we get away together.
MARTHA: We will get away and it will be a glorious moment! Straighten up, mother; there isn't much to do. You know very well there's not even a question of killing. He will drink his tea, he will sleep and we will carry him, still very alive, to the river. They will find him after a long time jammed against a weir, with the others who wouldn't have had his luck and who would've thrown themselves into the water, their eyes open. The day when we were helping in the cleaning of the weir, you said to me, mother, it is ours who suffer the least; life is more cruel than us. Pull yourself together, you will find your rest and we will finally escape from here.

THE MOTHER: Yes, I'm going to pull myself together. Sometimes, in fact, I'm content with the idea that ours never suffered. It's hardly a crime, barely an intervention, a flick of the thumb given to unknown lives. And it is true that, apparently, life is more cruel than us. Perhaps that is why I'm having difficulty feeling guilty.

(The old manservant enters. He seats himself behind the bar, without speaking. He won't move until the end of the scene.)

MARTHA: Which room shall we put him in?

THE MOTHER: It doesn't matter which, provided that it's on the first floor.

MARTHA: Yes, we had too much trouble last time with the two floors. (Martha sits down for the first time) Mother, is it true that, over there, the sand creates burns on the feet?

THE MOTHER: I haven't been there, you know that. But people have told me that the sun would devour everything.

MARTHA: I've read in a book that it would even consume souls and that it makes gleaming bodies, but empty on the inside.

THE MOTHER: Is it that, Martha, which makes you dream?

MARTHA: Yes, I've had enough of always carrying my soul. I'm anxious to find that country where the sun kills questions. My home isn't here.

THE MOTHER: Alas! First we have much to do. If all goes well, I shall, of course, go with you. But for me, I won't have the feeling of going home. At a certain age, there is no home where rest is possible, and it's already a lot if one has been able to accustom oneself to this mocking brick house, furnished with memories, where it sometimes happens that one falls asleep in it. But naturally, it would be something also, if I could find sleep and forgetfulness at the same time. (She gets up and crosses towards the door) Prepare everything, Martha. (A silence) If it is truly worth doing.

(Martha watches her leave. She herself leaves the room through another door.)
Scene 2

The old manservant goes to the window, sees Jan and Maria, then hides from view. The old man remains onstage, alone, for a few seconds. Jan enters. He stops, looks into the parlour and notices the old man behind the window.

JAN: Isn't there anyone in?  

(The old man gazes at him, crosses the stage and goes out)
Scene 3

Maria enters. Jan turns sharply towards her.

1 JAN: You followed me.

MARIA: Excuse me — I couldn't help it. Perhaps I will leave presently, but allow me to see the place where I leave you.

5 JAN: Someone may come and what I want to do will no longer be possible.

MARIA: At least give us this chance that someone comes and that I make you known in spite of yourself. (Jan turns away from Maria. A short silence. Maria looks around her.) This is it?

10 JAN: Yes, this is it. I left through that door twenty years ago. My sister was a little girl. She was playing in that corner. My mother didn't come to hug me. I thought, then, that I wasn't worthy.

MARIA: Jan, I can't believe they failed to recognise you just now. A mother always remembers her son.

15 JAN: It is twenty years since she last saw me. I was an adolescent, almost a young boy. My mother has aged; her sight has declined. I scarcely recognised her myself.

MARIA: (impatiently) I know. You came in; you said 'Good morning'; you sat down. You recognised nothing.

JAN: My memory wasn't accurate. They greeted me without a word.

MARIA: They gave me the beer that I asked for. They looked at me; they didn't see me. Everything was more difficult than I'd imagined.

25 JAN: You know very well that it wasn't difficult and that it was enough to speak. In these circumstances one says "It's me" and everything becomes natural again.

MARIA: Yes, but I was full of imaginings. And I was expecting, a little, the feast of the prodigal son; they gave me the beer against payment. I was moved and I wasn't able to speak.

20 JAN: One word would have been enough.

MARIA: I haven't found it. Besides which, I am not so anxious. I have come here to bring them my fortune and, if I'm able to do it, some happiness. When I learned of the death of my father, I understood that I had some responsibilities to both of them and, knowing that, I am doing what is necessary. But I suppose that it's not so easy as they say to return to one's home and it requires a little time to create a son out of a stranger.
MARIA: But why not have announced your arrival? There are some instances where one is clearly obliged to act like everyone else. When you want to be recognised, you give your name. That's self-evident. You'll end by making a mess of everything pretending to be what you're not. How will you not be treated like a stranger in a house when you present yourself like a stranger? No, all that is not safe.

JAN: Come on, Maria! It's not so serious. And, besides that, it will suit my plans. I'm going to get the benefit of this opportunity to observe them a little from the outside. I'll then perceive what will make them happy. Afterwards I'll devise the means of making myself known. In short, it's about finding one's words.

MARIA: There is only one way. That's to do what anyone would do, to say, “Here I am”, to allow one's heart to speak.

JAN: The heart isn't so simple.

MARIA: But it uses only simple words. And it wasn't very difficult to say: “I am your son, this is my wife. I have lived with her in a country that we love, in sight of the sea and the sun. But I wasn't happy enough and today I need you”.

JAN: Don't be unfair, Maria. I don't need them, but I understood they may need me, and a man never lives just for himself.

(A pause. Maria turns away.)

MARIA: Perhaps you are right, excuse me. But I have become mistrusting of everything since I came into this country where I look vainly for a happy face. This Europe is so sad. Since we've arrived I've no longer heard you laugh and, as for me, I have become suspicious. Oh! Why make me leave my country? Let's leave, Jan; we will not find happiness here.

JAN: It's not happiness we've come to look for. Happiness. We have that.

MARIA: (vehemently) Why not be content with it?

JAN: Happiness isn't everything and men have their duty. Mine is to find my mother again, a native land... (Maria makes a gesture. Jan stops her. We hear some footsteps. The old man passes in front of the window.)

JAN: Someone's coming. Go away, Maria, I beg of you.

MARIA: Not like this, it's not possible.

JAN: (whilst the footsteps are coming closer) Put yourself there.

(He pushes her behind the door at the back)
Scene 4

The door at the back opens. The old man crosses the room without seeing Maria and leaves by the exterior door.

1 JAN: And now, go quickly. You see, luck is with me.
MARIA: I want to stay. I will keep silent and I’ll stay by your side until you are recognised.
JAN: No. You would betray me.

5 (She turns away, then comes back to him and looks him in the face)

MARIA: Jan, it is five years that we have been married.
JAN: It will soon be five years.
MARIA: (lowering her head) This night is the first where we will be separated. (He says nothing. She looks at him again.) I have always loved everything about you; even what I couldn’t understand and I see clearly, at heart, I wouldn’t want you any different. I’m not a very annoying wife. But here, I’m afraid of the empty bed where you’re sending me and I’m also afraid that you’re abandoning me.
JAN: You must not doubt my love.
MARIA: Oh! I do not doubt it. But there is your love and there are your dreams, or your duties; it’s the same thing. You escape from me so often. At that time it’s as if you are resting yourself from me. But me, I cannot rest myself from you, and it’s tonight (She throws herself against him, crying), it’s tonight that I won’t be able to endure.
JAN: (holding her against him) That is childish.
MARIA: Sure enough, it is childish. But we were so happy over there and it’s not my fault if the nights in this country make me afraid. I don’t want you to leave me alone here.
JAN: I won’t be leaving you for long. Understand this, Maria, I have a promise to keep.
MARIA: What promise?
JAN: The one that I made to myself the day I understood that my mother needed me.
MARIA: You have another promise to keep.
JAN: Which?
MARIA: The one that you gave me the day when you promised to live with me.
JAN: I truly believe that I will be able to reconcile everything. What I ask of you is nothing much. It's not a whim. One evening and one night where I'm going to try to orientate myself, to better understand these women that I love and from understanding to restore their happiness.

MARIA: (shaking her head) A separation is always something for those who love each other with a vengeance.

JAN: Ferocious one, you know very well that I love you with a vengeance.

MARIA: No, men never know how love ought to be. Nothing satisfies them. All that they know is to dream, to imagine new duties, to search for new countries and new homes. Whereas we, we know it is necessary to make haste to love, to share the same bed, to give one's hand to each other, to fear the absence. When a woman loves, she dreams of nothing.

JAN: What are you seeking, then? What's at stake is merely to meet my mother again, to help her and make her happy. As for my dreams or my duties, you should take them as they are. I would be nothing without them and you would love me less if I didn't have them.

MARIA: (turning her back to him sharply) I know that your reasons are always good and that you can convince me. But I won't listen to you any longer; I stop up my ears when you put on that voice I know so well. It's the voice of your solitude, not the one of love.

JAN: (placing himself behind her) Let that go, Maria. I want you to leave me alone here so as to see more clearly from within. It is not so terrible and it isn't a great danger to sleep under the same roof as my mother. God will take care of the rest. But God also knows that I'm not forgetting you in all this. Only, people cannot be happy in exile or oblivion. One can't always remain a stranger. I want to recover my country, to make all those I love happy. I can see no further.

MARIA: You should be able to do all this using plain language. But your way is not right.

JAN: It is the right way since, out of it, I will know, yes or no, if I was right to have those dreams.

MARIA: I wish for it to be yes and that you are right. But me, I have no other dream than that country where we were happy, no other duty than you.

JAN: (holding her close to him) Allow me to go. I will conclude this by finding the words that put everything in order.
MARIA: (giving way) Oh, continue to dream. What does it matter, so long as I keep your love. Usually, I don't want to be miserable when I'm close to you. I am patient, I wait till you tire yourself out from your clouds; then my time begins. If I'm unhappy today it's that I am very sure of your love and yet certain that you are going to send me away. It's for that reason that men's love is a laceration. They can't restrain themselves from leaving what they prefer.

JAN: (holding her face and smiling) That's true, Maria. But in fact, look at me; I'm not so threatened. I'm doing what I want and my heart is at peace. You're entrusting me for one night to my mother and my sister; that's not so dreadful.

MARIA: (breaking from him) Then, goodbye and may my love protect you. (She goes towards the door, stops herself, turns and shows him her empty hands) But see how deprived I am. You're going towards discovery and you leave me in waiting. (She hesitates, then goes)
**SCENE 5**

*Jan sits down. Enter the old manservant who holds the door open to let Martha come through and then leaves.*

JAN: Good afternoon. I’ve come about the room.  
MARTHA: I know. We are getting it ready. I must register you in our book. *(She goes to find her book and comes back)*  
JAN: You have an odd servant.  
MARTHA: That’s the first time anyone has reproached us with something on his account. He always does very precisely what he ought to do.  
JAN: Oh! It’s not a reproach. He’s not like anyone else, that’s all. Is he mute?  
MARTHA: It’s not that.  
JAN: He speaks, then?  
MARTHA: As little as possible and only when it’s essential.  
JAN: In any case, he doesn’t seem to hear what one tells him.  
MARTHA: One can’t say that he doesn’t hear. It’s just that he hears badly. Now I must ask you your name and Christian names.  
JAN: Hasek, Karl.  
MARTHA: Karl — that’s all?  
JAN: That’s all.  
MARTHA: Date and place of birth?  
JAN: I’m thirty-eight years old.  
MARTHA: Where were you born? *(he hesitates)* In Bohemia.  
JAN: *(he smiles)* I’m not very poor and, for many reasons, I’m glad about that.  
MARTHA: *(in a different tone)* You’re a Czech, naturally?  
JAN: Naturally.  
MARTHA: Usual residence?  
JAN: Bohemia.  
MARTHA: You’ve come from there?  
JAN: No, I’ve come from Africa. *(Martha seems not to have understood)* On the other side of the ocean.  
MARTHA: I know. *(A brief silence)* You go there often?  
JAN: Often enough.  
MARTHA: *(she dreams for a moment and then responds)* What is your destination?
JAN: I don’t know. It will depend on a lot of things.
MARTHA: You want to settle yourself here?
JAN: I don’t know. That depends on what I’ll find here.
MARTHA: That doesn’t matter. But is anyone expecting you?
JAN: No, no-one in principle.
MARTHA: I assume you have an identity document?
JAN: Yes, I can show it to you.
MARTHA: It’s not worth the trouble. It’s enough that I indicate whether it’s a passport or an identity card.
JAN: (hesitating) A passport. Here it is. Do you want to see it?

(She takes it in her hands, and goes to read it but the old manservant appears in the doorway)

MARTHA: No, I haven’t called for you. (The old man leaves. Martha gives Jan’s passport back to him without having read it, with a distracted look.) When you go over there, do you live near the sea?
JAN: Yes.

(Martha gets up. She seems to be going to put the book away, then changes her mind and holds it open in front of her.)

MARTHA: (with a sudden harshness) Ah, I had forgotten. Do you have a family?
JAN: I had one. But it’s a long time since I left them.
MARTHA: No, what I meant was: Are you married?
JAN: Why do you ask me that? They haven’t asked me that question in any other hotel.
MARTHA: It appears in the set of questions given to us by the district administration.
JAN: That’s odd. Yes, I am married. Besides, you must have seen my wedding ring.
MARTHA: I haven’t seen it. Could you give me your wife’s address?
JAN: She has stayed in her country.
MARTHA: Ah! Perfect. (She closes her book) Shall I serve you something to drink, till your room is ready?
JAN: No, I’ll stay here. I hope that I won’t make you uncomfortable.
MARTHA: Why would you make me uncomfortable? This room is intended to welcome any clients.
JAN: Yes, but one client all alone is sometimes more inconvenient than a large crowd.
MARTHA: *(who is putting the room in order)* Why? I assume you won’t get the notion of telling me stories. I can give nothing to those who come here to look for some jesting. People in this part of the country have understood that for a long time. And you’ll soon see that you have chosen a peaceful inn. Almost no-one comes here.

JAN: That mustn’t suit your business.

MARTHA: We have lost some takings here, but gained our peace - and peace can never be priced dearly enough. Besides, one good client is worth more than a noisy customer. What we’re seeking is just the right client.

JAN: But... *(he hesitates)* sometimes life mustn’t be cheerful for you? Don’t you find yourselves feeling very alone?

MARTHA: *(turning sharply to face him)* Listen, I see that I must give you a warning. Here it is. Coming in here you only have the rights of a client. In return, you’ll receive all of them. You will be properly waited upon and I don’t think you’ll have to regret one day of our reception. But you don’t have to trouble yourself with our solitude, nor must you worry about making us uncomfortable, to be intrusive or not. Take every situation of a client, which is your right, but don’t take it any further.

JAN: I beg your pardon. I wanted to indicate to you my sympathy; my intention wasn’t to anger you. It simply struck me that we weren’t as alien as that to each other.

MARTHA: I see that I must repeat to you that there can be no question of angering me or not angering me. It seems to me that you contradict yourself in assuming a manner that shouldn’t be yours. I’ll try to point this out to you and I fully assure you that I’ll do it without getting angry. Is it not to our advantage for both of us to keep our distance? If you continue not to observe the language of a client, it’s very simple; we will refuse to have you here. But if, as I hope, you’re quite willing to understand that two women who rent you a room are not obliged to also admit you into their closeness, then all will be well.

JAN: That’s clear. It’s unforgivable of me to have allowed you to think that I could delude myself about this.

MARTHA: There isn’t anyone as bad as that. You aren’t the first who has tried to take that manner. But I have always spoken clearly enough that confusion became impossible.

JAN: You speak clearly, indeed, and I find that I no longer have anything to say...for the moment.

MARTHA: Why? Nothing prevents you from using the language of clients.

JAN: What language is that?
Most of them talk to us about everything; of their travels or of politics, except about ourselves. That is what we expect. It has even happened that some of them have spoken of their own life and of what they are. That was in order. After all, amongst the duties for which we're paid, is to listen. But, of course, the price of board and lodging cannot include an obligation for the inn-keeper to answer questions. My mother does it sometimes from indifference; as for me, I refuse to do it on principle. If you have clearly understood that, not only will we be in agreement, but you'll see that you still have a lot of things to tell us and you'll discover that it's something of a pleasure, sometimes, to be listened to when one speaks about oneself.

Unfortunately, I'm unable to speak very well about myself. But, after all, it's not so useful. If I make only a short stay you won't get to know me. And if I stay for a long time, you'll have all the spare time, without my speaking, to know who I am.

I only hope that you won't bear me unnecessary malice for what I've just said. I've always found it beneficial to point out such things as they are, and I couldn't allow you to continue in a tone which, to have done so, would have spoilt our relations. What I'm saying is reasonable, since, before this day, there was nothing in common between us; there was truly not one reason for why, all at once, we would find closeness.

I've already forgiven you. I know, it's true, that closeness doesn't happen instantly. It needs some time put into it. If, now, all seems clear between us to you, I must say I'm particularly gladdened by it.
Scene 6

The mother enters.

THE MOTHER: Good afternoon, sir. Your room is ready.
JAN: I thank you very much, Madame.

(The mother sits down)

THE MOTHER: (to Martha) You have filled out the form?
MARTHA: Yes.
THE MOTHER: May I see it? You will excuse me, sir, but the police are strict. So, hold on, my daughter has omitted to note down if you have come here for reasons of health, for your work or as a tourist.
JAN: I suppose it's to do with tourism.
THE MOTHER: Because of our monastery, no doubt. They talk very highly of our monastery.
JAN: They've spoken to me about it, indeed. I also wanted to see again this region that I knew in former times and from which I've kept the best memory.
MARTHA: You have lived here?
JAN: No, but a very long time ago I had the opportunity to pass through here. I haven't forgotten it.
THE MOTHER: It's still just a small village, nothing but our own.
JAN: That's true. But it pleases me very much and, since I've been here, I feel rather at home.
THE MOTHER: Are you going to stay here long?
JAN: I don't know. That appears strange to you, no doubt. But, truly I don't know. To stay in a place, one must have one's reasons—some friendships, the affection of a few people. Otherwise, there isn't any reason to stay there rather than somewhere else. And, as it's difficult to know if one will be well received, it's natural that I'm not yet aware of what I will do.
MARTHA: That doesn't mean much.
JAN: Yes, but I don't know how to express myself better.
THE MOTHER: Well, you'll quickly become jaded here.
JAN: No, I've a faithful heart and I rapidly build up some memories when someone gives me the opportunity for it.
MARTHA: (impatiently) The heart has nothing to do here.
JAN: (without appearing to have understood, to the mother) You seem very disillusioned. Have you been living in this hotel a long time, then?
THE MOTHER: For years and years like this; so many years that I'm no longer aware of when it started and I've forgotten what I was at that time. This is my daughter.

MARTHA: Mother, you've no reason to relate these things.

THE MOTHER: That's true, Martha.

JAN: (very quickly) Never mind. I understand your feelings so well, Madame. It's the person that you find at the end of a working life. But perhaps it all would have been changed if you'd been helped, as every woman should be, and if you had received the support of a man's arm.

THE MOTHER: Oh, I received it at the time but there was too much to do. My husband and I were scarcely able to do it. We didn't even have the time to think of each other, and even before he was dead I believe I had forgotten him.

JAN: Yes, I understand that. But (with a measure of hesitation) a son who would have given you his arm, perhaps you wouldn't have forgotten him?

MARTHA: Mother, you know that we have a lot to do.

THE MOTHER: A son! Oh, I'm too much of an old woman! Old women forget even to love their sons. The heart wears itself out, sir.

JAN: That's true. But I know he never forgets.

MARTHA: (placing herself between them and with resolution) A son who would come in here would find what any client is sure to find here: a friendly indifference. All the men that we have accepted have settled for that. They have paid for their room and received a key. They haven't spoken of their hearts. (A silence) That simplified our work.

THE MOTHER: Leave that.

JAN: (reflecting) And have they stayed a long time, then?

MARTHA: Some, a very long time. We have done what was necessary so that they stay. Others who were less wealthy have left the following day. We have done nothing for them.

JAN: I've a lot of money and I wish to stay for a little while in this hotel, if you'll accept me. I had forgotten to tell you that I could pay in advance.

THE MOTHER: Oh, that's not something we ask for!
MARTHA: If you’re rich, that’s good. But speak no more of your heart; we can do nothing for it. I nearly asked you to leave; your manner made me suffer so much. Take your key; settle yourself in your room, but be aware you are in a house without resources for the heart. Too many grey years have passed over this tiny village and over us. They have little by little chilled this house. They have taken away from us the inclination for sympathy. I tell you this again; you will have nothing here that resembles closeness. You will have what we always reserve for our few travellers and what we reserve for them has nothing to do with feelings of the heart. Take your key (She holds it out to him) and don’t forget this: we welcome you out of selfishness, calmly, and if we keep you it will be out of selfishness, calmly. (He takes the key. She leaves. He watches her go out.)

THE MOTHER: Don’t pay her too much attention, sir. But it’s true that there are some topics that she has never been able to endure. (She goes to stand up and he wants to help her) Leave off, my son, I’m not infirm. See, these hands are still strong. They should be able to hold up the legs of a man. (A pause. He looks at his key.) Is it my words that cause you to reflect?

JAN: No, pardon me, I hardly heard you. But why did you call me “my son”?

THE MOTHER: Oh! I’m confused. It wasn’t from familiarity, depend upon it. It was a manner of speaking.

JAN: I understand. (A pause) Can I go up to my room?

THE MOTHER: Sure enough, sir. The old manservant is waiting for you in the passage. (He looks at her and wants to speak) Is there something you need?

JAN: (hesitating) No, Madame. But… I thank you for your welcome.
Scene 7

The mother is alone. She sits down again, lays her hands on the table, and contemplates them.

1 THE MOTHER: Why have I spoken to him about my hands? Suppose, though, he had looked at them, perhaps he would have understood what Martha said to him. He would have understood; he would have left. But he doesn’t understand. Well, he wants to die. And me, I wish only that he runs away from here so that I can, at least tonight, lie down and sleep. Too old! I’m too old to close my hands anew around his ankles and restrain the swinging of his body all along the track that leads to the river. I’m too old for that last effort which will throw him into the water and which will leave me breathless, my arms hanging down, muscles cramped, without strength to wipe off my face the water that will have splashed up under the weight of the sleeper. I’m too old... Come on, come on! The victim is perfect. I must give him the sleep that I desire for my own night. And it is...

16 (MARTHA enters abruptly) ■
SCENE 8

MARTHA: What are you still musing about? You know that we have a lot to do yet.

THE MOTHER: I was thinking of that man. Or rather, I was thinking of myself.

MARTHA: It would be better to think of tomorrow. Be positive.

THE MOTHER: That’s your father’s word, Martha; I recognise it. But I want to be sure that it’s the last time we’ll be obliged to be positive. Strange! He said that word in order to drive away the fear of the police and you; you use it only to dissipate the little desire for honesty that was starting to grow in me.

MARTHA: What you call a desire for honesty is merely a desire for sleep. Put off your weariness until tomorrow and, afterwards, you’ll be able to let go.

THE MOTHER: I know that you’re right. But, admit it, this traveller is unlike all the others.

MARTHA: Yes, he is too inattentive; he exaggerates the demeanour of innocence. What would become of the world if the condemned turned to confide their heartaches to the hangman? It’s a principle that isn’t sound. And, besides, his impertinence aggravates me. I want to finish it.

THE MOTHER: That’s the thing that isn’t sound. Before, we brought neither anger nor compassion to our work; we had the indifference that was necessary. As for me, today I’m tired and you’re now enraged. Must we then become stubborn when things occur the wrong way and pass over everything for a little more money?

MARTHA: No, not for the money, but for the sake of forgetting this country and for a house beside the sea. So you’re tired of your life. Me, I’m weary to death of this closed horizon and I feel I couldn’t live one more month here. We are both completely worn out by this inn, and you, who are old, want only to shut your eyes and to forget. But I, who still feels in my heart a little of the desires of my twenty years, want to manage it so as to dispense with them forever. Even if, for that, we must go on a little further in the life we want to desert. And it’s you who should help me with this, you who have thrust me into the world in a country of clouds and not in a land of sunshine!

THE MOTHER: I don’t know, Martha if, in a sense, it wouldn’t be better for me to be forgotten, as I have been by your brother, rather than to hear you speak to me in that tone.
39  MARTHA:  You know very well that I don’t want to torment you. (A pause, and then wildly) What would I do without you by my side, what will become of me far from you? I, at least, wouldn’t be able to forget you, and if the heaviness of this life sometimes makes me fail in the respect that I owe you, I beg your forgiveness for it.

44  THE MOTHER:  You’re a good daughter and I imagine also that an old woman is sometimes difficult to understand. But I want to profit from this moment by telling you what I tried to tell you just before: not tonight.

MARTHA:  Oh, what! We’ll have to wait till tomorrow? You know very well we’ve never proceeded in this way, that it’s the wrong way to allow him time to meet some people and that we must act while we have him to hand.

THE MOTHER:  I don’t know, but not tonight. Leave him this night. Give us this reprieve. Perhaps it’s through him that we will save ourselves.

54  MARTHA:  We have no need to be saved; that talk is ridiculous! All that you can hope for is to gain, by applying yourself tonight, the right to lull yourself to sleep afterwards.

THE MOTHER:  That’s the thing I was calling for to be saved: sleep.

MARTHA:  Then I swear it to you; this salvation is in our hands. Mother, we must resolve ourselves. It will be tonight or it will not be.

CURTAIN
ACT TWO

SCENE 1

The bedroom. Evening light is starting to enter the room. Jan is looking out the window.

JAN: Maria is right, this hour is difficult. (A pause) What is she doing; what is she thinking of in her hotel room, her heart closed off, tearless eyes, all twisted in the hollow of a chair? The nights over there have some promises of happiness. But here, on the other hand… (He looks round the room) Now then, this anxiety is groundless. One must know what one wants. It’s in this room that all will be settled.

(There is a sharp knock at the door. Martha enters.)

MARTHA: I hope, sir, that I’m not disturbing you. I want to change your towels and your water.

JAN: I thought that it was done.

MARTHA: No, the old manservant is sometimes absent-minded.

JAN: That’s of no importance. But I hardly dare to tell you that you’re not disturbing me.

MARTHA: Why?

JAN: I’m not sure that’s within our agreement.

MARTHA: You see clearly that you’re not able to respond like other people.

JAN: (he smiles) I need to accustom myself to it. Give me a little time.

MARTHA: (who works) You’ll be leaving soon. You won’t have the time for anything. (He turns away from her and looks out the window. She scrutinises him. He still has his back turned. She speaks while working.) I regret, sir, that this room is not as comfortable as you might wish it to be.

JAN: It’s particularly clean; that’s the most essential part. You’ve had it recently converted from something else, haven’t you?

MARTHA: Yes. How can you know that?

JAN: From some details.

MARTHA: In any case, many of our clients lament the absence of running water and one truly cannot blame them. For a long time also we have wanted to install an electric bulb above the bed. It is uncomfortable for those who like reading in bed to be forced to get up to turn off the light-switch.

JAN: (he turns around) In fact, I hadn’t noticed it. But it’s not a great bother.
MARTHA: You are very indulgent. I congratulate myself that the numerous imperfections of our inn are immaterial to you. I know of others who would have felt this to be enough to drive them away.

JAN: In spite of our agreement, allow me to tell you that you are singular. It strikes me, indeed, that it's not the role of an inn-keeper to stress the importance of the defects of their establishment. One would think, truly, that you're looking to persuade me to leave.

MARTHA: That's not exactly my thinking. (Taking a decision) But it is true that my mother and I hesitated a lot about taking you in.

JAN: I have been able to observe, at least, that you're not doing a lot to keep me here. But I don't understand why. You must not doubt that I am solvent and I don't give the impression, I imagine, of a man who has some misdeed to blame himself for.

MARTHA: No, it's not that. You don't possess anything of an evildoer. Our reason is somewhere else. We must leave this hotel and for some time we have been contemplating every day about closing this establishment to begin our preparations. It was easy for us; clients rarely come to us. But it's with you that we understand at what point we've abandoned the idea of resuming our old business.

JAN: Have you therefore a desire to see me leave?

MARTHA: I've told you precisely; we hesitated, and I especially hesitated. In fact, everything depends on me, and I don't know as yet what to decide.

JAN: I don't want to be a burden to you, don't forget that, and I'll do whatever you want. I must say, however, that it would suit me to stay at least one or two days. I have some concerns to put in order before resuming my travels and I would hope to find here the tranquillity and peace that I need.

MARTHA: I understand your desire, depend upon it, and if you like I will think further on it. (A pause. She takes an uncertain step towards the door.) Are you going then to return to the country where you've come from?

JAN: Perhaps.

MARTHA: It's a beautiful country, isn't it?

JAN: (he looks out the window) Yes, it's a beautiful country.

MARTHA: They say that, in those regions, there are some beaches entirely deserted.

JAN: That's right. Nothing there to remind you of mankind. In the early morning on the sand you find marks left by the feet of sea-birds. They are the only signs of life. As for the evenings... (He stops himself)

MARTHA: (gently) As for the evenings, sir?
JAN: They are unsettling. Yes, it's a beautiful country.  
MARTHA: (with a new tone) I have often thought of it. Some travellers have spoken to me about it; I've read what I've been able to. Often, like today, in the midst of the harsh spring of this country I think of the sea and the flowers over there. (A pause, then, darkly) And what I imagine makes me blind to everything that surrounds me. (He looks at her with kindness, then seats himself gently in front of her)

JAN: I understand that. The spring over there seizes you by the throat; the flowers open by the thousands above the white walls. If you take a walk by yourself for an hour on the hills that encircle my town, you will carry home in your clothes the scent of honey from yellow roses. (She seats herself also)

MARTHA: That is marvellous. What we call the spring here; it's one rose and two buds that chance to push up into the garden of the monastery. (With scorn) That's enough to stir up the men of my country. But their hearts resemble this miserly rose. One more powerful breath would cause them to wither. They have the springtime they deserve.

JAN: You're not entirely fair, for you also have the autumn.

MARTHA: What autumn?

JAN: A second springtime where all the leaves are like flowers. (He looks at her with insistence) Perhaps from here you'll see some lives flower in that way, if only you could help them with your patience.

MARTHA: I no longer have any patience to spare for this Europe, where the autumn has the face of spring and spring the smell of misery. But I imagine with delight that other country where summer crushes everything, where the winter rains flood the towns and where, finally, things are what they are.

(A silence. He looks at her with more and more curiosity. She becomes aware of this and gets up suddenly.)

MARTHA: Why do you look at me in that way?

JAN: Excuse me, but since, on the whole, we happened to abandon our agreement, I can truly tell you this: it strikes me that, for the first time, you're coming round to taking a human tone with me.

MARTHA: (with violence) You delude yourself, without doubt. Even if it was so, you'd have no reason to rejoice about it. What I possess of human nature isn't the best of me. That which is human in me is what I desire and to get what I desire, I believe that I would crush anything in my way.
JAN: (smiling) They are some acts of violence that I can understand. I have no need to be frightened of that, since I’m not an obstacle in your path. Nothing incites me to oppose your desires.

MARTHA: You haven’t any reasons for opposing them, that is certain. But, on the other hand, you haven’t any to give rise to them and, in certain circumstances, that can throw everything.

JAN: What tells you that I haven’t any reasons in me to give rise to them?

MARTHA: Common sense, and the desire that I have to keep you outside my plans.

JAN: If I understand correctly, we are now back to our agreement.

MARTHA: Yes, and we have been wrong to divert ourselves from it, you can see that clearly. I thank you only for having spoken to me of the land that you know and I apologise to you for perhaps having wasted your time. (She is already near the door) I must say, however, that for my part, this time hasn’t been entirely wasted. It has awakened in me some desires that perhaps were falling asleep. If it’s true that you are anxious to stay here, you have, without knowing it, improved your cause. I had almost decided to ask you to leave, but you see, you have appealed to what is human in me and I wish you to stay now. My taste for the sea and the country of sunshine will finish the better for it in the end.

(He looks at her for a moment in silence)

JAN: (slowly) Your language is quite strange. But I will stay, if I can, and if your mother really doesn’t see it as an inconvenience.

MARTHA: My mother has desires less strong than mine; that’s natural. Consequently she doesn’t have the same reasons as me for desiring your presence. She doesn’t think enough of the sea and wild beaches to recognise that it matters that you stay. That’s a reason that is only of worth to me. But at the same time, she doesn’t have strong enough grounds to oppose me, and that’s enough to settle the question.

JAN: If I understand right, one of you will accept me out of selfishness and the other out of indifference?

MARTHA: What more can a traveller ask for? (She opens the door)

JAN: I should, of course, just be amused by it. But surely you’ll understand that everything here seems peculiar to me; the dialect and the people. This house is truly strange.

MARTHA: Perhaps it’s merely that you conduct yourself in an odd way here.

(She leaves) ■
Scene 2

JAN: (looking towards the door) Perhaps, indeed... (He goes to the bed and seats himself there) But this girl just gives me the desire to leave, to find Maria and to be happy again. It's all stupid. What am I doing here?...But no, I am in charge of my mother and my sister. I've forgotten them for too long. (He gets up) Yes, it's in this room that everything will be determined. Yet how cold she is! I didn't recognise anything from this place; everything has been rendered like new. It now resembles all the hotel rooms of strange towns where lonely men arrive each night. I have known that too. It struck me at the time that there was an answer to find. Perhaps I will receive it here. (He looks outside) The sky is clouding over. And here now my old anguish; there, in the depth of my body, like a nasty wound that each movement irritates. I know its name. It is fear of the eternal solitude, apprehension that there won't be any answer. And who would answer in a hotel room?

(He has moved towards the house-bell. He hesitates, then he rings it. Nothing is heard. A moment of silence, some steps, someone knocks once. The door opens. Into the doorframe the old manservant stands. He stays motionless and silent.)

JAN: It's nothing. Excuse me. I only wanted to know if someone would respond, if the bell works.

(The old man looks at him, closes the door. The footsteps recede.)
SCENE 3

1  JAN:  The bell works but he doesn't speak. That's not an answer. (He looks at the sky) What to do?

4  (Someone knocks twice. The sister enters with a tray.) ■
Scene 4

JAN: What is it? 1
MARTHA: The tea that you’ve asked for.
JAN: I haven’t asked for anything.
MARTHA: Ah? The old man must have misunderstood. He often half understands. *(She puts the tray on the table; Jan makes a gesture)* 5 Should I take it away?
JAN: No, no — on the contrary, I thank you. *(She looks at him. She leaves.)* 8
**SCENE 5**

*He takes up the cup, looks at it, and puts it down again.*

1 JAN: A glass of beer, but in exchange for my money. A cup of tea, and by mistake. *(He picks up the cup and holds it in silence for a moment. Then darkly.)* Oh my God! Allow me to find my words or else make me give up this vain undertaking in order to recover Maria’s love. Give me now the strength to choose what I prefer and to hold myself to it. *(He laughs)* Now then, to honour the feast of the prodigal! *(He drinks. Someone knocks vigorously at the door.)* What now?

10 *(The door opens. The mother enters.)* ■
Scene 6

THE MOTHER: Pardon me, sir, my daughter told me she gave you some tea.

JAN: As you see.

THE MOTHER: You have drunk it?

JAN: Yes, why?

THE MOTHER: Excuse me; I'm going to remove the tray.

JAN: (he smiles) I'm sorry to have inconvenienced you.

THE MOTHER: It's nothing. Actually, this tea wasn't intended for you.

JAN: Ah! That's it, then. Your daughter brought it to me without my having ordered it.

THE MOTHER: (with a kind of lassitude) Yes, that's it. It would have been better...

JAN: (surprised) I'm sorry, believe me, but your daughter wanted to leave it all the same and I didn't think...

THE MOTHER: I'm sorry, too. But don't apologise. It's only a mistake. (She takes the tray and goes to leave)

JAN: Madame!

THE MOTHER: Yes.

JAN: I've just come to a decision. I think that I'll leave this evening after dinner. Naturally, I'll pay you for the room. (She looks at him in silence) I understand you looking surprised. But, above all, don't think that you are responsible for anything. I feel sympathetic towards you, and even strong sympathy. But, to be true, I'm not at ease here. I prefer not to prolong my stay.

THE MOTHER: (slowly) That doesn't matter, sir. On principle, you are entirely at liberty, but by dinner, perhaps you will change your mind. Sometimes, one obeys the impression of the moment and afterwards things settle down and one ends by becoming accustomed to it.

JAN: I don't think so, Madame. However, I wouldn't want you to imagine that I'm leaving discontented. On the contrary, I'm very grateful to you for having welcomed me as much as you have done. (He hesitates) I seem to feel in your house a sort of kindness towards me.

THE MOTHER: That was entirely natural, sir. I had no personal reasons to show hostility to you.

JAN: (with a contained emotion) Perhaps, indeed. But, if I tell you this, it's because I want to leave on good terms with you. Later on, perhaps, I will return; I'm very sure of that. But, for the moment, I have the feeling of having misled myself and having nothing to do here. For all you say, I have the painful impression that this house isn't mine.
THE MOTHER: *(looking at him constantly)* Yes, sure enough. But, usually these are things that one senses immediately.

JAN: You're right. You see, I'm a little distracted. And then, it's never easy to return to a country that one left a long time ago. You must understand that.

THE MOTHER: I understand you, sir, and I'd have liked things to turn out well for you. But I think that, for our part, we can do nothing.

JAN: Oh! That is sure, and I don't blame you for anything. You're the first people I've met since my return and it's natural that I experience first of all with you the difficulties that await me. Of course, everything comes down to me; I am still out of my depth.

THE MOTHER: When things turn out badly, one can do nothing about it. In a certain sense, it also bothers me that you have decided to leave. But I tell myself that, after all, I haven't any reasons to attach any importance to it.

JAN: It's already a lot that you share my vexation and that you're making the effort to understand me. I don't know if I'm able enough to express to you that what you've just said touches and pleases me. *(He makes a gesture towards her)* Do you see?

THE MOTHER: It's our profession to make ourselves pleasant to all our clients.

JAN: *(discouraged)* You're right. *(A pause)* Finally, I merely owe you some excuses and, if you deem it fit, an indemnity. *(He moves his hand across his forehead. He seems more tired. He speaks less easily.)* You may have made some preparations, involved some expense, and it is quite natural...

THE MOTHER: We certainly haven't any compensation to ask of you. It's not for us that I was regretting your uncertainty; it's for you.

JAN: *(supporting himself against the table)* Oh, that doesn't matter! The main point is that we be in harmony and that you don't retain too bad a memory of me. I won't forget your house, depend on it, and I hope that when I return here I will be in better mood. *(She walks without a word towards the door)* Madame! *(She turns. Jan speaks with difficulty, but finishes more easily than he began)* I wish... *(He stops himself)* Excuse me, but my journey has exhausted me. *(He sits himself on the bed)* I would like, at least, to thank you... I believe also from what you know of it that it's not as an indifferent guest that I'll leave this house.

THE MOTHER: Pray, sir. *(She leaves)*
Scene 7

He watches her leave. He makes a gesture, but shows at the same
time some signs of fatigue. He appears to give way to the weariness
and props himself on a pillow.

JAN:  I will return tomorrow with Maria, and I’ll say: “It’s me”. I will
make them happy. All this is clear. Maria was right. (He sighs,
stretches himself half out on the bed) Oh! I don’t like this evening
where everything is so distant. (He lies down full length; he says
some words that we can’t hear in a barely audible voice) Yes or
no?

(He shakes a little then he sleeps. The stage is nearly in darkness. Long silence.
The door opens. The two women enter with a lamp.

The old manservant follows them.)
SCENE 8

1 MARTHA: (after having illuminated the body, in a hushed voice) He sleeps.

THE MOTHER: (in the same tone, but raising it little by little) No, Martha! I don’t like this way of forcing my hand. You dragged me into this act. You started it, in order to compel me to finish it. I don’t like this way of overlooking my hesitation.

MARTHA: It’s a way of simplifying everything. In the confusion you were in, it was my duty to help you in acting on it.

THE MOTHER: I know very well that it should end. He did not oppose it. I don’t like that.

MARTHA: Come on, think more of tomorrow and work quickly. (She rummages through the jacket and pulls out a wallet from which she starts counting the notes. She empties all the pockets of the sleeping man. During this operation the passport falls and slips behind the bed. The old manservant goes to pick it up without the women seeing it and he withdraws.)

MARTHA: There. Everything is ready. In a moment the waters of the river will be full. Flowing down. We will come to fetch him when we hear the water running over the weir. Come!

THE MOTHER: (with calm) No, we’re comfortable here. (She sits down)

MARTHA: But… (She looks at her mother, then with defiance) Do not think that it will deter me. Wait here.

THE MOTHER: Yes, let’s wait. To wait is good; to wait is calming. Presently, it will be necessary to carry him all along the track to the river. And I am worn out before my time from this, from a weariness so old that my blood can no longer stomach it. (She sways by herself as if she were half-asleep) During this time, he suspects nothing. He sleeps. He has finished with this world from here. Henceforth, everything will be easy for him. He will merely pass from a sleep filled with images to a sleep without dreams. And a thing which, for everybody else, is a fearful wrenching, will be for him only one long sleep.

MARTHA: (with defiance) Let’s rejoice, then! I hadn’t any reasons to hate him, and I’m happy that suffering at least for him is spared. But… it seems to me that the waters are rising. (She listens, then smiles)

MARTHA: Mother, mother, everything will be settled, very soon.
THE MOTHER: *(with the same animation)* Yes, all will be settled. The waters are rising. During this time he knows nothing of what is going on. He sleeps. He no longer knows the strain of work to resolve, of work to finish. He sleeps; he no longer has to steel himself, to drive himself, to demand of himself what he isn’t able to do. He no longer carries the cross of this inner life that forbids rest, diversion, weakness... He sleeps and thinks no more, he no longer has duties or tasks, no, no and me, old and tired. Oh! I envy his sleepiness now and to be certain to die soon. *(Silence)* You don’t say anything, Martha?

MARTHA: No, I’m listening. I’m waiting for the sound of the waters.

THE MOTHER: In a moment; in only a moment. Yes, one more moment. During this time, at least, happiness is still possible.

MARTHA: Happiness will be possible afterwards. Not till then.

THE MOTHER: Do you know, Martha, that he wanted to leave this evening?

MARTHA: No, I didn’t know that. But, knowing it, I would have done the same thing. I’d already decided that.

THE MOTHER: He told me that just a moment ago and I didn’t know how to answer him.

MARTHA: You’ve seen him, then?

THE MOTHER: I came up here to prevent him from drinking it. But it was too late!

MARTHA: Yes, it was too late! And since you need to speak of him, it was he who decided it for me. I was hesitating. But he had spoken to me of those lands that I hope for and, to have known how to affect me, he gave me weapons against him. It’s in this way that innocence is rewarded.

THE MOTHER: Nevertheless, Martha, he had ended by understanding. He told me that he felt that this house wasn’t his.

MARTHA: *(with force and impatience)* And this house, in fact, isn’t his, but the truth is it’s not anyone’s. No-one will ever find ease or warmth here. If he had understood that more quickly, he would have saved himself and we would have escaped from having to teach him that this room is made for one to sleep in and this world for one to die in. Enough now, we... *(We hear in the distance the sound of the waters)* Listen, the water flows over the weir. Come, mother, and for the love of this God that you sometimes call upon, let’s finish it. *(The mother makes a step towards the bed)*

THE MOTHER: Come on! But it seems to me that this dawn will never arrive.

CURTAIN
ACT THREE

Scene 1

The mother, Martha and the servant are onstage. The old man sweeps and tidies up. Martha is behind the bar tying her hair back. The mother passes over the tray and proceeds towards the door.

1  MARTHA:  You see clearly that this dawn has arrived.
THE MOTHER:  Yes. Tomorrow, I’ll find that it’s a good thing to have finished with it. Now, I feel only my stress.

MARTHA:  This morning is the first for some years where I have drawn breath. It seems to me that I already hear the ocean. There is within me a joy that’s going to make me cry.

THE MOTHER:  So much the better, Martha, so much the better. But I feel so old now that I cannot share anything with you. Tomorrow all will be better.

MARTHA:  Yes, all will be better; I hope so. But don’t pity yourself again and allow me to be happy at leisure. I’ve become again the young girl that I was. Once more, my body burns; I want to run. Oh! Tell me just… (She stops herself)

THE MOTHER:  What is it, Martha? I no longer recognise you.

MARTHA:  Mother… (She hesitates, then with vivacity) Am I still beautiful?

THE MOTHER:  You are this morning. The crime is beautiful.

MARTHA:  What does the crime matter now? I’m being born for the second time! I’m going to reach the land where I’ll be happy.

THE MOTHER:  Good. I’m going to go for a rest, but I’m glad to know that life is finally going to begin for you.

(The old man appears at the top of the staircase, walks down to Martha, gives her the passport, then goes out without saying anything. Martha opens the passport and reads it, without reaction.)

THE MOTHER:  What is it?

MARTHA:  (in a calm voice) His passport. Read.

THE MOTHER:  You know quite well that my eyes are tired.

MARTHA:  Read! You’ll know his name.

(The mother takes the passport, comes to sit herself at the table, opens the book and reads. She looks at the pages in front of her for a long time.)
THE MOTHER: (in a neutral voice) Well, I knew very well that one day it would turn out this way and that then it would be necessary to finish it.

MARTHA: (coming round to place herself in front of the bar) Mother!

THE MOTHER: (in the same manner) Let me be, Martha. I have lived quite long enough. I’ve lived much longer than my son. I haven’t recognised him and I’ve killed him. I can now go to join him at the bottom of that river where the weeds already cover his face.

MARTHA: Mother! You’re not going to leave me alone?

THE MOTHER: You have helped me well, Martha, and I’m sorry to leave you. If it can still possess any sense, I must testify that in your way you have been a good daughter. You’ve always shown me the respect that you owe me. But now, I’m worn out and my old heart, which thought it had turned away from everything, has just learned again the sorrow. I’m no longer young enough to adapt myself from here. And anyhow, when a mother is no longer capable of recognising her son, the fact is her role on this earth is finished.

MARTHA: Not if the happiness of her daughter is yet to be made. I don’t understand what you’re saying to me. I don’t recognise your words. Haven’t you taught me to respect nothing?

THE MOTHER: (in the same indifferent voice) Yes, but for my part, I’ve just learnt that I was wrong and that on this earth where nothing is assured, we have our certainties. (With bitterness) The love of a mother for her son is today my certainty.

MARTHA: Aren’t you certain, then, that a mother can love her daughter?

THE MOTHER: I don’t want to wound you now, Martha, but it’s true that it’s not the same thing. It’s less strong. How could I overlook the love of my son?

MARTHA: (with uproar) Fine love that forgot you for twenty years!

THE MOTHER: Yes, fine love that survived twenty years of silence. But what does it matter? This love is beautiful enough for me, since I cannot live without him. (She gets up)

MARTHA: It’s not possible that you can talk this way without the shadow of a revolt and without a thought for your daughter.

THE MOTHER: No, I haven’t a thought for anything and less yet of revolt. It’s the punishment, Martha, and I suppose it’s a time where all murderers are like me, empty on the inside, barren, without possibility of a future. It’s for that reason that we do away with them; they are good for nothing.

MARTHA: You’re speaking a language that I despise and I can’t stand to hear of crime and punishment from you.

THE MOTHER: I say what comes to my mouth, nothing more. Ah! I’ve lost my freedom; it’s the hell which has started!
MARTHA: (coming towards her and with violence) You haven't said these things before. And during all these years, you've continued to keep yourself close to me and to use a firm hand on the legs of those who were bound to die. You didn't think then of freedom and of hell. You carried on. How can your son change that purpose?

THE MOTHER: I carried on, it's true. But from habit; something like a death. It was enough for grief to transform everything. That's the thing my son has come to change. (Martha makes a gesture as if to speak) I know, Martha, it's not rational. What does grief mean for a criminal? But then, you see, it's not a true mother's grief. I haven't cried yet. It's nothing other than the suffering of the revival of love, and in the meantime it has left me behind. (With a new tone) But this world itself is not rational and I can say this truly. I who have tasted everything, from creation to destruction.

(Martha has half turned, her head back, seeming to watch the door)

THE MOTHER: (gently) It is true, Martha, but I have killed him!

(Martha has half turned, her head back, seeming to watch the door)
MARTHA: (after a silence, with increasing passion) All that life can give a man has been given to him. He left this country. He has known other realms, the sea, some free existence. Me, I remained here. I remained, small and sullen, in the tedium, buried in the heart of the continent and I have grown in the density of these lands. No-one has kissed my mouth and even you; you haven't seen my body without clothes. Mother, I swear to you, that must be paid for. And under the empty pretext that a man is dead, you cannot rob me of the moment where I'm going to receive all that is owed to me. Understand, then, that for a man who has lived, death is a small matter. We can forget my brother and your son. What has happened to him is unimportant; he had nothing more to learn. But as for me, you will deprive me of everything and you'll cut me off from what he has enjoyed. Is it just that again he abducts from me the love of my mother and carries you away forever in his icy stream? (They look at each other in silence. The sister lowers her eyes. Very low) I would be satisfied with so little. Mother, there are some words that I've never known how to deliver, but it seems to me that it would be a blessing to begin our life again every day. (The mother has moved towards her)

THE MOTHER: Had you recognised him?

MARTHA: (abruptly raising her head) No! I hadn't recognised him! I hadn't retained any image of him. This has happened as it was meant to happen. You've said it yourself; this world isn't rational. But you weren't entirely wrong to ask me that question. Because if I had recognised him, I know now that it wouldn't have changed anything.

THE MOTHER: I want to believe that that is not true. The worst murderers know times where they disarm themselves.

MARTHA: I know them too. But it's not before an unknown and indifferent brother that I would have lowered my head.

THE MOTHER: So before whom, then? (Martha lowers her head)

MARTHA: Before you.

(Silence)

THE MOTHER: (slowly) Too late, Martha. I can do nothing more for you. (She turns towards her daughter) Are you crying, Martha? No, you wouldn't know how. Do you remember anything of the times when I hugged you?

MARTHA: No, mother.
142  THE MOTHER: You’re right. It’s a long time since then and I very quickly forgot to hold out my arms to you. *(She gently turns aside Martha, who little by little gives up the opening)* But I haven’t stopped loving you. I know it now since my heart speaks; I live anew at the moment when I can no longer endure living.

147  *(The passage is clear)*

MARTHA: *(putting her face in her hands)* But what can be more powerful than the distress of your daughter?

THE MOTHER: Weariness perhaps, and the thirst for peace. *(She leaves without her daughter opposing her)*
Scene 2

Martha hurries towards the door, slams it shut brutally and leans herself against it. She breaks into wild cries.

MARTHA: No! I didn't have to watch over my brother and for that I'm now exiled in my own country; my own mother has rejected me. But I did not have to watch over my brother, this is the injustice that they do to innocence. There he is, having now got what he wanted, whilst I remain lonely, far from the sea that I thirst for. Oh! I hate him! All my life has been spent in expectation of this wave that would carry me away and I know that it will no longer come! I must reside, on my right and my left, before and behind me, with a crowd of people and nations, plains and mountains, which stop the seabreeze and whose jabberings and mutterings drown her repetitive call. (Lower) Others have more luck! There are some places, though remote from the sea, where the evening breeze occasionally brings a scent of seaweed. It speaks of humid beaches, all sonorous with the cry of seagulls, or of golden shores in evenings without limit. But the breeze wears itself out long before arriving here. Never again will I have what is owed to me. Even if I were to press my ear against the earth, I will not hear the clashing of waves or the measured breathing of a happy sea. I am too far from what I love and my distance is without remedy. I hate him; I hate him for having got what he wanted! For my home, I have this dull, closed place where the sky is without horizon, for my hunger the sour plum tree of this country and nothing for my thirst, except the blood that I have spilt. That is the price that one must pay for the tenderness of a mother! Let her die, then, since I am not loved! Let the doors be closed around me! Let her leave me to my righteous anger! Because, before dying, I won't raise up my eyes to implore the heavens. Over there, where one can escape, liberate oneself, press one's body against another, roll in the wave, in that country protected by the sea, the Gods do not accost. But here, where one can see the beseeching gaze. Oh! I hate this world where we are to be reduced to God. But I, who suffers from injustice, a person not given my right, I will not kneel down. And deprived of my place on this earth, rejected by my mother, alone in the middle of my crimes, I will leave this world without being reconciled. (Someone knocks on the door)
SCENE 3

1 MARTHA: Who’s there?
MARIA: A traveller.
MARTHA: We’re no longer receiving clients.
MARIA: I’ve come to rejoin my husband. (She enters)
5 MARTHA: (watching her) Who is your husband?
MARIA: He arrived here yesterday and was meant to meet me again this morning. I’m surprised he didn’t make it.
MARTHA: He said that his wife was in a foreign country.
MARIA: He had his reasons for that. But we must find each other now.
10 MARTHA: (who has not stopped watching her) That will be difficult for you. Your husband is no longer here.
MARIA: Why do you say that? Hadn’t he taken a room with you?
MARTHA: He did take a room, but he left it in the night.
MARIA: I can’t believe that, I know every reason that he has to stay in this house. But your manner disturbs me. Tell me what you have to tell me.
MARTHA: I have nothing to say to you, except that your husband is no longer here.
MARIA: He wouldn’t have been able to leave without me. I don’t understand you. Did he leave you definitively or did he say that he would return?
MARTHA: He has left us definitively.
MARIA: Listen. Since yesterday, I have endured, in this strange country, a waiting that has exhausted all my patience. I have come, incited by anxiety, and I’m determined not to leave without having seen my husband or knowing where to find him.
15 MARTHA: That’s not my concern.
MARIA: You delude yourself; it’s equally your concern. I don’t know if my husband would approve of what I’m going to say to you, but I’m tired of these complications. The man who arrived at your place, yesterday morning, is the brother whom you haven’t heard from for some years.
MARTHA: You’re telling me nothing.
MARIA: (with uproar) But in that case, hasn’t he arrived, then? Why is your brother not in this house? Haven’t your mother and you recognised him, and haven’t you been happy at his return?
MARTHA: Your husband is no longer here because he is dead. (Maria gives a start and remains silent a moment, staring at Martha. Then she makes a show of approaching her and smiles.)
MARIA: You’re joking, aren’t you? Jan often told me that, even as a girl you amused yourself in disconcerting people. We are almost sisters and…

MARTHA: Don’t touch me! Stay in your place. There is nothing in common between us. (A pause) Your husband died last night; I assure you that it isn’t a joke. You no longer have anything to do here.

MARIA: But you’re mad, raving mad! It’s too sudden and I can’t believe you. Where is he? Let me see him dead and only then will I believe what I can’t even imagine!

MARTHA: That’s impossible. Where he is, no-one can see him. (Maria makes a gesture towards her) Don’t touch me and stay where you are! He’s at the bottom of the river where my mother and I carried him to last night, after he had fallen asleep. He hasn’t suffered, but he didn’t prevent his death, and it’s us, his mother and I, who have killed him.

MARIA: (recoiling) No, no, it’s me who is mad, who hears words that have never yet resounded on this earth! I knew that nothing good was awaiting me here, but I’m not ready to enter into this insanity. I don’t understand, I don’t understand you…

MARTHA: My role isn’t to persuade you, only to inform you. You will come to the evidence yourself.

MARIA: (in a distracted manner) Why, why have you done it?

MARTHA: In the name of what are you questioning me?

MARIA: (with a cry) In the name of my love!

MARTHA: What does that word mean?

MARIA: It means all that which now tears me to pieces and eats away at me, this delirium which unlocks my hands for murder. Were it not for this stubborn disbelief that remains in my heart you would learn, mad woman, what that word means, by feeling your face rip under my nails.

MARTHA: You really speak a language that I don’t understand. I understand badly the words of love, of joy or of sorrow.

MARIA: (with a great effort) Listen; stop this game, if it is one. Let’s not lead ourselves astray in empty words. Tell me plainly enough what I want to know, before I let myself go.

MARTHA: It’s difficult to be clearer than I’ve already been. We killed your husband last night, in order to take his money, as we’ve already done to some travellers before him.

MARIA: So his mother and his sister were criminals?

MARTHA: Yes.

MARIA: (still with the same effort) Hadn’t you already learnt that he was your brother?
MARTHA: If you want to know about it, there was misunderstanding. And however little you know of the world, it won't astonish you.

MARIA: (turning back towards the table, her fists against her chest, in a hollow voice) Oh, my God! I knew that this sham might be stained with blood, and that he and I would be punished for giving ourselves to it. Misfortune was in that sky. (She stops beside the table and speaks without looking at Martha) He wanted to make himself known to you, to get back his house, to bring you happiness, but he didn't know how to find the speech that was necessary. And while he was searching for his words, you killed him. (She begins to weep) And you, like two mad women, blind in the presence of the marvellous son who had returned to you... for he was marvellous, and you didn't know what a proud heart, what an exacting soul you proceeded to kill! He could've been your pride, as he had been mine. Ah! But you were his enemy, you are his enemy, who can talk coldly of what ought to make you throw yourself into the street and drag the cries of a beast from you.

MARTHA: Don't give judgement on anything, because you don't know everything. By this time, my mother has rejoined her son. The flood begins to gnaw at them. Someone will discover them very soon and they will meet again in the same earth. But I don't see that there is anything even in that to extract screams from me. I have a different idea of the human heart and, to sum it all up, your tears are repugnant to me.

MARIA: (turning upon her with hatred) These are the tears of joys lost forever. It would be better for you than that dry grief which is soon going to come over me and which could kill you without a tremor.

MARTHA: There's nothing there to move me. Truly, that would be insignificant. Me too, I've seen and heard enough. I've decided it's my turn to die. But I don't want to mingle with them. What am I to do in their company? I leave them to their recovered tenderness, to their dark caresses. Neither you nor I have any further hand in this; they are unfaithful to us forever. Happily I still have my room; it will be good to die there alone.

MARIA: Ah! You can die, the world can crumble! I've lost the one I love. I must now live in this terrible solitude where memory is a torment.

(Martha moves behind her and speaks above her head)
MARTHA: Let’s not exaggerate anything. You’ve lost your husband and I’ve lost my mother. After all, we are even. But you’ve only lost him once, after having pleasure with him for some years and without him having rejected you. My mother has rejected me. Now she is dead and I’ve lost her twice.

MARIA: He wanted to bring you his fortune, to make you happy, both of you. And it was that he was thinking of, alone in his room, at the moment when you were preparing his death.

MARTHA: (with a sudden tone of despair) I’m even with your husband too, for I’ve known his distress. Like him, I believed I had my house. I imagined that the crime was our home and that it had united us, my mother and me, forever. So towards whom in the world could I have turned, except towards the one who had killed at the same time as me? But I was deceiving myself. Crime is also solitude, even if we join a thousand people to accomplish it. And it’s right that I die alone, after having lived and killed alone.

(Maria turns towards her in tears. Martha recoils and regains her hard voice.)

MARTHA: Don’t touch me, I’ve told you already. At the thought that a human hand can impose its warmth on me before dying, at the thought that anything that resembles the hideous fondness of men can still pursue me, I feel all the furies of my blood rising to my temples.

(They are facing each other, very near to one another)

MARIA: Fear nothing. I will leave you to die, as you desire. I am blind, I no longer see you! And neither your mother nor you will ever be more than fleeting faces, met and lost in the course of a tragedy that will not end. I feel for you neither hate nor compassion. I can no longer love or detest anyone. (She suddenly hides her face in her hands) In truth, I barely had the time to suffer or to revolt. The misfortune was much bigger than me.

MARTHA: (who has turned away and taken some steps towards the door, comes back towards Maria) But not big enough, since it has left you some tears. And I see that there remains something for me to do before leaving you for good.

MARIA: (looking at her with fright) Oh! Leave me! Go away and leave me!
Indeed, I'm going to leave you, and for me too it will be a relief. I can't stand your love and your tears. But I cannot die while leaving you the idea that you are right, that love isn't useless, and that this is an accident. For it's now that we are in the order. I must convince you of that.

What order?

The one where no-one is ever recognised.

(bewildered) What is that to me? I hardly hear you. My heart is torn. There is only curiosity for the one you have killed.

(with violence) Shut up! I no longer want to hear talk of him; I detest him! He is no longer anything to you. He has entered the bitter house where one is exiled forever. The idiot! He has what he wanted; he has found the woman he was looking for. Here we all are in the order. Understand that neither for him or for us, either in life or in death, is there homeland or any peace. (With a scornful laugh) Isn't it true, for one can't call home this deep earth, deprived of light where one goes to nourish blind animals.

(in tears) Oh, my God! I cannot, I cannot bear this language. He wouldn't have put up with it either. It's for the sake of another fatherland that he set out.

(who has reached the door, turns round sharply) This foolishness has received its pay. You'll soon receive yours. (With the same laugh) We are robbed, I tell you that. What is the good of this great calling of existence, this alarm of souls? Why cry out about the sea or about love? That is mockery. Your husband now knows the answer; that appalling house where we'll finally be squeezed, everyone against each other. (With hatred) You will know it too, and if you were able to then, you'd recollect with delight this day which you still believe to be entry into the most harrowing of exiles. Understand that your grief will never match the injustice done to mankind. And to conclude, listen to my advice. I rightly owe you a piece of advice, don't you think, since I've killed your husband. Pray to your God that he makes you like stone. It's the happiness that he takes for himself; it's the only true happiness. Act like him; make yourself deaf to all cries. Go back to stone while there's still time for it. But if you feel too cowardly to enter into this silent peace, then come to join us in our town house. Farewell, my sister! Everything is easy, you see. You have to choose between the stupid happiness of stones and the slimy bed where we wait for you.

(She leaves and Maria, who has listened with bewilderment, swings round alone, her hands in front of her)
MARIA:  

(with a cry) Oh, my God! I can't live in this desert. It’s to you that I'll speak and I’m unable to find my words. (She falls to her knees) Yes, it's from you that I need healing within. Have pity on me, turn yourself towards me! Hear me, give me your hand! Have pity, Lord, on those who love each other and who are separated!

(The door opens and the old manservant appears)  

205-211
Scene 4

1  THE OLD MAN: (in a strong and clear voice) Have you called for me?

2  MARIA: (turning round towards him) Oh! I don't know! But help me, for I need someone to help me. Have pity and agree to help me!

4  THE OLD MAN: (in the same voice) No!

CURTAIN
CHARACTERS

Caligula, from 25 to 29 years old
Caesonia, Caligula’s mistress, aged 30
Helicon, close friend of Caligula, aged 30
    Scipio, aged 17
    Cherea, aged 30
Senectus, the old patrician, aged 71
Metellus, a patrician aged between 40 and 60
Lepidus, a patrician aged between 40 and 60
Octavius, a patrician aged between 40 and 60
    Patricius, the intendant aged, 50
    Mereia, aged 60
    Mucius, aged 33
    Wife of Mucius
Knights, guards, servants and poets

The first, third and fourth acts take place in a hall of the imperial palace. We see there a full-length mirror, a gong and a bed. The second act takes place in Cherea’s dining room.
Caligula was produced for the first time in September 1945 at the Hebertot Theatre in Paris. The production was directed by Paul Oettly with scenery by Louis Miquel and costumes by Marie Viton. The cast was as follows:

Caligula ................................................................. Gerard Philipe
Caesonia.............................................................. Margo Lion
Helicon ................................................................. Georges Vitaly
Scipio ................................................................. Michel Bouquet, then Georges Carmier
Cherea ................................................................. Jean Barrere
Senectus, the old patrician .................................... Georges Saillard
Metellus, a patrician .............................................. Francois Darbon, then Rene Desormes
Lepidus, a patrician .............................................. Henry Duval
Octavius, a patrician ............................................. Norbert Pierlot
Patricius, the intendant ........................................ Fernand Liesse
Mereia ................................................................. Guy Favieres
Mucius ................................................................. Jacques Leduc
First guard .......................................................... Jean Oettly
Second guard ...................................................... Jean Fonteneau
First servant ...................................................... Georges Carmier, then Daniel Crouet
Second servant ................................................. Jean-Claude Orlay
Third servant ..................................................... Roger Saltel
Wife of Mucius .................................................... Jacqueline Hebel
First poet ............................................................ Georges Carmier, then Daniel Crouet
Second poet ....................................................... Jean-Claude Orlay
Third poet .......................................................... Jacques Leduc
Fourth poet ....................................................... Francois Darbon, then Rene Desormes
Fifth poet ........................................................... Fernand Liesse
Sixth poet ............................................................ Roger Saltel
This translation is dedicated to the memory of my teacher
Brian Syron
First Patrician: Always nothing.
Old Patrician: Nothing in the morning, nothing in the evening.
Second Patrician: Nothing for three days.
Old Patrician: The couriers leave, the couriers return. They shake their heads and say: 'Nothing'.
Second Patrician: The whole country has been scoured. There is nothing to be done.
First Patrician: Why alarm oneself too fast? Let's wait. Perhaps he will return as he departed.
Old Patrician: I saw him leaving the palace. He had a strange look.
First Patrician: I was there too and I asked him what the matter was.
Second Patrician: And his reply?
First Patrician: A single word: 'Nothing'.

(A silence. Helicon enters, eating some onions)

Second Patrician: (still nervous) That's disturbing.
First Patrician: Come on, all the young men live like that.
Old Patrician: Well understood; time erases everything.
Second Patrician: Do you think so?
First Patrician: Let's wish that he forgets.
Old Patrician: Of course! For one thrown away, ten are found again.
Helicon: How do you assume that the matter is about love?
First Patrician: And of what else?
Helicon: The liver, perhaps? Or the simple disgust that you see every day. We would tolerate our peers so much better if they could, from time to time, have a change of face. But no, the menu doesn't change. Always the same stew.
Old Patrician: I prefer to think that it's about love. That's more moving.
Helicon: And comforting, above all, so much more comforting. It's the kind of sickness that spares neither the clever nor the foolish.
First Patrician: Anyhow, happily, the sorrows are not everlasting. Are you capable of grieving for more than one year?
Second Patrician: Me, no.
First Patrician: No-one is capable of that.
Old Patrician: Life would be impossible.
FIRST PATRICIAN: You see now. Consider this; I lost my wife a year ago. I cried a lot and then I forgot. Now and then I have difficulty. But, on the whole, it's nothing.

OLD PATRICIAN: Nature settles these things well.

HELICON: When I look at you, however, I have the impression that it manages to miss its aim.

(Enter Cherea)

FIRST PATRICIAN: Well then?

CHERA: Still nothing.

HELICON: Some calm, gentlemen, some calm. Let's preserve appearances. The Roman Empire, that's us. If we lose form the Empire goes mad. This is not the moment, oh no! And in order to begin, let's eat lunch. The Empire will sustain itself better.

OLD PATRICIAN: That's right. It's wrong to let go of the prize for the shadow.

CHERA: I don't like it. But everything was going too well. This emperor was perfect.

SECOND PATRICIAN: Yes, he was as one ought to be: scrupulous and inexperienced.

FIRST PATRICIAN: But, come, what's the matter with you and why these laments? Nothing stopped him from proceeding. He loved Drusilla, that's understood. But, finally, she was his sister. To sleep with her, that was a great deal to begin with. But to destroy Rome because she is dead, that oversteps the boundaries.

CHERA: He won't stop. I don't like it and this perspective tells me nothing.

OLD PATRICIAN: Yes, there's no smoke without fire.

FIRST PATRICIAN: In any case, State policy cannot allow an incest that assumes the demeanour of some tragedies. The incest let it be so, but discreet.

HELICON: You know incest inevitably makes a little disturbance. The bed creaks, if I may express myself that way. However, what tells you that Drusilla is the issue?

SECOND PATRICIAN: And what to do, then, in that case?
HELICON: You’re guessing. Mark my words, misfortune, it’s like marriage. You believe that you’re selecting and then you are chosen. It’s like that, you cannot help it. Our Caligula is unhappy, but perhaps he doesn’t even know why! He has had to feel cornered, and then he has run. We all would have done the same from that place. Look, I tell you, if I had been able to choose my father, I would not have been born.

(Enter Scipio)
Scene 2

CHEREA: Now?

SCIPIO: Still no result. Some peasants are believed to have seen him yesterday evening, near here, running through the thunderstorm.

(Cherea moves back towards the senators. Scipio follows him)

CHEREA: That clearly makes three days, Scipio?

SCIPIO: Yes. I was present, following him, as is my custom. He moved towards Drusilla’s corpse. He touched her with two fingers. Then he appeared to meditate, turning in upon himself, and went out at an even pace. Since that time we’ve followed him.

CHEREA: (shaking his head) This lad loved literature too much.

SECOND PATRICIAN: It’s his age.

CHEREA: But it’s not his station. An artistic emperor. It is not seemly. We have had one or two of them, to be sure - there are some black sheep everywhere but the others have had the good taste to stick at being office-holders.

FIRST PATRICIAN: That was more restful.

OLD PATRICIAN: Everyone to his calling.

SCIPIO: What can we do, Cherea?

CHEREA: Nothing.

SECOND PATRICIAN: Let’s wait. If he doesn’t return, it will be necessary to replace him. Among us, emperors are not lacking.

FIRST PATRICIAN: No, we’re only lacking in character.

CHEREA: And if he returns ill disposed?

FIRST PATRICIAN: Upon my word, he is still a youth. We will make him listen to reason.

CHEREA: And if he is deaf to reasoning?

FIRST PATRICIAN: (smiling) Well then! Haven’t I previously written a treatise on revolution?

CHEREA: Of course, if that was wanted. But I’d prefer that you leave me to my books.

SCIPIO: I beg your pardon.

(He leaves)

CHEREA: He is offended.

OLD PATRICIAN: He’s a boy. The young people are accomplices.
HELICON: Accomplices or not, they will grow old anyhow.

(A guard appears)

GUARD: We have seen Caligula in the palace garden.

(Everyone leaves)
Scene 3

The stage stays empty for some seconds. Caligula enters furtively from the left. He has a distracted look, he is in a mess, his hair is all wet and his legs are dirty. He raises a hand to his mouth several times. He moves towards the mirror and stops as soon as he observes his own image. He mutters some indistinguishable words, then goes to sit down, to the right, his arms hanging down between open knees. Helicon enters from the left. Noticing Caligula, he stops at the edge of the stage and watches him in silence. Caligula turns around and sees him. A silence.
SCENE 4

1 HELICON: (from one end of the stage to the other) Good day, Caius.

CALIGULA: (with naturalness) Good day, Helicon.

(Silence)

5 HELICON: You seem tired?
CALIGULA: I have walked far.
HELICON: Yes, your absence has lasted a long time.

(Silence)

CALIGULA: It was difficult to find.
HELICON: What, then?
CALIGULA: What I want.
HELICON: And what do you want?
CALIGULA: (still natural) The moon.
HELICON: What?
CALIGULA: Yes, I want the moon.

20 HELICON: Ah! (A silence. Helicon approaches) What do you want that for?

CALIGULA: Well! It’s one of the things that I don’t have.
HELICON: Of course. And now, all is in order?
CALIGULA: No, I haven’t been able to get it.

25 HELICON: That’s annoying.
CALIGULA: Yes, that’s the reason I’m tired. (A pause) Helicon!
HELICON: Yes, Caius.
CALIGULA: You think that I’m mad.
HELICON: You know very well I never think. I’m clearly too intel-

30 ligent for that.

CALIGULA: Yes, upon the whole! But I’m not mad and even I have never been so reasonable. Only, all at once, I feel within a hunger for the impossible. (A pause) Things, as they are, don’t seem satisfactory to me.

35 HELICON: That’s a pretty common opinion.
CALIGULA: It’s true. But I didn’t know it before. Now, I know. (Still natural) This world, as it is constituted, is not bearable. Therefore I have need of the moon, or of happiness, or immortality, of something which is demented perhaps but which is not of this world.
HELICON: That reasoning holds together. But, in general, people aren't able to grasp it until the end.

CALIGULA: (standing, but with the same simplicity) You know nothing about it. It's because people never stick to it until the end that nothing has been gained. (He looks at Helicon) I also know what you're thinking. What disturbances for the death of a woman! No, it's not that. I believe I recall, it's true, that some days ago a woman that I loved died. But what is love? A slight thing. This death is nothing. I swear it to you. It is only the omen of a truth which makes the moon necessary to me. It's a truth entirely simple and entirely clear, a little thing, but difficult to discover and heavy to bear.

HELICON: And what is this truth then, Caius?

CALIGULA: (turning away, in a neutral tone) Men are dying and they are not happy.

HELICON: (after a pause) Now then, Caius, that's a truth which people come to terms with very well. Look around you. It's not that which prevents them from having lunch.

CALIGULA: (with a sudden outburst) In that case, everything around me is fiction and me; I want only that men live in the truth. And justly, I have the means to make them live in truth. For I know what their need is, Helicon. They are deprived of knowledge and they need a teacher who knows what he is talking about.

HELICON: Don't be offended, Caius, by what I'm going to say to you. But, first of all, you should rest yourself.

CALIGULA: (sitting down and with gentleness) That isn't possible, Helicon; that will never more be possible.

HELICON: Why so?

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

HELICON: (after a silence) That's true.

(Caligula gets to his feet with a visible effort)

CALIGULA: Listen, Helicon. I hear some footsteps and sounds of voices. Remain silent and forget that you've just seen me.

HELICON: I understand.

(Caligula goes towards the exit. He turns around)

CALIGULA: And, please, help me from this moment on.
HELICON: I have no grounds not to do so, Caius. But I know a great many things and not much interests me. What can I help you with?

CALIGULA: With the impossible.

HELICON: I will do my best.

(Caligula leaves. Scipio and Caesonia enter quickly)
SCENES

SCIPIO: There’s nobody. Haven’t you seen him, Helicon?
HELICON: No.
CAESONIA: Helicon, did he truly say nothing to you before running away?
HELICON: I’m not his confidant, I am his spectator. That’s more sensible.
CAESONIA: I beg of you!
HELICON: Dear Caesonia, Caius is an idealist, everybody knows it. So much to say that he hasn’t yet understood. As for me, yes, that’s why I trouble my mind about nothing. But suppose Caius begins to understand he is capable, on the other hand, with his good little heart, of thinking about everything. God knows what that will cost us! Now, by your leave, lunch!

(He leaves)

I:5  1-16

ALBERT CAMUS
SCENE 6

(Caesonia sits down wearily)

1 CAESONIA: A guard saw him pass through. Well, all Rome sees Caligula everywhere. And Caligula, in reality, only sees his idea.

SCIPIO: What idea?

5 CAESONIA: How should I know, Scipio?

SCIPIO: Drusilla?

CAESONIA: Who can say? But it’s true that he loved her. It’s true that it is hard to see dying today what he was holding tightly in his arms the day before.

10 SCIPIO: (timidly) And you?

CAESONIA: Oh! Me, I am the old mistress.

SCIPIO: Caesonia, we must save him.

CAESONIA: You love him, then?

SCIPIO: I love him. He was good to me. He encouraged me and

15 I know by heart some of his speeches. He would tell me that life isn’t easy, but there would be religion, art, love that we sustain ourselves with. Often he would repeat that to torture would be the only way to make a mistake. He wanted to be a just man.

20 CAESONIA: (getting up) This was a child.

(She goes towards the mirror and contemplates herself there)

CAESONIA: I have never had any other god than my body, and it’s this god that I would like to pray to today so that Caligula is returned to me.

(Caligula enters. Observing Caesonia and Scipio, he hesitates and moves back. At the same moment the patricians and the intendant of the Palace enter from the opposite side. They stop, taken aback. Caesonia turns around. She and Scipio run towards Caligula. He stops them with a gesture)
SCENE 7

INTENDANT: (in an uncertain voice) We... we have been looking for you, Caesar.

CALIGULA: (in a curt and changed voice) I see.

INTENDANT: We... that is to say...

CALIGULA: (brutally) What do you want?

INTENDANT: We were anxious, Caesar.

CALIGULA: (moving towards him) By what right?

INTENDANT: Ah! Well... (Suddenly inspired and very quickly) Well anyhow, you know that you have reason to determine some questions concerning the public treasury.

CALIGULA: (seized by uncontrollable laughter) The treasury? But it's true; let me see, the treasury, it's essential.

INTENDANT: Most assuredly, Caesar.

CALIGULA: (still laughing, to Caesonia) The treasury, my dear, it's very important, isn't it?

CAESONIA: No, Caligula, it's a secondary issue.

CALIGULA: But it's a thing which you know nothing about. The treasury is a powerful interest. Everything is important: the finances, the public morality, the foreign policy, the supplying of the army and the agrarian laws. Everything is essential, I tell you. Everything is on the same footing: the grandeur of Rome and your fits of arthritis. Ah! I go to busy myself with all that. Listen to me a little, intendant.

INTENDANT: We are listening to you.

(The patricians approach)

CALIGULA: You are loyal to me, aren't you?

INTENDANT: (in a tone of reproach) Caesar!

CALIGULA: Well then, I have a plan to lay before you. We're going to overturn the economic policy by two measures. I will explain it to you, intendant... when the patricians have left the room.

(The patricians go out)
SCENE 8

(\textit{Caligula seats himself beside Caesonia})

1 CALIGULA: Listen well. First measure: all the patricians, all people of the Empire who possess some wealth — small or large, it’s exactly the same thing — must compulsorily disinherit their children and instantly make their will in favour of the State.

5 INTENDANT: But, Caesar…
CALIGULA: I have not yet given you permission to speak. In proportion to our requirements, we will put to death these persons in the order of a list arbitrarily drawn up. Occasionally we might modify this order, but always arbitrarily. And we will inherit.

CAESONIA: \textit{(breaking away)} What is the matter with you?
CALIGULA: \textit{(imperturbably)} In truth, the order of the executions won’t have any importance. Or rather, these executions have an equal importance, a thing which sweeps away that they have no point to them. Besides, they are equally guilty, one as much as the other. Furthermore I tell you that it’s no more immoral to steal directly from citizens than to slip indirect taxes into the price of commodities which they aren’t able to indulge in. To govern is to steal. Everybody knows that, but it is the manner of doing it. For my part, I will steal openly. That will make a change for you from small earnings. \textit{(Harshly to the intendant)} You will execute these orders without delay. The testaments will be signed in the course of the evening by every resident of Rome; in a month at the latest by all the country people. Despatch some couriers.

INTENDANT: Caesar, you’re not accounting for yourself…
CALIGULA: Listen to me clearly, idiot. If the treasury is of importance, then human life hasn’t any. That is clear. All those who think like you must accept this reasoning and count their life for nothing since they value money as everything. Besides I’ve decided to be logical and seeing that I have the power, you’re going to see what logic is going to cost you. I will exterminate the opponents and the oppositions. If it’s necessary, I’ll start with you.
INTENDANT: Caesar, my goodwill is not in question, I swear it to you.
CALIGULA: Nor mine, you can believe me on that account. The proof:
the fact that I agree to embrace your point of view and to
possess the public treasury as an object for meditations.
In short, thank me since I buy into your game and be-
cause I play with your cards. (A pause and then calmly)
After all, my plan by its simplicity is marked with genius,
which closes the debate. You have three seconds to disap-
appear. I’m counting: one…

(The intendant disappears)
Scene 9

1 CAESONIA: I hardly recognise you. It’s a joke, isn’t it?
CALIGULA: Not exactly, Caesonia. It’s the science of teaching.
SCIPIO: That’s not possible, Caius!
CALIGULA: Exactly!

5 SCIPIO: I don’t understand you.
CALIGULA: Exactly! The point is about what isn’t possible; or rather, it’s about making possible that which isn’t.
SCIPIO: But it’s a game which has no limits. It’s the recreation of a fool.

10 CALIGULA: No, Scipio, it’s the virtue of an emperor. (He lies down on his back with an expression of fatigue) I’ve finally come to understand the use of power. It gives one chances at the impossible. Today, and for all time to come, my liberty no longer has any boundaries.

15 CAESONIA: (sadly) I don’t know if it’s necessary to rejoice about it, Caius.
CALIGULA: I no longer know it either. But I suppose that it’s right to live from here.

20 (Enter Cherea)
Scene 10

CHEREA: I have learned of your return. I offer up some prayers for your health.

CALIGULA: My health thanks you. (A pause and then suddenly) Go away, Cherea, I don't want to see you.

CHEREA: I'm surprised, Caius.

CALIGULA: Don't be surprised. I don't like literary men and I cannot support their lies. They speak so as not to listen to themselves. If they were to hear themselves, they would know they're nothing and would no longer be able to speak. Go, retreat, I have a horror of false witnesses.

CHEREA: If we lie, it's often without knowing it. I plead not guilty.

CALIGULA: The lie is never innocent. And your own gives an importance to beings and chattels. That's a thing which I can't forgive you for.

CHEREA: And yet, it's clearly necessary to argue in favour of this world, if we want to live here.

CALIGULA: Don't argue. The cause is understood. This world is without importance and he who recognises it gains his freedom. (He gets up) And justly, I hate you because you are not free. In all the Roman Empire, behold in me the only free person. Rejoice, there is finally attained an emperor capable of teaching freedom. Go away, Cherea, and you too, Scipio. Friendship makes me laugh. Go declare to Rome that her freedom is returned to her at last and that with it a great trial begins.

(They leave. Caligula turns away)
1 CAESONIA: You weep?
CALIGULA: Yes, Caesonia.
CAESONIA: But at last, what is it within you that has changed? If it's true that you loved Drusilla, you loved her at the same time as me and many others. That reason wouldn't be enough to allow her death to drive you away for three days and three nights in the country and bring you back with this hostile countenance.

CALIGULA: (turning to her) Who speaks to you of Drusilla, madwoman? And can't you imagine that a man cries for any other reason than love?

CAESONIA: Pardon, Caius. But I seek to comprehend.
CALIGULA: Men cry because things are not what they should be. (She goes towards him) Leave me alone, Caesonia. (She recoils) But stay near to me.

CAESONIA: I will do what you want. (She sits down) At my age one knows that life is not fair. But if evil is on the earth, why desire to add to it?

CALIGULA: You cannot understand. What does it matter? Perhaps I will get out of here. But I feel rising within me some nameless creatures. What would I do against them? (He turns towards her) Oh! Caesonia, I knew that men could be in despair, but I was ignorant of what that word meant. Like everyone else I believed that it was an illness of the soul. But no, it's the body that suffers. My skin gives me pain, my lungs, my limbs. I have an empty head and churning stomach. And the most frightful is this taste in my mouth. Neither blood, nor death, nor fever, but all those at the same time. Suffice it to say that I stir my tongue so that everything becomes black again and still the creatures clash with me. How hard it is, how bitter it is to become a man.

CAESONIA: It's necessary to sleep, to sleep for a long time, to let yourself go and to think no more. I will watch over your sleep. After your awaking, the world for you will recover its taste. Then make use of your power to like better that which can still be true. What has merit should also have its chance.

CALIGULA: But sleep is needed on the subject; one must give up to it. That isn't possible.

CAESONIA: That's what people believe in extreme tiredness. A time comes where you find a firm hand again.
CALIGULA: But I must know where to place it. And what is a firm hand to me, of what use to me is so much astonishing power if I can’t change the order of things? If I can’t make the sun lie down in the east, until suffering decreases and lives are no longer expiring? No, Caesonia, it is insignificant to sleep or to stay awake if I don’t have any influence over the direction of this world.

CAESONIA: But that is wanting to make yourself equal with the gods. I don’t know of any worse lunacy.

CALIGULA: You too, you believe I’m mad. And yet, what is a god that I desire to make myself equal to him? What I wish for today, with all my might, is beyond the reach of some gods. I take charge of a kingdom where the impossible is king.

CAESONIA: You won’t be able to make the sky not be the sky, only a beautiful face become ugly, and a man’s heart unfeeling.

CALIGULA: (with a growing exaltation) I want to mix the sky with the ocean, to blend ugliness and beauty, to make laughter burst out of suffering.

CAESONIA: (standing before him and imploring) There is the good and the bad, that which is great and that which is inferior, the just and the unjust. I swear to you that all that won’t change.

CALIGULA: (in the same manner) My will is to change it. I will create for this century the gift of equality. And when everything will be level, the impossible finally on earth, the moon in my hands, then perhaps I will also be transformed and the world with me. Then, at last, men won’t die and they will be happy.

CAESONIA: (with a cry) You won’t be able to deny the existence of love!

CALIGULA: (with a piercing voice full of rage) Love, Caesonia? (He seizes her by the shoulders and shakes her) I’ve learned that it was nothing! It’s the other thing which is capable of satisfaction: the public treasury! You’ve understood this clearly, haven’t you? Everything begins with that. Ah! It’s now that I’m finally going to live! To live, Caesonia, to live, it’s the opposite of love! It’s me who tells you this and it’s me who invites you to a feast without limit, to a general trial, at the most beautiful of shows. And I require some company, some spectators, some victims and some criminals.

(He rushes to the gong and begins to strike it, without stopping, with increasing force. All the time he is striking while he speaks)
CALIGULA: Make the criminals come in! I must have some criminals! And they all are. (Continually striking the gong) I want people to send the condemned to death. Some public, I will have my public! Judges, witnesses, accused, all condemned in advance! Ah! Caesonia, I will show them what they've never seen — the only free man of this empire!

(With the sound of the gong, the palace little by little has become full of noises that increase and draw nearer. Some voices, sounds of weapons, some footsteps and some stamping. Caligula laughs and keeps on striking the gong. Some guards enter, and then leave)

CALIGULA: (still striking the gong) And you, Caesonia, you will obey me. You will help me always. This will be marvellous.

CAESONIA: (bewildered, she speaks between two hits of the gong) I have no need to swear, since I love you.

CALIGULA: (very animated) You will do whatever I tell you to!

CAESONIA: (equally animated) Anything, Caligula, but stop.

CALIGULA: (still striking) You will be cruel!

CAESONIA: (weeping) Cruel.

CALIGULA: (same animation) Cold and implacable!

CAESONIA: Implacable.

CALIGULA: (same animation) You will also suffer!

CAESONIA: Yes, Caligula, but I’m going mad.

(Some patricians have entered, confused, and with them the palace attendants. Caligula strikes one last blow, raises his mallet, turns towards them and summons them.)

CALIGULA: (insane) Come, everyone, approach! I order you to approach! (He stamps his foot) It’s an emperor who demands that you approach. (Everyone advances, full of terror) Come quickly. And now, approach Caesonia.

(He takes her by the hand, leads her close to the mirror and frenziedly obliterates the image on its polished surface with the mallet. He laughs.)


(He stands before the glass in a demented attitude)
CAESONIA:  
(looking at the mirror, with dread) Caligula!  

(Caligula, changing tone, places his finger on the glass and suddenly staring at himself, says in a triumphant voice)

CALIGULA:  
Caligula!  

CURTAIN
ACT TWO

SCENE 1

Some patricians have gathered at Cherea's house.

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1  FIRST PATRICIAN: He insults our dignity.
   MUCIUS: For three years!
   OLD PATRICIAN: He calls me little woman! He ridicules me terribly!
   MUCIUS: For three years!

5  FIRST PATRICIAN: Every evening he makes us run around his bed when he
goes to take a walk in the fields.
   SECOND PATRICIAN: And he tells us that the run is good for the health.
   MUCIUS: For three years!
   OLD PATRICIAN: There isn't any excuse for that.

10  THIRD PATRICIAN: No, we cannot forgive that.
    FIRST PATRICIAN: Patricius, he confiscated your wealth; Scipio, he killed
your father; Octavius, he abducted your wife and now
makes her work in his brothel; Lepidus, he has killed
your son. Are you going to tolerate this? As for me, my
choice is made. Between the risk of running and this un-
bearable life of fear and impotence, I cannot hesitate.

15  SCIPIO: In killing my father, he has chosen for me.
    FIRST PATRICIAN: Will you hesitate still?
    THIRD PATRICIAN: We are with you. He has given our seats at the circus to
the working classes and forced us, against our will, to
clap with the common people in order to better punish
us afterwards.

20  OLD PATRICIAN: That's a coward.
    SECOND PATRICIAN: A cynic.
    THIRD PATRICIAN: An actor.
    OLD PATRICIAN: That's impotent.

25  FOURTH PATRICIAN: For the last three years!

(Disorderly uproar. Some weapons are brandished. A light falls. A table is
upended. Everyone rushes towards the exit. But Cherea enters, impassive, which
stops this flight.) ■
Scene 2

CHEREA: Where are you running to like that?

THIRD PATRICIAN: To the palace.

CHEREA: I completely understand. But do you believe that they will allow you to enter?

FIRST PATRICIAN: It’s not a question of asking permission.

CHEREA: There you are abundantly strong at a single stroke! Can I at least have permission to seat myself in my own house?

(He shuts the door. Cherea walks towards the overturned table and sits upon one of the corners, whilst everyone turns towards him)

CHEREA: This is not as easy as you believe it, my friends. The fear that you’re experiencing cannot take the place of courage and composure. All this is premature.

THIRD PATRICIAN: If you’re not with us, be off, but hold your tongue.

CHEREA: I believe, however, that I am with you. But it’s not for the same reasons.

THIRD PATRICIAN: Enough of babbling!

CHEREA: (standing up again) Yes, enough of babbling. I want things to be clear. For though I’m with you, I’m not for you. This is why your method seems no good to me. You haven’t recognized your true enemy. You ascribe to him some petty motives. He only has noble ones and you will run to your death. First of all learn to see him as he is and you’ll be better able to fight against him.

THIRD PATRICIAN: We see him as he is; the most insane of tyrants!

CHEREA: That’s not certain. Emperors are foolish, we’re aware of that. But this one isn’t foolish enough. And what I detest about him is that he knows what he wants.

FIRST PATRICIAN: He wants our death before anything.
CHEREA: No, that is secondary. Now he employs his power in the service of a higher and more deadly passion. He threatens us through what we hold most deeply. Without doubt, this isn't the first time that, among us, a man has command of an unlimited power. But it's the first time that he uses it without constraints; as far as to deny the existence of mankind and the world. That is the thing which alarms me about him and what I wish to oppose. To lose one's life is no great matter and I'll have this courage when it will be necessary to do so. But to see the meaning of this life dissipated, our reason to exist disappear, that's the thing which is unbearable. A man cannot live without reason.

FIRST PATRICIAN: Vengeance is a reason.

CHEREA: Yes, and I'm going to take part in that with you. But understand that it's not to take up the cause of your petty humiliations. It's in order to fight against a large idea whose victory would mean the end of the world. I can accept that you are turned sour from derision. I cannot accept that Caligula carries out what he dreams of doing and everything he dreams of doing. He transforms his philosophy into corpses and, for our misfortune, it's a philosophy free from objections. Clearly it's necessary to strike when one cannot refute.

THIRD PATRICIAN: Then we must act.

CHEREA: We must act. But you won't destroy this unjust power by attacking it from the front, when it's at full strength. Anyone can fight against tyranny; it's vital to use cunning against disinterested malice. We must push it forward in its own direction, in expectation that this logic must become insanity. But once more, and I've only spoken here for the sake of honesty, understand that I'm with you only for a while. Afterwards I will not serve any of your interests, desirous only to recover peace in a newly coherent world. It's not ambition that makes me act but a rational fear; the fear of this cruel lyricism, in the presence of which my life is nothing.
FIRST PATRICIAN: (coming forward) I believe I've understood, or nearly so. But the essential point is that you, like us, judge that the foundations of our society are shaken. For us the question is above all moral. Isn't it for you fellows? The family totters, respect for work evaporates, and the entire country is given up to blasphemy. Virtue calls to us for help. Are we going to refuse to hear her? Conspirators, in the end, will you accept that patricians are forced each evening to run around the bed of Caesar?

OLD PATRICIAN: Will you allow it that he calls them 'my beloved'?
THIRD PATRICIAN: That he abducts their wives from them?
SECOND PATRICIAN: And their children?
MUCIUS: And their money?
FIFTH PATRICIAN: No!
FIRST PATRICIAN: Cherea, you have spoken well. You have also made us a great deal calmer. It is too soon to act: the people, to-day at least, would be against us. Do you wish to wait with us for the decisive moment?

CHEREA: Yes, let's allow Caligula to carry on. On the contrary, let's urge him on in this way. Let's organize his madness. A day will come where he will be alone before an empire full of the dead and relations of the dead.

(General clamour. Trumpets outside. Silence. Then from mouth to mouth a name: Caligula)
Scene 3

Caligula and Caesonia enter, followed by Helicon and some soldiers. A scene played in silence. Caligula stops and observes the conspirators. He goes from one to the other in silence, adjusts a buckle on one, moves back to contemplate a second, looks at them again, passes a hand over his eyes and leaves without saying a word.
CAESONIA: (ironically, pointing out the disorder) You’re fighting amongst yourselves?

CHEREA: We’re fighting amongst ourselves.

CAESONIA: (same tone) And why are you fighting amongst yourselves?

CHEREA: We are fighting for nothing.

CAESONIA: Then it’s not true.

CHEREA: What’s not true?

CAESONIA: You’re not fighting amongst yourselves.

CHEREA: Then we’re not fighting.

CAESONIA: (smiling) Perhaps it would be better to put the room in order. Caligula hates disorder.

HELICON: (to the old patrician) You’ll end by making this man take leave of his character.

OLD PATRICIAN: But after all, what have we done to him?

HELICON: Precisely nothing. It’s extraordinary to be insignificant at this point. It ends by becoming unbearable. Put yourself in Caligula’s place. (A pause) Naturally, you would plot soundly. Isn’t that so?

OLD PATRICIAN: But you see it’s wrong. What does he believe then?

HELICON: He doesn’t believe. He knows it. But at heart, I suppose that he desires it somewhat. Come on; let’s help to repair the disorder.

(They get on with the job. Caligula enters and observes.)
CALIGULA: (to the old patrician) Good day, my beloved. (To the others) Cherea, I have decided to refresh myself at your house. Mucius, I have permitted myself to invite your wife.

(The intendant claps his hands. A slave enters, but Caligula stops him.)

CALIGULA: One moment! Gentlemen, you know that the State finances only hold up because they have taken up a custom with them. Since yesterday, the custom itself no longer suffices for this. Therefore I am in the distressing need to get on with some compressions in staff. In a spirit of sacrifice that I’m sure you will appreciate, I have decided to reduce my establishment, to liberate some slaves and to assign you to my household duties. You would be quite willing to prepare the table and to wait upon it.

(The senators look at each other and hesitate.)

HELICON: Come on, gentlemen, a little willingness. You’ll see, moreover, that it’s easier to go down the social ladder than to go up it.

(The senators leave their seats hesitantly.)

CALIGULA: (to Caesonia) What is the punishment reserved for lazy slaves?

CAESONIA: The whip, I believe.

(The senators hasten themselves and begin awkwardly setting up the table)

CALIGULA: Now then, a little diligence! Some method, some method! (To Helicon) It seems to me they’ve lost power.

HELICON: To tell the truth, they’ve never had any, except in order to beat or to command. It will be necessary to have patience, that’s all. It requires a day to make a senator and ten years to make a worker.

CALIGULA: But I’m very much afraid that it needs twenty of them to make a worker out of a senator.
HELICON: They get there, all the same. In my opinion, they have the calling! Servitude will suit them. (A senator mops his face) Look, they even begin to perspire. It's a day's march.

CALIGULA: Good. Don't ask too much of them. It's not so bad. And then, a moment of justice; that's always good to take. Speaking of justice, we must hurry; I have an execution to attend. Ah! Rufius is lucky that I so suddenly happen to be hungry. (Confidentially) Rufius, he is the knight who must die. (A pause) You don't ask me why he must die?

(General silence. During this time some slaves have brought over some food.)

CALIGULA: (good humouredly) Now then, I see that you've become intelligent. (He nibbles an olive) You have finally understood that it's not necessary to have done anything in order to die. Soldiers, I'm pleased with you. Isn't that right, Helicon?

(He pauses from eating and gazes at the guests with the expression of a buffoon.)

HELICON: Sure. What an army! But if you want my opinion, now they're too intelligent and no longer want to fight. If they progress further, the empire collapses!

CALIGULA: Perfect! We will refresh ourselves. Now, let's seat ourselves at random. No protocol. So, this Rufius is lucky. And I'm sure that he doesn't appreciate this little respite. However, some hours gained over death; that's invaluable.

(He eats and the others do too. It becomes clear that Caligula behaves badly at the table. Nothing compels him to throw his olive stones into the plate of his immediate neighbours, to spit his meat trimmings onto the dish as well as pick his teeth with his nails and to scratch his head frantically. However, it is during the meal that he will carry out so many deeds with silliness. Then he abruptly stops eating and stares insistently at one of the guests, Lepidus.)

CALIGULA: (brutally) You look cross. Would that be because I've put your son to death?

LEPIDUS: (mouth clenched) Why no, Caius, on the contrary.

CALIGULA: (expansively) On the contrary! Ah! How I love when the face contradicts the cares of the heart. Your face is sad, but your heart — on the contrary, isn't it Lepidus?

LEPIDUS: (resolutely) On the contrary, Caesar.
CALIGULA: (more and more happy) Ah! Lepidus, no-one is dearer to me than you. Let's laugh together, do you want to? And tell me a good story.

LEPIDUS: (who has overrated his constraint) Caius!

CALIGULA: Very well, all right, I'll tell a story, then. But you will laugh, isn't that so, Lepidus? (Giving the evil eye to Lepidus) It would only be for your second son. (Laughing again) Besides, you're not in bad humour. (He drinks, then prompting) On... on... Come on, Lepidus.

LEPIDUS: (wearily) On the contrary, Caius.

CALIGULA: Well done! (He drinks) Listen now. (Musing) There was once a poor emperor that nobody liked. He, who loved Lepidus, had his younger son killed in order to rub out this love from the heart. (Changing tone) Naturally, it's not true. Funny, don't you think? You don't laugh. Nobody laughs? Listen to me, then. (With a violent rage) I want everybody laughing. You, Lepidus and the others. Get up! Laugh! (He thumps on the table) I want to see you laugh.

(Everybody gets up. During this scene the actors, except Caligula and Caesonia, perform like puppets. Caligula lies back on his bed, beaming with joy, seized by an irresistible laughter)

CALIGULA: Oh behold them, Caesonia. Nothing works any longer. Honesty, respectability, the opinion of others, the wisdom of nations. Nobody wants to say anything any more. Everything vanishes in the presence of the fear. The fear, Caesonia, this beautiful sensation, without alliance, pure and indifferent. An extraordinary one that drags nobility from the guts. (He passes a hand over his forehead and drinks. Then, in an amicable tone) Let's speak of something else now. Now then, Cherea, you're very silent.

CHREA: I'm ready to speak, Caius, as soon as you will allow it.

CALIGULA: Perfect. In that case, shut up. I would very much like to hear our friend, Mucius.

MUCIUS: (reluctantly) At your orders, Caius.

CALIGULA: Well then, speak to us of your wife. And begin by sending her to my left.

(Mucius' wife goes to Caligula's side)
CALIGULA: Well now! Mucius, we’re waiting for you.
MUCIUS: (a little lost) My wife… but I love her.

(General laughter)

CALIGULA: Of course, my friend, of course. But how trivial it is! (He already has the wife close to him and abstractedly licks her left shoulder. More and more at ease) In fact, when I entered, you were plotting, isn’t it true? They were concerned with their little conspiracy, eh?

OLD PATRICIAN: Caius, how could you?
CALIGULA: No importance, my pretty. It’s clearly necessary that old age be forgiven. No importance, truly. You are incapable of a courageous act. It strikes me only with the sense that I have some questions of State to settle. But first I must balance those needs with urgent desires that nature has created.

(He gets up and drags Mucius’ wife into an adjoining room)
SCENE 6

(Mucius seems to be about to spring up)

CAESONIA: (amiably) Oh! Mucius, I’m very much taken with this excellent wine.

(Mucius, subdued, serves her in silence. A moment of uneasiness. The seats creak. The dialogue which follows is somewhat formal.)

CAESONIA: Well then! Cherea, suppose you tell me now why you lot were beating yourselves up a moment ago?

CHERA: (coldly) Everything happened, dear Caesonia, because of our discussions concerning the point of whether poetry should be murderous or not.

CAESONIA: That’s very interesting. Nevertheless, that exceeds my feminine understanding. But I wonder that your passion for art drives you to exchange some blows.

CHERA: (same tone) Indeed. But Caligula tells me there isn’t any profound passion without some cruelty.

HELICON: Nor love without a bit of violation.

CAESONIA: (eating) There must be some truth in this opinion. Isn’t that so, you fellows?

OLD PATRICIAN: Caligula is a vigorous psychologist.

FIRST PATRICIAN: He spoke to us with the eloquence of courage.

SECOND PATRICIAN: He should summarise all his ideas. That would be invaluable.

CHERA: Not to mention that it would occupy his thoughts, for it’s clear that he needs distractions.

CAESONIA: (still eating) You will be delighted to know that he has thought of it and is writing a large treatise at this present time.
Scene 7

(Caligula and the wife of Mucius enter)

CALIGULA: Mucius, I give you back your wife. She will rejoin you. But excuse me; I've some instructions to give.

(He leaves rapidly. Mucius, pale, has stood up.)
SCENE 8

1  CAESONIA:  (to Mucius, who has remained standing) This important treatise will equal the most celebrated ones, Mucius. We have no doubt about it.

5  MUCIUS:  (still gazing at the door through which Caligula has disappeared) And what does he speak of, Caesonia?

CAESONIA:  (indifferently) Oh, that is beyond me.

CHEREA:  Therefore, we’re right in concluding that this draft must contain the murderous power of poetry.

CAESONIA:  Precisely, I believe.

10  OLD PATRICIAN:  (with playfulness) Well, then! That will occupy him, as Cherea said.

CAESONIA:  Yes, my pretty. But what will trouble you, without doubt, is the title of this work.

CHEREA:  What is it?

15  CAESONIA:  The Sword. ■
Scene 9

(Caligula enters quickly)

Caligula: Excuse me, but affairs of State are also pressing. Intendant, you will execute the shutting of the public granaries. I have just signed the decree. You will find it in the bedroom.

Intendant: But...

Caligula: Tomorrow, there will be famine.

Intendant: But the people are going to protest.

Caligula: (with strength and precision) I say that there will be famine tomorrow. Everyone knows famine; it’s a plague. Tomorrow, there will be plague... and I’ll stop the plague when it pleases me. (He explains to the others) After all, I haven’t so many ways to prove that I am free. A man is always free at the expense of someone. It’s tedious but it’s normal. (With a glance towards Mucius) Apply that thought to jealousy and you will see. (Dreaming) All the same, how ugly it is to be jealous! To suffer through vanity and imagination! To see his wife...

(Mucius clenches his fists and opens and shuts his mouth very quickly.)

Eat up, gentlemen. Do you know that we’ve been working hard with Helicon? We’re setting down, to a degree, a little tract on execution which you will give us your views on.

Helicon: That’s assuming that we ask your opinion.

Caligula: Be generous, Helicon! Unveil our little secrets for them. Go on — section three, first paragraph.

(Helicon gets up and recites mechanically)

Helicon: Execution relieves and releases. It is universal, strengthening and as just in its applications as in its intentions. People die because they are guilty. They are guilty because they are subject to Caligula. Now, everyone is subject to Caligula. Consequently, everyone is guilty, from which it follows that everyone dies. It is a question of time and of patience.
CALIGULA: (smiling) What do you think of it? Patience, eh, that’s a conception! Shall I tell you: it’s what I admire the most in you. Now, gentlemen, you can dispose of yourselves. Cherea no longer requires you. However, let Caesonia stay! And Lepidus and Octavius! Mereia also. I would like to discuss with you the arrangement for my brothel. It’s giving me a great deal of concern.

(The others depart slowly. Caligula follows Mucius with his eyes)
Scene 10

CHEREA: At your orders, Caius. What’s not working? Are there unpleasant women?

CALIGULA: No, but the takings aren’t good.

MEREIA: We must increase the price lists.

CALIGULA: Mereia, you’ve just wasted an opportunity to keep yourself silent. Having the good luck to be your age, these questions won’t interest you and I don’t ask for your advice.

MEREIA: Then why have you ordered me to stay?

CALIGULA: Because, presently, I will need an opinion without passion.

(Mereia turns away)

CHEREA: Caius, if I may speak with passion, it’s not necessary to meddle with prices.

CALIGULA: Of course, you see. But we must recoup more than the sum total of our undertakings. And I’ve already explained my plan to Caesonia who is going to disclose it to you. As for me, I’ve drunk too much wine and I’m starting to feel sleepy.

(He lies down and closes his eyes)

CAESONIA: It’s very simple. Caligula created a new decoration.

CHEREA: I don’t see the connection.

CAESONIA: It is there, though. This distinction will establish the order of civic hero. It will recompense those citizens who will have visited Caligula’s brothel most often.

CHEREA: That’s bright.

CAESONIA: I believe so. I forgot to mention that the reward is bestowed every month, after verification of the entry tickets. A citizen who has not obtained any decoration at the end of twelve months is exiled or executed.

THIRD PATRICIAN: Why ‘or executed’?

CAESONIA: Because Caligula said that it doesn’t have any importance. The main point is that he is able to choose.

CHEREA: Bravo! Today the public treasury is refloated.

HELICON: And note it well — all the time in a very moral fashion. It’s better, after all, to tax the vice than to fleece the virtue like they do in the republican societies.
(Caligula half opens his eyes and watches the old Mereia, who, left by himself, gets out a small flask and drinks a mouthful from it.)

CALIGULA: (still lying down) What are you drinking, Mereia?
MEREIA: It's for my asthma, Caius.

(Caligula moves towards him, driving the others away from him and smells his mouth.)

CALIGULA: No, it's a counterpoison.
MEREIA: Oh no, Caius. You will laugh. I choke in the night and I've been looking after myself for a very long time before this.
CALIGULA: So you're frightened of being poisoned?
MEREIA: My asthma…

CALIGULA: No. Call things by their name: you fear only that I am poisoning you. You're suspicious of me. You're spying on me.
MEREIA: I say no, by all the gods!
CALIGULA: You suspect me. In some measure, you're setting yourself in defiance of me.
MEREIA: Caius!
CALIGULA: (harshly) Answer me! (Mathematically) If you take a counterpoison, you therefore ascribe to me the intention to poison you.

MEREIA: Yes… I mean… no.
CALIGULA: And from the moment where you believe that I took the decision to poison you, you conclude that you must oppose this intention.

(Silence. From the beginning of the scene Caesonia and Cherea have gathered the gist of what's going on. Alone, Lepidus follows the dialogue with an anguished look.)

CALIGULA: (more and more tersely) That makes two crimes, and a choice which you won't get out of. Either I was not willing to put you to death and you suspect me unjustly — I, your emperor — or else I wished it, and you, insect, opposed my plans. (A pause. Caligula contemplates the old man with satisfaction) Eh, Mereia, what do you say to this logic?
MEREIA: It is… it is severe, Caius. But it can't be applied to the case.
CALIGULA: And the third crime is that you take me for an imbecile. Hear me well. Of these three crimes, only one is honourable for you: the second. Because from the moment where you attribute a decision to me and take counteractions, that involves a revolt on your part. You’re a leader of men, a revolutionary. That is good. (Sadly) I like you a great deal, Mereia. That’s why you will be condemned for your second crime and not for the others. You’re going to die like a man, to embody the rebel in you.

(During all of this speech, Mereia has shrunk little by little into his seat)

CALIGULA: Don’t thank me. That’s natural. Take this. *(He holds out a phial to him and says in an amiable tone)* Drink this poison.

(Mereia, sobbing, shakes his head in refusal.)

CALIGULA: *(losing his patience)* Come on, come on!

(Mereia then tries to escape. But Caligula, with a wild leap, catches him in the centre of the stage, hurls him onto a low bench and, after a few moments of struggle, forces the phial between his teeth and breaks it with his fist. After some convulsions, his face bloody and streaked with tears, Mereia dies. Caligula stands up and mechanically wipes his hands.)*

CALIGULA: *(to Caesonia, giving her a fragment of the phial from Mereia)* What is it? A counterpoison?

CAESONIA: *(with coolness)* No, Caligula. It’s a medicine for asthma.

CALIGULA: *(looking at Mereia, after a silence)* That makes no difference. It comes to the same thing. A little sooner, a little later...

(He leaves abruptly, with a preoccupied look, still wiping his hands.)
Scene 11

1  LEPIDUS: (astounded) What should we do?
    CAESONIA: (with simplicity) First of all, take out the corpse, I believe.
               It is too unsightly!

5  (Cherea and Lepidus take up the corpse and drag it into the wings.)

    LEPIDUS: (to Cherea) We'll have to act quickly.
    CHEREA: We must be two hundred strong.

10 (Scipio enters. Seeing Caesonia, he makes a gesture in order to depart.)
SCENE 12

CAESONIA: Come here.  
SCIPIO: What do you want?  
CAESONIA: Approach.

(Scipio goes to her. She raises his chin to her and looks him in the eyes. Pause.)

CAESONIA: (coldly) He has killed your father?
SCIPIO: Yes.
CAESONIA: You hate him?
SCIPIO: Yes.
CAESONIA: You want to kill him?
SCIPIO: Yes.
CAESONIA: (releasing him) Then why speak of it to me?
SCIPIO: Because I don't fear anybody. To kill him or to be killed; they're the two ways of ending it. Besides, you will not betray me.
CAESONIA: You're right, I won't betray you. But I want to tell you something — or rather, I wish to speak to that which is now the best in you.
SCIPIO: My hatred, that's what is best in me.
CAESONIA: Just listen to me. It's an utterance both painful and obvious that I want to tell you. But it's an utterance which, if it were truly listened to, would accomplish the one definitive revolution in this world.
SCIPIO: Then say it.
CAESONIA: Not yet. First of all, think of the revulsion on your father's face as they tore his tongue from him. Think of that mouth full of blood and that cry of a tortured beast.
SCIPIO: Yes.
CAESONIA: Now think of Caligula.
SCIPIO: (with all the tone of hatred) Yes.
CAESONIA: Now listen: try to understand him.

(She departs, leaving the young Scipio weakened. Helicon enters)
HELICON: Caligula is coming back. So, poet, you're going to eat?
SCIPIO: Helicon, help me!
HELICON: That's dangerous, my dove. And I understand nothing of poetry.

SCIPIO: You should be able to help me. You know many things.
HELICON: I know that the days are passing by and that it's necessary to make haste to eat. I also know that you might be able to kill Caligula... and that he would not perceive it with an evil eye.

(Caligula enters. Helicon leaves)
Scene 14

CALIGULA: Ah! It's you.  *(He pauses, a little as if he were casting about for an attitude)* It's a long time since I've seen you. *(Advancing slowly towards Scipio)* What are you doing? You're still writing? Are you able to show me your latest pieces?

SCIPIO: *(he is likewise ill at ease, split between his hatred and he knows not what)* I've written some poems, Caesar.

CALIGULA: About what?

SCIPIO: *(more at ease)* I don't know, Caesar. Concerning nature, I think.

CALIGULA: *(indulging himself, in an ironic and mischievous manner)* Beautiful subject, and vast. What is it that nature has done for you?

SCIPIO: *(indulging himself, in an ironic and mischievous manner)* It consoles me for not being Caesar.

CALIGULA: Ah! And do you believe that it might console me for being him?

SCIPIO: *(same tone)* Upon my word, it has healed some more serious wounds.

CALIGULA: *(strangely natural)* Wound? You say that with malice. Is that because I had your father killed? If you knew, though, how accurate the word is. Wound! *(Changing in tone)* There is nothing but hatred to make men intelligent.

SCIPIO: *(stiffly)* I have responded to your question about nature.

*(Caligula sits down, gazes at Scipio, then abruptly seizes his hands and brings him forcibly to his feet. He takes Scipio's face in his hands.)*

CALIGULA: Tell me your poem.

SCIPIO: I beg of you, Caesar, no.

CALIGULA: Why?

SCIPIO: I don't have it on me.

CALIGULA: Don't you remember it?

SCIPIO: No

CALIGULA: At least tell me what it contains.

SCIPIO: *(still taut and almost with regret)* I spoke on the subject...

CALIGULA: Well, then?

SCIPIO: No, I don't know...

CALIGULA: Try.

SCIPIO: I spoke on the subject of a certain union of the earth...

CALIGULA: *(interrupting him in an engrossed tone)* ... of the earth and the feet.
SCIPIO: (surprised, he hesitates and continues) Yes, that's almost it.
CALIGULA: Carry on.
SCIPIO: … and also of the line of Roman hills and that fleeting, unsettling pacification that the night brings over them.
CALIGULA: Of the cry of swifts in the green sky.
SCIPIO: (giving himself up to it a little more) Yes, more.
CALIGULA: Well?
SCIPIO: And that subtle moment where the sky, still full of gold, suddenly swings and, within an instant, shows us her other face, crammed with glittering stars.
CALIGULA: That scent of smoke, trees and water which then rises from the earth towards the night.
SCIPIO: (in full) The noise of the cicadas and the recoil from the hot weather. The dogs, the rumbling of the last chariots, the voices of the farmers…
CALIGULA: And the roads drenched in shadow from the lentisk trees and the olive trees…
SCIPIO: Yes, yes. It's all that! But how have you learned of it?
CALIGULA: (pressing Scipio against him) I don't know. Perhaps because we love the same truths.
SCIPIO: (shaking, he hides his face against Caligula's chest) Oh! What does it matter, since everything captures within me the aspect of love!
CALIGULA: (still kind) That's the power of large hearts, Scipio. If I could at least connect with your transparency! But I know too well the strength of my passion for life; it won't be satisfied by nature. You cannot understand that. You exist in a different world. You are pure in what is good, while I am pure in evil.
SCIPIO: I can understand.
CALIGULA: No. This thing in me... this lake of silence, these rotten weeds. (Suddenly changing tone) Your poem ought to be beautiful. But if you want my opinion…
SCIPIO: (same animation) Yes.
CALIGULA: The whole thing lacks blood.

(Scipio staggers backwards and looks at Caligula in horror. All the time recoiling, he speaks in a deep voice, in sight of Caligula, whom he watches with intensity)

SCIPIO: Oh, monster, infectious monster! You have played a game again. You’ve just come to mock, eh? And you’re pleased with yourself?
CALIGULA: (with a little sadness) There is some truth in what you say. I have played a game.

SCIPIO: (same animation) What a vile and bloodstained heart you must have. Oh, how so much evil and hatred must torture you!

CALIGULA: (gently) Hold your tongue now.

SCIPIO: How I pity you and how I hate you!

CALIGULA: (with anger) Shut up.

SCIPIO: And what an unclean solitude must be yours!

CALIGULA: (exploding, he rushes towards him and collars him; he shakes him) Solitude! You know of solitude? That of poets and the powerless. Solitude? But which? Ah! You're not aware that by oneself, a man is never so! And that everywhere the very weight of the future and the past accompanies us! The lives that we have slaughtered are with us. And this would still be easy for those ones. But those that we have loved, those that we haven't loved and who have loved us, the regrets, the desire, the bitterness and the sweetness, the whores and the clan of the gods. (He lets Scipio go and moves back towards his seat) Alone! Ah! Suppose however, instead of this solitude poisoned with coffins that is mine, I could taste the silence, the silence and the trembling of a tree! (Sitting with a sudden weariness) Solitude! But no, Scipio. It is filled with the gnashing of teeth and wholly resounding with noises and doomed cries. And by the side of the women that I caress, when the night closes upon us and then I think, remote from my finally satisfied flesh, to seize a little of me between life and death, my complete solitude fills up with the sour smell of pleasure in the armpits of the woman who sinks further down against my side.

(He seems to be exhausted. Long silence. Scipio passes behind Caligula and approaches him hesitantly. He holds out a hand towards Caligula and places it on his shoulder. Caligula, without turning around, covers Scipio's hand with one of his.)

SCIPIO: All men have a comfort in life. That thing helps them to carry on. They turn towards it when they feel too worn out.

CALIGULA: That's true, Scipio.
127  SCIPIO: Then isn't there anything in your life that is like this; access to tears, a quiet refuge?

   CALIGULA: Yes, for that.
   SCIPIO: And what then?

131  CALIGULA: (slowly) Contempt.

CURTAIN
ACT THREE

SCENE 1

Before the rising of the curtain, we hear the sound of cymbals and of drums. The curtain opens on a sort of strange display. In the centre, there is a tapestry, in front of which, upon a small platform, stand Helicon and Caesonia. The cymbal-players are on each side. Seated on some benches with their backs to the audience are some patricians and Scipio.

HELICON: (spruiking about the tone of the display) Come near! Approach! (Cymbals clash) Once again, the gods are landed upon earth. Caius, Caesar and god, surnamed Caligula, imparts to them his entirely human shape. Approach, common mortals, the sacred miracle works before your eyes. By means of a special grace in the blessed reign of Caligula, the divine secrets are offered up to every eye. (Cymbals clash)

CAESONIA: Come near, gentlemen! Worship and give your obolus. The celestial mystery is today placed within reach of every purse. (Cymbals clash)

HELICON: Olympus and its stages, its intrigues, its nonsense and its tears. Approach! Approach! All the truth about your gods! (Cymbals clash)

CAESONIA: Worship and give your obolus. Approach, gentlemen! The performance is about to begin.

(Cymbals. Movements of slaves who bring different objects close to the platform.)

HELICON: An impressionistic reconstitution of truth, a realization without precedent. The majestic scenery of the divine power brought back to earth. An attraction sensational and beyond measure. The lightning (the slaves light some Greek fire), the thunder (they roll a cask full of stones), destiny itself in its triumphal march. Approach and behold!

(He draws the tapestry aside and Caligula, dressed like a grotesque Venus, appears on a pedestal.)
31 CALIGULA: *(amiably)* Today, I am Venus.
CAESONIA: The worship begins. Prostrate yourselves *(Everyone, except Scipio, bows their heads)* and repeat after me the sacred prayer of Caligula — Venus: Goddess of sorrows and of the dance.

36 PATRICIANS: Goddess of sorrows and of the dance.
CAESONIA: Born of the waves, all sticky and bitter with the salt and the foam.
PATRICIANS: Born of the waves, all sticky and bitter with the salt and the foam.

41 CAESONIA: You who are like a smile and a regret.
PATRICIANS: You who are like a smile and a regret.
CAESONIA: A rancour and a yearning.
PATRICIANS: A rancour and a yearning.
CAESONIA: Teach us the indifference which brings love to life again.

46 PATRICIANS: Teach us the indifference which brings love to life again.
CAESONIA: Instruct us in the truth of this world, which is that it is pointless.
PATRICIANS: Instruct us in the truth of this world, which is that it is pointless.

51 CAESONIA: And grant us the strength to live up to this incomparable truth.
PATRICIANS: And grant us the strength to live up to this incomparable truth.
CAESONIA: Pause!

56 PATRICIANS: Pause!
CAESONIA: *(resuming)* Crown us with your gifts, spill on our faces your impartial cruelty, your completely objective hatred. Open above our eyes your hands abundant with flowers and with murders.

61 PATRICIANS: … your hands abundant with flowers and with murders.
CAESONIA: Welcome your lost children. Receive them in the asylum stripped of your indifferent and painful love. Give us your aimless passions, your sufferings deprived of reason and your joys without hope…

66 PATRICIANS: … and your joys without hope…
CAESONIA: *(very grand)* You, so empty and so fiery, inhuman, but so earthy, intoxicate us with the wine of your equivalence and gorge us forever in your black and pungent stomach.

PATRICIANS: Intoxicate us with the wine of your equivalence and gorge us forever in your black and pungent stomach.
(When the last phrase has been uttered by the patricians, Caligula, till then motionless, snorts and in a stentorian voice says:)

CALIGULA: Agreed, my children, your vows will be favourably heard.

(He sits cross-legged, like a tailor, on the pedestal. One by one, the patricians bow, deposit their obolus and place themselves on the right before going. The last one, disturbed, forgets to deposit his obolus and shrinks away. But Caligula, with a bound, gets to his feet)

CALIGULA: Hey! Hey! Come here, my boy. To worship is good, but to enrich is better. Thanks that will do nicely. If the gods hadn’t any other wealth than the love of mortals, they would be as poor as poor Caligula. And now, gentlemen, you’re going to be able to leave and propagate in the city the astonishing miracle which you have been permitted to witness: you have seen Venus, something which calls to be seen, with your eyes of flesh and Venus has spoken to you. Go, gentlemen. (Movement of patricians) One second! On your way out, take the passage to the left. In the one on the right I’ve posted some guards in order to assassinate you.

(The patricians leave with a great deal of obsequiousness and much agitation. The slaves and the musicians disappear)
Scene 2

(Helicon wags a threatening finger at Scipio)

1 HELICON: Scipio, you're still playing the anarchist!
SCIPIO: (to Caligula) Caius, you have blasphemed.
CALIGULA: What is it he truly means?
SCIPIO: You defile the heavens after having stained the earth with blood.
HELICON: This young man adores grand words. (He goes to lie down on a divan)
CAESONIA: (very calm) What a rate you're going at, my boy. There are, at this moment in Rome, people who are dying for the sake of some speeches considerably less eloquent.
SCIPIO: I've decided to speak the truth to Caius.
CAESONIA: Well now, Caligula, here's the thing missing from your reign; a fine moral figurehead!
CALIGULA: (interested) So you believe in the gods, Scipio?
SCIPIO: No.
CALIGULA: Then I don't understand. Why are you so quick to hunt out blasphemies?
SCIPIO: I can deny a thing without deeming myself compelled to befoul it or to take away from others the right to believe in it.
CALIGULA: But that's modesty. That is some true modesty! Oh, dear Scipio, how pleased I am for you! And envious, you know… for that's the only feeling that I will perhaps never experience.
SCIPIO: It's not me that you're jealous of, it is the gods themselves.
CALIGULA: If you're disposed to it, that will continue as the great secret of my reign. All that they can reproach me for today is for having made only a small advancement on the road of power and liberty. For a man who loves power, the rivalry of the gods is something inherently vexatious. I have done away with that. I have proven to these illusory gods that a man, if he has the will for it, can exercise their ridiculous trade without apprenticeship.
SCIPIO: That is the blasphemy, Caius.
CALIGULA: No, Scipio, it is clairvoyance. I have simply understood that there is only one way of making oneself equal with the gods: it is to be as cruel as them.
SCIPIO: That's enough to become a tyrant.
CALIGULA: What is a tyrant?
SCIPIO: A deluded soul.
CALIGULA: That's not so certain, Scipio. But a tyrant is a man who sacrifices some nations to his ideas or to his ambition. As for me, I don't have any ideas and I no longer have anything to aspire to in the way of honours and power. If I use this power, it's for the sake of compensation.

SCIPIO: For what?
CALIGULA: For the stupidity and the hatred of the gods.
SCIPIO: Hatred doesn't make amends for hatred. Power isn't a solution. And I know only one way of balancing the hostility of the world.
CALIGULA: What is that?
SCIPIO: Poverty.
CALIGULA: (tending to his feet) I will have to try that too.
SCIPIO: In the meantime, a great many men are dying around you.
CALIGULA: So little, Scipio, truly. Do you know how many wars I have refused?
SCIPIO: No.
CALIGULA: Three. And do you know why I've refused them?
SCIPIO: Because you despise the grandeur of Rome.
CALIGULA: No, because I respect human life.
SCIPIO: You're making fun of me, Caius.
CALIGULA: Or, at least, I respect it more than I respect an ideal of conquest. But it's true that I don't respect it more than I respect my own life. And if it's easy for me to kill, the reason is it's not difficult for me to die. No, the more and more I reflect on it I'm convinced that I am not a tyrant.
SCIPIO: What does it matter if it costs us as dearly as if you were one?
CALIGULA: (with a little impatience) If you knew how to count, you would know that the smallest war undertaking by a moderate tyrant would cost you a thousand times more dearly than the caprices of my fantasy.
SCIPIO: But at least that would be rational and the essential point is worthy of understanding.
CALIGULA: People don't understand fate and that's why I am representing fate myself. I have taken the stupid and incomprehensible face of the gods. That's the thing that a moment ago your companions learned to worship.
SCIPIO: And that is the blasphemy, Caius.
CALIGULA: No, Scipio, it is dramatic art! The error of all these men is not believing enough in theatre. Otherwise they would know that it's possible for every man to act the celestial tragedies and become the part of god. To toughen the heart is enough.

SCIPIO: Perhaps, indeed, Caius. But if that is correct, I believe that you've now made it inevitable that one day legions of human gods will rise up around you, implacable in their turn, and drown your present divinity in blood.

CAESONIA: Scipio!

CALIGULA: (in a hard and precise voice) Stop, Caesonia. You can't believe how well said that was, Scipio: I have made it inevitable. I find it difficult to imagine the day of which you speak, but sometimes I dream about it. And in all the faces which draw near then from the heart of the bitter night, with their features contorted by hatred and anguish, I recognize, with rapture, the only god that I have worshipped in this world, wretched and mean-spirited, like the human heart. (Irritated) And now, go away; you've said far too much about it. (Changing tone) I still have my toenails to paint. That needs hastening on.

(Everyone leaves, except Helicon, who moves in a circle around Caligula who is engrossed in the care of his feet)
Scene 3

CALIGULA: Helicon!
HELICON: What's the matter?
CALIGULA: Is your work proceeding?
HELICON: What work?
CALIGULA: Well... the moon!
HELICON: That progresses. It's a question of patience. But I would like to speak with you.
CALIGULA: I might possibly have the patience but I don't have much time. We must act quickly, Helicon.
HELICON: I will act for the best, I've told you that. But first, I have some serious matters to advise you of.
CALIGULA: (as if he hadn't heard) Take note that I've already had her.
HELICON: Who?
CALIGULA: The moon.
HELICON: Yes, of course. But do you know that they are plotting against your life?
CALIGULA: I had her entirely. Two or three times only, it's true, but all the same, I had her.
HELICON: Clearly, it's a while now that I've been trying to speak with you.
CALIGULA: (still occupied with colouring his toenails) This varnish is worthless. But, to return to the moon, it was during a beautiful August night. (Helicon turns away in vexation and remains silent and still) She had made a few appearances. I was already in bed. At first, she was all bloodstained above the horizon. Then she started to rise more and more, buoyant with a growing velocity. The more she rose, the brighter she became. She became like a milky lake in the middle of this night full of clashing stars. She approached then in the heat, sweet, light and naked. She leapt over the threshold of my bedroom. With steady slowness, she came up to my bed, glided herself into it and drenched me with her smiles and her radiance. Really, this varnish is worthless. Now you see, Helicon, I can say without bragging that I've had her.
HELICON: Do you want to listen to me and know what threatens you?

CALIGULA: (stops working on his toenails and stares at Helicon) I only want the moon, Helicon. I know in advance what will kill me. Besides, I haven’t exhausted everything which can enable me to live. That’s why I want the moon. And you will not show your face in this place again before having procured her for me.

HELICON: In that case, I will do my duty and I’ll say what I have to say. A conspiracy has grown against you. Cherea is the ringleader of it. I have intercepted this tablet which can inform you of the main point. I’ll leave it here.

(Helicon places the tablet on one of the benches and withdraws.)

CALIGULA: Where are you going, Helicon?

HELICON: (at the threshold) To seek out the moon for you.
Scene 4

(Someone is scratching at the opposite door. Caligula turns around and observes the old patrician.)

OLD PATRICIAN: (hesitating) By your leave, Caius?

CALIGULA: (impatient) Well, then! Come in. (Watching him) Now, my pretty, you’ve come to see Venus again.

OLD PATRICIAN: No, it’s not that. Hush! Oh! Pardon, Caius… I meant to say… You know that I’m very fond of you… and besides, I only wish to end my old life in tranquillity…

CALIGULA: Hurry up! Hurry up!

OLD PATRICIAN: Yes, right. In short… (Very quickly) It’s very serious, that’s all.

CALIGULA: No, it’s not serious.

OLD PATRICIAN: But what, then, Caius?

CALIGULA: What are we speaking about, my love?

OLD PATRICIAN: (he looks around him) The fact is… (He twists round and bursts out with) A plot against you…

CALIGULA: You see now, it’s what I told you, it isn’t serious at all.

OLD PATRICIAN: Caius, they intend to kill you.

CALIGULA: (goes to him and takes hold of his shoulders) Do you know why I cannot believe you?

OLD PATRICIAN: (somewhat bewildered) It means, Caius, that my love for you…

CALIGULA: (something of the same tone) And I cannot assume that. I have detested cowardice so long that I could never be able to hold myself back from killing a traitor. I’m well aware what you stand for — me. And surely you would not wish either to betray me or to die.

OLD PATRICIAN: Assuredly, Caius, assuredly!

CALIGULA: You see then that I had reason for not believing you. You’re not a coward, eh?

OLD PATRICIAN: Oh, no!

CALIGULA: Nor a traitor?

OLD PATRICIAN: That goes without saying, Caius.

CALIGULA: And, consequently, there isn’t any plot. Tell me now, this was only a joke?
OLD PATRICIAN:  
(losing composure) A joke, a simple joke…

CALIGULA:  Nobody wants to kill me. That is clear?


CALIGULA:  
(breathing fast, then slowly) In that case, disappear, my pretty. An honourable man is such a rare creature in this world that I couldn’t endure the sight of him for too long.

46  I must remain alone to savour this great moment.
Scene 5

(Caligula looks at the tablet on his seat for a moment. He seizes it and reads it. He breathes deeply and calls for a guard.)

CALIGULA: Fetch Cherea. (The guard begins to leave) One moment! (The guard halts) Show him some respect. (The guard departs)

(Caligula walks backwards and forwards a little. Then he turns to the mirror.)

CALIGULA: You had decided to be logical, idiot. The point is merely to know how far that will go. (Ironically) If they had brought the moon to you, everything would be transformed, wouldn't it? What is impossible would turn out to be possible and from the same blow, for once, all would be transformed. Why not, Caligula? Who can be aware of it? (He looks around him) There are less and less people around me; that's curious. (To the mirror in a deep voice) Too many dead, too many dead, that deprives. Even if they had brought me the moon I couldn't revert. Even if the dead were trembling anew beneath the caress of the sun, the murders wouldn't recede underground for so long. (With a furious tone) Logic, Caligula, we must pursue logic. Power until the end. Freedom till the end. No, a man can't revert and I must go on until destruction!

(Cherea enters)
SCENE 6

(Caligula, lying down a little in his seat, is covered up in his cape. He seems to be exhausted.)

1 CHEREA: You called for me, Caius?
CALIGULA: (in a weak voice) Yes, Cherea. Guards! Some torches!

(Silence)

5 CHEREA: You have something specific to say to me?
CALIGULA: No, Cherea.

(Silence)

10 CHEREA: (a little irritated) You're sure that my presence is necessary?
CALIGULA: Absolutely sure, Cherea.

(A further period of silence)

15 CALIGULA: (suddenly earnest) But, excuse me, I'm distracted and treating you very badly. Take this seat and let's talk as friends. I'm anxious to converse a little with someone intelligent.

(Cherea sits down. Caligula seems unaffected for the first time since the beginning of the play.)

20 CALIGULA: Cherea, do you believe that two men whose soul and pride are alike could, at least once in their lifetime, speak to each other with all their heart? As if they were naked before each other, stripped of any prejudices, special interests and lies by which they live?

25 CHEREA: I think that is possible, Caius, but I believe that you're incapable of it.

30 CALIGULA: You're right; I just wanted to know if you thought like me. So let's conceal ourselves with masks. Make use of our lies. Speak like we're having a fight, covered up to the hilt. Cherea, why don't you like me?
CHEREA: Because there is nothing lovable within you, Caius. Because such things don’t come on command. And also, because I understand you too well and that a man cannot like the person of one’s own countenances that one tries to hide from oneself.

CALIGULA: Why do you hate me?

CHEREA: Here you deceive yourself, Caius. I don’t hate you. I judge you harmful and cruel, selfish and conceited, but I cannot hate you since I don’t believe you’re happy. And I cannot disregard you as I know that you’re not cowardly.

CALIGULA: Then for what reason do you wish to kill me?

CHEREA: I’ve told you: I judge you harmful. I have the taste and the need for security. Most men are like me. They’re unable to live in a universe in which the strangest thinking can, in one second, come into reality — where, generally, it penetrates like a knife into a heart. For my part, though, I don’t want to live in such a universe. I prefer to hold my life tightly in my hand.

CALIGULA: Security and logic don’t fit together.

CHEREA: It’s true. It isn’t logical, but it is sane.

CALIGULA: Keep going.

CHEREA: I have nothing more to say. I won’t participate in your logic. I have a different idea of my duties as a man. I know that most of your subjects think like me. You’re troublesome for everyone. It’s natural that you should disappear.

CALIGULA: All that is very clear and very legitimate. For the majority of men, that would be self-evident. Not for you, however. You are intelligent and intelligence must be paid for dearly or is denied. Me, I pay. But you, why deny it and not be willing to pay?

CHEREA: Because I have the desire to live and to be happy. I believe that men cannot be one or the other while inciting the absurd to all its consequences. I’m like everyone else. Sometimes for the sake of feeling liberated from them I wish for the death of those whom I love. I covet some women that family laws or friendship prohibit me from coveting. To embody logic, I ought then to kill or possess, but I discern that these loose ideas haven’t any worth. If everybody concerned themselves with realising these thoughts we could neither live nor be happy. Once more, that is the thing which matters to me.

CALIGULA: Therefore it requires that you believe in some higher plan?
80  CHEREA: I believe that there are some actions which are nobler than others.

    CALIGULA: I believe that all are equivalent.
    CHEREA: I know it, Caius, and that’s why I don’t hate you. But you are troublesome and it’s necessary that you should vanish.

85  CALIGULA: That’s very correct. But why give me notice of it and risk your life?
    CHEREA: Because others will replace me and because I don’t like to conceal the truth.

(Silence)

    CALIGULA: Cherea.
    CHEREA: Yes, Caius.

90  CALIGULA: Do you believe that two men whose soul and pride are alike could, at least once in their lifetime, speak to each other with all their heart?
    CHEREA: I believe that’s what we’ve just been doing.
    CALIGULA: Yes, Cherea. However, you believed me incapable of it.
    CHEREA: I was wrong, Caius. I recognize it and I thank you. Now I wait for your sentence.

    CALIGULA: (distracted) My sentence? Ah! You mean... (Pulling the tablet out from his cape) Do you recognize it, Cherea?
    CHEREA: I knew that it was in your possession.

95  CALIGULA: (passionately) Yes, Cherea, and your candour was also simulated. The two men have not spoken to each other with all their heart. That is of no consequence, however. Now we’re going to stop the sincerity game and try again to live as before. Moreover, it requires that you try to understand what I’m going to say to you, that you endure my insults and my mood. Pay attention, Cherea. This tablet is the only proof.

    CHEREA: I’m getting away from it, Caius. I’m tired of all this grimaced play. I know it too well and no longer want to see it.

100 CALIGULA: (in the same impassioned and intent voice) Stay still. It’s the proof, isn’t it?
    CHEREA: I don’t believe that you need proof to put a man to death.

105 CALIGULA: That’s true, but for once I wish to contradict myself. That won’t inconvenience anyone. And it’s so good to contradict oneself from time to time. So refreshing. I need rest,

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Cherea.
CHEREA: I don't understand and I haven't any taste for these complications.

CALIGULA: Sure enough, Cherea. You, you're a sane man. You desire nothing extraordinary! (Bursting out laughing) You want to live and be happy. Only that!

CHEREA: I believe that it's better if we say no more about it.

CALIGULA: Not yet; a little patience, what do you want? I have here this proof — behold. I wish to consider that I cannot kill you without it. That's my idea and it's my resting place. Well, then! Observe what becomes of proof in the hand of an emperor.

(He brings the tablet near to a torch. Cherea joins him. The torch separates them. The tablet melts down.)

CALIGULA: You see, conspirator. It melts, and as fast as this proof disappears, a dawn of innocence rises upon your face. What a pure, admirable countenance you have, Cherea. How beautiful it is, an innocent, how beautiful it is! Admire my power. The gods themselves couldn't restore innocence without punishing in the first place. And your emperor only needed a flame to absolve you and to encourage you. Go on, Cherea, pursue until the end the magnificent reasoning that you have held me to. Your emperor awaits his rest. It's his way of living and being happy.

(Cherea looks at Caligula with astonishment. He can scarcely make a rough gesture, appears to understand, opens his mouth and leaves abruptly. Caligula continues to hold the tablet in the flame and, smiling, follows the departing Cherea with his gaze.)

CURTAIN
ACT FOUR

SCENE 1

The stage is in semi-darkness. Cherea and Scipio enter. Cherea goes to the right, then to the left and comes back to Scipio.

1 SCIPIO: (looking resolute) What do you want from me?
CHEREA: Time is urgent. We must be strong about what we’re going to do.
2 SCIPIO: What tells you that I’m not strong?
CHEREA: You didn’t come to our meeting yesterday.
3 SCIPIO: (turning away) That’s right, Cherea.
CHEREA: Scipio, I am older than you and I’m not in the habit of asking for help, but it’s true that I stand in need of you. This murder calls for some respondents who are respectable. In the midst of these wounded vanities and base fears, it’s only you and I whose reasons are pure. I know that if you desert us, you will disclose nothing. But that is unimportant. What I want is that you stick with us.
4 SCIPIO: I understand, but I swear to you that I cannot do it.
CHEREA: Then are you with him?
5 SCIPIO: No. But I cannot be against him (A pause, then in a dark tone) If I were to kill him, my heart at least would be with him.
CHEREA: Yet he killed your father.
6 SCIPIO: Yes, it was there that everything began. But it’s there too that everything ends.
CHEREA: He denies what you avow. He scoffs at what you venerate.
7 SCIPIO: That’s true, Cherea. But, nevertheless, something within me resembles him. The same flame burns in our hearts.
8 SCIPIO: There are some times when one must choose. For my part, I have silenced in me what could resemble him.
CHEREA: I cannot choose, since in addition to what I suffer, I grieve equally what he grieves. My misfortune is to understand everything.
9 SCIPIO: Then you choose to confirm him right.
CHEREA: (with a cry) Oh! I beg of you, Cherea, nobody, no person for me will ever be right!

35 (A pause. They look at each other.)
CHERA: (with emotion, moving to Scipio) Do you know that I hate him even more for what he has done to you?
SCIPIO: Yes, he has taught me to demand everything.
CHERA: No, Scipio, he has disheartened you. And to drive a young soul to despair is a crime which exceeds all those that he has committed so far. I swear to you that this would be enough to enable me to slaughter him with rage.

(He goes towards the exit. Helicon enters.)
1 HELICON: I was looking for you, Cherea. Caligula is organising a friendly little meeting here. It's necessary that you attend it. *(He turns to Scipio)* But he doesn't need you, my pigeon. You can leave.

5 SCIPIO: *(at the moment of leaving the room, turns towards Cherea)* Cherea!

CHEREA: *(very gently)* Yes, Scipio.

SCIPIO: Try to understand.

CHEREA: *(very gently)* No, Scipio.

11 *(Scipio and Helicon leave.)*
Scene 3

(A sound of weapons in the wings. Two guards appear on the right, leading the old patrician and the first patrician, who are showing all the signs of fear)

FIRST PATRICIAN: (to one guard, in a voice that he tries to deliver unshaken) But after all, what does he want us for at this hour of the night?

GUARD: Sit down there. (He indicates the seats to the right.)

FIRST PATRICIAN: If it’s to kill us, like the others, there’s no need for so much nonsense.

GUARD: Sit down there, old mule.

OLD PATRICIAN: We’re sitting down. This man knows nothing, that’s obvious.

GUARD: Yes, my pretty, that’s obvious. (He leaves.)

FIRST PATRICIAN: I knew it was important to act quickly. Now it’s torture which is in store for us.
SCENE 4

1 CHEREA: (calm and taking a seat) What’s the matter?

FIRST PATRICIAN & OLD PATRICIAN: (at the same time) The conspiracy is uncovered.

CHEREA: What next?

5 OLD PATRICIAN: (trembling) It’s torture.

CHEREA: (impassive) I remember that Caligula gave eighty-one thousand sesterces to a theiving slave whom torture hadn’t made confess.

FIRST PATRICIAN: We are now wiser for that.

10 CHEREA: No, but it’s evidence that he loves courage. And you should take that into account. (To the old patrician) Would you mind not chattering your teeth in that way? I abhor that noise

OLD PATRICIAN: It’s because…

FIRST PATRICIAN: Enough bickering. It’s our existence that we’re playing with.

CHEREA: (without missing a beat) Do you know Caligula’s favourite saying?

OLD PATRICIAN: (on the point of tears) Yes. He says it to the executioner: Kill him slowly so that he can feel himself dying.

CHEREA: No, it’s something better. After an execution, he yawns and says with gravity: What I admire the most is my unfeelingness.

FIRST PATRICIAN: Do you hear?

20 (Sound of weapons)

CHEREA: That saying reveals a weakness.

OLD PATRICIAN: Would you mind not uttering philosophy? I hold it in abhorrence.

30 (At the back, a slave enters bringing some weapons and places them on a seat.)

CHEREA: (who hasn’t seen him) At least acknowledge that this man exerts an undeniable influence. He compels thought. He compels everyone to think. The insecurity; that’s what makes one think. And that’s why so much hatred pursues him.

OLD PATRICIAN: (trembling) Look!

35 CHEREA: (noticing the weapons; his voice changes a little) Perhaps you had reason.

40 FIRST PATRICIAN: It was vital to be quick. We have delayed too long.
CHEREA: Yes; it’s a lesson which comes somewhat late.
OLD PATRICIAN: But it’s insane! I don’t want to die!

(He gets up and tries to escape. Two guards spring up and forcibly hold him after having slapped his face. The first patrician sinks down in his seat. Cherea says some words that they can’t hear. Suddenly, a strange, harsh music leaping from sistrums and cymbals bursts forth from the back. The patricians keep silent and watch. Caligula, in the short dress of a dancer, some flowers on his head, appears like a fantastic shadow behind the back curtain. He mimes some ridiculous dance gestures and disappears. Immediately after he goes, a guard says in a solemn voice: The show is finished. During this time, Caesonia has quietly entered behind the spectators. She speaks in a neutral voice which nevertheless startles the patricians.)
Scene 5

1 CAESONIA: Caligula has directed me to tell you that up till now he called for you in the interest of State affairs, but as of today he has invited you to receive the sacrament with him through an artistic emotion. (A pause; then in the same voice) He has also added that the person who won’t take communion will have his head cut off.

(The patricians remain silent.)

10 CAESONIA: I apologise for insisting, but I must ask you whether you found that dance beautiful.
FIRST PATRICIAN: (after some hesitation) It was beautiful, Caesonia.
OLD PATRICIAN: (overflowing with gratitude) Oh, yes, Caesonia!
CAESONIA: And you, Cherea?
15 CHerea: (coldly) It was great art.
CAESONIA: Perfect, now I’m going to be able to inform Caligula about it.

19 (She leaves) ■
Scene 6

(Helicon enters)

HELICON: Tell me, Cherea, was that truly great art?

CHEREA: In one sense, yes.

HELICON: I understand. You are very strong, Cherea. False like an honest man, but strong, indeed. Me, I’m not strong. And yet, I won’t allow you to strike at Caius, even if that is what he himself desires.

CHEREA: I understand nothing of this lecture. But I congratulate you for your devotion. I like kind-hearted servants.

HELICON: What? You’re haughty now. Yes, I serve a madman. But you, who do you serve? Virtue? I’m going to tell you what I think of it. I was born a slave. At that time, honest man, I danced the appearance of virtue under the whip. Caius, for his part, hasn’t given me any lecture. He has freed me and frozen over in his palace. It’s like I’ve been able to examine you — you, the virtuous ones — and I’ve seen that you have sordid looks and a needy smell, the unsavoury smell of those who have never suffered or risked anything. I’ve seen the draped noblemen, and also the usury in the heart. The avaricious face, the receding hand. You lot, some judges? You who have a hold on concern with virtue, who dream of security like a young girl dreams of love, who nevertheless are going to die from fright without even understanding that you have lied all your lives. You will involve yourselves in the act of passing sentence on the one who has suffered beyond reckoning and who bleeds every day from a thousand new wounds? You will strike me before then, be sure of it! Despise the slave Cherea! He is inferior to your virtue since he can still love this miserable master whom he will defend against your noble lies, your perjured mouths...

CHEREA: Dear Helicon, you let yourself go on with eloquence. Frankly, once upon a time you had better taste.

HELICON: I’m extremely sorry, truly; that is what comes of associating with you too much. The old married couple have the same number of hairs in their ears to such a degree that they end up by looking like each other. But I regain myself, never fear, I regain myself. Simply this...Look, you see this face? Good. Look at it well. Perfect. Now you have seen your enemy. (He leaves.)
Scene 7

1  CHEREA: And now, we must act quickly. Stay here, both of you. We will be a hundred or so this evening.

(He leaves.)

5  OLD PATRICIAN: Stay here, stay here! I would be very glad to leave, me.
(He sniffs.) This place here smells of death.
FIRST PATRICIAN: Or lies. (Sadly) I said that his dance was beautiful.
OLD PATRICIAN: (conciliatory) It was in one sense. It was.

11  (Like a gust of wind several patricians and knights enter.)
SCENE 8

SECOND PATRICIAN: What is it? Do you know what the matter is? The emperor sent for us.
OLD PATRICIAN: (distracted) Perhaps it's for a dance.
SECOND PATRICIAN: What dance?
OLD PATRICIAN: Yes, at last, the artistic emotion.
THIRD PATRICIAN: Someone told me that Caligula was very ill.
FIRST PATRICIAN: So he is.
THIRD PATRICIAN: What's the matter with him? (With delight) By all the gods, is he going to die?
FIRST PATRICIAN: I don't think so. His illness is only deadly for others.
OLD PATRICIAN: If we dare to say.
SECOND PATRICIAN: I understand. But hasn't he some infirmity less serious and more advantageous for us?
FIRST PATRICIAN: No, this illness won't abide competition. Excuse me, I must see Cherea.

(He leaves. Caesonia enters. A small silence.)

1-17
SCENE 9

1 CAESONIA: (in an indifferent manner) Caligula is suffering stomach pain. He has vomited some blood.

(The patricians rush up to surround her)

5 SECOND PATRICIAN: Oh! All-powerful gods, I vow, if he recovers, to pay into the state treasury two hundred thousand sesterces.

THIRD PATRICIAN: (exaggerated) Jupiter, take my life in exchange for his!

10 (Caligula has entered a moment before. He listens.)

CALIGULA: (moving towards the second patrician) I accept your offering, Lucius. I thank you. My treasurer will call at your house tomorrow. (He goes to the third patrician and embraces him.) You cannot understand how moved I am. (A silence and tenderly) You love me, then?

THIRD PATRICIAN: (piercingly) Ah! Caesar, there’s nothing that I wouldn’t give instantly for you.

CALIGULA: (still embracing him) Ah! Cassius, this is too much, and I haven’t deserved so much love. (Cassius makes a gesture of protest) No, no I tell you. (He calls two guards) Take him away. (To Cassius, gently) Go, friend. And remember that Caligula has given you his heart.

THIRD PATRICIAN: (vaguely uneasy) But where are they taking me?

CALIGULA: To death, now. You have given your life for mine. As for me, I feel better now. I no longer even have that dreadful taste of blood in my mouth. You have cured me. Are you happy, Cassius, to be able to give your life for another, when that other is called Caligula? Here I am ready once more for all the festivities.

(The guards drag away the third patrician, who resists and howls.)

THIRD PATRICIAN: I won’t! Why, it’s a joke!

CALIGULA: (dreamily between the howling) Very soon, the sea routes will be covered in mimosas. The women will wear light dresses. A vast sky, fresh and pouring, Cassius! The smiles of life!

(Cassius is ready to leave. Caesonia pushes him gently. Caligula turns round, suddenly serious.)
CALIGULA: My friend, if you had loved life enough, you wouldn't have gambled it away with so much imprudence.

(They carry Cassius away. Caligula comes back to the table.)

CALIGULA: And when you’ve lost, you must always pay up. (A pause) Come, Caesonia. (He turns towards the others) Appropriately, a beautiful thought occurs to me that I wish to share with you. My reign till now has been too happy. Neither universal plagues nor cruel religion, not even a revolution. In short, nothing that you could pass on for posterity. You see, it’s a little for this that I try to compensate for the prudence of fate. I mean to say... I don’t know if you have understood me. (With a small laugh) In the end, it’s I who replaces the plague. (Changing tone) Now, here comes Cherea. It’s your turn, Caesonia.

(He goes out. Cherea and the first patrician enter.)
SCENE 10

(Caesonia moves quickly in front of Cherea.)

CAESONIA: Caligula is dead.

(She turns aside, as if she was weeping and looks steadfastly at the others who say nothing. Everyone looks dismayed, but for different reasons.)

FIRST PATRICIAN: You... you're sure of this calamity? This isn't possible. He was dancing just a moment ago.

CAESONIA: Precisely. That effort has finished him.

CHEREA: (slowly) You say nothing, Cherea.

CHEREA: (equally slowly) It's a great misfortune, Caesonia.

(Caligula enters brutally and goes to Cherea)

CALIGULA: Well played, Cherea. (He takes a walk by himself and looks at the others. Peevishly) Well, then! That's missed. (To Caesonia) Don't forget what I told you.

(He leaves)
Scene 11

(Caesonia watches him leave in silence.)

OLD PATRICIAN: (sustained by an indefatigable hope) Could he prove to be diseased, Caesonia?

CAESONIA: (looking at him with hatred) No, my pretty, but what you’re unaware of is that this man sleeps two hours every night and the remainder of the time, unable to rest, he wanders through the galleries of his palace. What you’re ignorant of, what you’ve never asked yourselves, is what this being thinks of during the mortal hours which move from the middle of the night to the return of the sun. Diseased? No, he isn’t that, unless you invent a name and some medicines for the ulcers his soul is covered in.

CHerea: (whom one would describe as touched) You’re right, Caesonia. We’re not aware that Caius…

CAESONIA: (more quickly) No, you’re unconscious of it. But like all those who haven’t any soul, you’re unable to tolerate those who have too much of it. Too much soul! Here comes he who is troublesome, isn’t that it? In such cases, you call it disease: the vulgar pedants are justified and content. (In a different tone) Is it that you’ve never known how to love, Cherea?

CHerea: (himself once more) We’re too old now to learn to do it, Caesonia. And besides, it isn’t certain that Caligula would allow us the time for it.

CAESONIA: (who has regathered herself) That’s true. (She sits down) And I was about to forget Caligula’s recommendations. Do you know that today is a day consecrated to art?

OLD PATRICIAN: According to the calendar?

CAESONIA: No, according to Caligula. He has called together some poets. From them he will bid an improvised composition on a given subject. He expressly desires that those among you who are poets compete in this. In particular he has nominated young Scipio and Metellus.

METELLUS: But we’re not ready.

CAESONIA: (as if she hadn’t heard, in a neutral voice) Naturally, there will be some rewards. There are also some punishments. (Small recoil from the others) I can tell you, in confidence, that they aren’t very serious.

(Caligula enters. He is gloomier than ever.)
Scene 12

CALIGULA: Is everything ready?
CAESONIA: Everything. (To a guard) Send in the poets.

(A dozen poets enter, two by two, who walk down to the right at an even pace.)

CALIGULA: And the others?
CAESONIA: Scipio and Metellus!

(Both men join with the poets. Caligula sits at the back, to the left, with Caesonia and some patricians behind him. A small silence.)

CALIGULA: Subject: death. Time: one minute.

(The poets write hastily on their tablets.)

OLD PATRICIAN: Who will be the jury?
CALIGULA: Me. Isn't that sufficient?
OLD PATRICIAN: Oh, yes! Quite sufficient.
CHEREA: Are you going to participate in the competition, Caius?
CALIGULA: That's unnecessary. I created my composition on this subject a long time ago.

OLD PATRICIAN: (eagerly) Where can one obtain it?
CALIGULA: In my own way, I recite it every day.

(Caesonia looks at him, distressed.)

CALIGULA: (brutally) My face displeases you?
CAESONIA: (gently) I beg your forgiveness.
CALIGULA: Ah! Please, not humility. Above all, not humility. You, you're already difficult to endure, but your humility!

(Caesonia gets up slowly.)

CALIGULA: (to Cherea) I continue. It's the only composition that I've made. But also, it provides the proof that I'm the only artist that Rome has known. The only one, do you hear, Cherea, who brings his thinking and his actions into harmony.

CHEREA: It's merely a question of power.
CALIGULA: Certainly. Other people create out of a deficiency of power. Me, I have no need of a piece of work: I live.

(Brutally) Now, you fellows, are you ready?
METELLUS: We are, I believe.  
ALL: Yes.  
CALIGULA: Good, listen to me carefully. You're going to leave your places. I will whistle. The first one will begin his reading. At my whistle, he must stop and the next one begins. And so on. The victor, naturally, will be the one whose composition won't have been interrupted by the whistle. Prepare yourselves. (He turns to Cherea and says confidentially) Organisation is necessary in everything, even with art.

(Whistle)

FIRST POET: Death, when beyond the black shores... (Caligula blows the whistle. The poet walks down to the left. The other poets will perform in the same manner; a mechanical scene.)

SECOND POET: The three Goddesses of Fate in their cave... (Whistle)

THIRD POET: I call for you, oh death... (A passionate whistle. The fourth poet steps forward and takes up a dramatic posture. The whistle sounds before he has even spoken.)

FIFTH POET: When I was a little child... (yelling) No! What affinity can the infancy of an imbecile have with the subject? Do you want to tell me where the connection is?

FIFTH POET: But, Caius, I haven't finished... (Strident whistle)

SIXTH POET: (he advances, clearing his voice) Unrelenting, she approaches... (Whistle)

SEVENTH POET: (mysterious) Secret and verbose oration... (Intersecting whistle. Scipio steps forward without tablets.)

CALIGULA: Your turn, Scipio. Haven't you any tablets?

SCIPIO: I have no need of them.

CALIGULA: Let's see. (He bites at his whistle.)

SCIPIO: (very near Caligula, without looking at him and with a kind of lassitude) Pursuit of happiness that makes creatures pure. Sky where the sun streams down. Wild and unique entertainments. My delirium without hope! (gently) Stop, do you mind? (To Scipio) You are very young to be aware of the true lessons of death.

SCIPIO: (staring at Caligula) I was very young to lose my father.
CALIGULA: (turning away sharply) Come on, all of you, form your lines. A false poet is a punishment too tough for my taste. Till now I was meditating about retaining you as allies and imagining that you would make up the last quadrangle of my defenders. But this is fruitless, and I'm going to throw you out among my enemies. The poets are against me; I can tell that it's the end. Leave in good order! You're going to march in front of me while licking your tablets to wipe from them the traces of your infamies. Attention! Forward!

(Rhythmic whistling. The poets, marching in time, leave by the right, licking their immortal tablets.)

CALIGULA: (very low) Everyone leave.

(At the door, Cherea holds the first patrician by the shoulder.)

CHerea: The time has come.

(Scipio, who has heard Cherea, hesitates on the doorstep and goes towards Caligula.)

CALIGULA: (maliciously) Can't you leave me in peace, like your father now does?
Scene 13

SCIPIO: Now then, Caius, all that is useless. I already know what you've chosen.

CALIGULA: Leave me.

SCIPIO: I'm going to leave you, indeed, for I believe that I've under- 5
stood you. There's no longer any issue, either for you or for me who is so much like you. I'm going to go very far away to seek out the reasons for all that. (A pause. He looks at Caligula. Then with an intense emphasis) Goodbye, dear Caius. When everything is finished, don't forget that I have loved you.

(He leaves. Caligula watches him. He makes a gesture. But he shakes himself roughly and comes back to Caesonia.)

CAESONIA: What did he say?

CALIGULA: It exceeds your understanding.

CAESONIA: What are you thinking of?

CALIGULA: Of him. And then of you too. But it's the same thing.

CAESONIA: What is it?

CALIGULA: (looking at her) Scipio has gone. I have ended the friendship with him. But you, I ask myself why you're still here.

CAESONIA: Because I please you.

CALIGULA: No. If I had to have you killed, I believe that I would understand.

CAESONIA: That would be a solution. Do it then. But can't you, at least for one minute, let yourself go to live freely?

CALIGULA: It's been a few years now that I've practised living freely.

CAESONIA: It's not in that way that I meant it. Understand me clearly. Perhaps it's so good to live and to love within the purity of one's heart.

CALIGULA: Everyone gains his purity as he can. For me, it's in pursuing the essential. However, all that doesn't prevent me being able to kill you. (He laughs) That would be the crowning of my career.

(Caligula gets up and turns the mirror toward himself. He walks in a circle, letting his arms hang down, almost without gesture, like a fool.)
CALIGULA: It’s funny. When I don’t kill, I feel alone. The living are not enough to fill the universe and to drive away the tedious. When you’re all here, you make me feel an emptiness without limit which I cannot look into. I am only good among my dead. (He places himself facing the audience, leaning forward a little. He has forgotten Caesonia.)

They are true. They are like me. They wait for me and throng for me. (He shakes his head) I have some extensive dialogues with many or one man who cries out to me to be pardoned and whose tongue I ordered to be cut out.

CAESONIA: Come, lay down beside me. Put your head on my lap. (Caligula obeys) You are well. Everything is silent.

CALIGULA: Everything is silent! You exaggerate. Can’t you hear those clanking irons? (They listen for them) Can’t you perceive those thousand tiny noises that reveal hatred lying in wait?

(Noises)

CAESONIA: No one would dare…

CALIGULA: Nevertheless, the stupidity.

CAESONIA: It doesn’t kill; it restores a wise man.

CALIGULA: It is murderous, Caesonia. It is murderous when it thinks itself offended. Oh! It isn’t those whose sons or fathers I’ve killed who will assassinate me. They have understood. They are with me; they have the same taste in their mouths. But the others, those whom I’ve mocked and ridiculed, I’m defenceless against their vanity.

CAESONIA: (vehemently) We will defend you. We are still many that love you.

CALIGULA: You are less and less numerous; I’ve done what was necessary for that. And besides, I haven’t only stupidity against me, I also have the honesty and courage of those who want to be happy.

CAESONIA: (same tone) No, they will not kill you. Or by that time something come down from heaven would destroy them before they had touched you.

CALIGULA: From heaven! There isn’t any heaven, wretched woman! (He sits down) But why so much love, all at once? It’s not in our agreement.
CAESONIA: *(who has stood up and is walking)* So it’s not enough to witness you kill others. Must I also know how you will be killed? It’s not enough to receive you cruel and torn, to smell your odour of murder when you lay yourself on my belly! Every day, I see dying in you a little more that which has represented the part of lover. *(She turns towards him)* I’m old and close to being ugly, I know it. But the anxiety that I have for you now has created such a feeling that it no longer matters if you don’t love me. I only wish to see you get well again; you who are still a boy. A whole life in front of you! And what can you ask for now which is more majestic than a whole life?

CALIGULA: *(standing up and gazing at her)* It’s a very long time that you’ve been here.

CAESONIA: That’s true. But you’re going to keep me, aren’t you?

CALIGULA: I don’t know. I only know why you’re here: for all those nights where the pleasure was acute and without joy, and for all that you know about me.

*(He takes her in his arms and with one hand, pulls her head back from him.)*

CALIGULA: I am twenty-nine years old. It’s not much, but at this time when my life still appears so very long to me, so laden with relics, so finished after all, you remain the final witness for all those nights where the pleasure was acute and without joy, and for all that you know about me.

CAESONIA: Tell me that you want to take care of me!

CALIGULA: I don’t know. I just have conscience, and it’s terrible that this shameful tenderness is the only genuine feeling that my life has given me so far.

*(Caesonia withdraws from his arms. Caligula follows her. She presses her back against him. He clasps her.)*

CALIGULA: Wouldn’t it be better that the last witness disappear?

CAESONIA: That’s of no importance. I’m happy with what you’ve told me. But why can’t I share this happiness with you?

CALIGULA: Who told you that I’m unhappy?

CAESONIA: Happiness is generous. It doesn’t live by destruction.
CALIGULA: In that case, the truth is there are two sorts of happiness and I've chosen that of murderers. For I am happy. There was a time when I believed I had reached the extremity of pain. Well! No, a man can still go beyond. It's a sterile and magnificent happiness at the end of that region. Look at me. (She turns towards him) I laugh, Caesonia, when I think how, for some years, all Rome has avoided uttering the name of Drusilla. Because Rome has deceived itself for some years. Love isn't enough for me. That's the thing that I understood then. That's the thing that I understand about it again today looking at you. To love a creature, is to undertake to grow old with her. I am not capable of such a love. Drusilla aged; that was a great deal worse than Drusilla dead. People believe that a man suffers because the being that he loves dies within one day. But his true suffering is not so futile. His true suffering is to perceive that the grief no longer lasts. Even the pain is deprived of sense. You see, I hadn't any excuses, not even the ghost of a love, or the bitterness of melancholy. I am without alibi. But today I'm now freer than some years ago, liberated as I am from memory and illusion. (He laughs in an impassioned way) I know that nothing lasts! To know that! We are two or three in history to have truly created the experience of it; accomplished this demented happiness. Caesonia, you have followed until the end a particularly curious tragedy. For you, it is time that the curtain lowers.

(He goes behind her again and slides his forearm around Caesonia's neck.)

CAESONIA: (in terror) So is this something of happiness, this appalling freedom?

CALIGULA: (gradually crushing Caesonia's throat with his arm) Be sure of it, Caesonia. Without it, I'd have been a satisfied man. Thanks to it, I have conquered the divine clear-sightedness of the solitary.

(He becomes more and more exalted, little by little strangling Caesonia, who lets go without resistance, her hands held out in front a little. He speaks to her, leaning towards her ear.)
CALIGULA: I live, I kill, I exert the delirious power of the destructive; compared with which that of the creator appears an apish trick. This is what it means to be happy. This is happiness. This unbearable deliverance, this universal contempt, the blood, the hatred around me. This unequalled isolation of a man who all his life keeps under his gaze the inordinate joy of the unpunished assassin. This implacable logic which shatters human lives (he laughs), that crushes you, Caesonia, to finally perfect the eternal solitude that I desire.

CAESONIA: (struggling weakly) Caius!

CALIGULA: (more and more exalted) No, no tenderness. We must finish it, for the time hastens. The time hastens, dear Caesonia!

(Caesonia gives a death-rattle. Caligula drags her to the bed where he lets her fall. He looks at her with a lost expression.)

CALIGULA: (in a hoarse voice) And you too, you were guilty. But to kill isn't the solution.
Scene 14

(Haggard, Caligula turns on himself and goes to the mirror)

1 CALIGULA: Caligula! You too, you too, you are guilty. Isn't it true now, a little more, a little less! But who would dare to condemn me in this world without justice, where no-one is innocent! (With all the tone of distress, while pressing himself against the mirror) You see it clearly. Helicon hasn't succeeded; I will not have the moon. But how bitter it is to be right and to have to go on until the consummation.

2 Some sounds of weapons! It's innocence that prepares its triumph. How am I not in their place! I'm afraid. What disgust, after having despised the others, to feel the same cowardice in my soul. But that is nothing. The fear no longer lasts. I'm going to recover that great emptiness where the heart becomes quiet.

5 (He moves back a little; then returns to the mirror. He seems calmer. He begins to speak again, but in a deeper and more concentrated voice.)

CALIGULA: Everything seems to be so complicated, yet everything is so simple. If I'd have had the moon, if love had sufficed, all would have been transformed. But where to slake this thirst? What heart, what god would have for me the depth of a lake? (Kneeling and weeping) Nothing in this world, or in the next, that exists to my standard. I know, however, and you know it too (He holds out his hands towards the mirror while weeping) — that the impossible existing would have been enough. The impossible! I have searched for it in the extremities of the world, in the confines of myself. I've stretched out my hands. (Crying) I hold out my hands and it's only you that I find, always you in front of me and I'm full of hatred for you. I haven't taken the required path and I've come to nothing. My freedom isn't benevolent. Helicon! Helicon! Nothing! Still nothing! Oh! This night is heavy! Helicon will not come; we will be guilty forever! This night is heavy like human grief!

30 (Sounds of weapons and whisperings can be heard in the wings.)
HELICON: (arriving at the back) Watch out, Caius! Watch out!

(An unseen hand stabs Helicon. Caligula stands, picks up a small seat and approaches the mirror, breathing heavily. He observes himself, simulates a leap forward and, in sight of the symmetrical movement of his twin in the glass, throws his seat at full swing while yelling)

CALIGULA: Into history, Caligula! Into history!

(The mirror breaks to pieces and at the same moment, from every passage the conspirators enter with weapons. Caligula faces them with a wild laugh. The old patrician strikes him in the back. Cherea strikes him in the middle of the face. Caligula's laughter is transformed into sobs. Everyone strikes. With a final sob, laughing and death-rattling, he howls)

CALIGULA: I am still alive!

CURTAIN