

For Love Of Caligula: a Reality Show

TIME: Rome before the dawn of Christianity.

SETTING: Caligula's palace. It is profanely extravagant and steeped in the gaudiness only vast sums of money may purchase and ruthless brutality provide.

CHARACTERS: (In order of appearance)

JOLEAN: Caligula's wife. Pampered and apparently brainless, though not really. It takes, however, a challenge to get her brain-cells going.

DARK-SKINNED LADY: Terrified minion.

BLACK MANSERVANT: Another terrified minion.

WHITE MANSERVANT: A third terrified minion.

CALIGULA: The most tirelessly homicidal *homo sapien* in the known world. Dedicated to sacking towns and villages; a connoisseur of wholesale murder; a master of mayhem. . .and an emerging humanitarian. You could say he was mean and mad, but he done mellowed.

DIRECTOR: His snappy demeanor doesn't belie anything deeper. He is what he seems to be.

(Various offstage business can be provided electronically, or by non-actors who are interested in that sort of thing.)

For Love Of Caligula, a Reality Show In Fifteen Minutes

(Setting is Caligula's Palace. Slaves are being slapped around, people are in constant, paranoid movement - but the place looks good. Really, really good.)

Caligula's wife, JOLEAN, appears. She is skimpily, though opulently, dressed. She is attended by one black manservant, who shades her with a palmy-looking branch; one white guy, who fans her; and a dark-skinned young woman, who is applying makeup to her tummy.)

JOLEAN: Not so hard!

(The white guy apologizes.)

JOLEAN: Not you! Her!

DS LADY: Beg your pardon, great lady.

JOLEAN: Oh. Don't worry about it. I just get testy when I don't see my man.

(Both men shudder at the suggestion that such a person could be near.)

JOLEAN: Rumor has it that he's coming in today. Any of you know about that?

(They all deny it.)

JOLEAN: Well, don't have a cow. He's just a guy, y'know. Just like. . .well, not you guys - but like that one of over there. Hello, good Brosius!

(The unseen man apparently waves back.)

JOLEAN: Now there's a guy who pays attention. I know. Don't ask me how I know, but. . .*(to the DARK-SKINNED LADY)* have you stopped rubbing me?

DS LADY: No, ma'am.

JOLEAN: Okay, then.

DS LADY: Would you care for a more fragrant oil?

JOLEAN: Yeah. That essence of something. What the hell is in it? Really gets a guy going, if you know what I mean.

(She elbows the black manservant, who leaps out of the way.)

JOLEAN: You're such a baby! All I did was. . .well, I guess you've lived a more pampered life than most Romans. If you don't mind my asking, are you gay?

(The two men shudder, deny it vigorously, and start horsing around.)

JOLEAN: Okay, okay. Just asking. Jeez. *(Turning melancholy.)* I guess he's not coming. When he does, there's always this big ruckus. No ruckus out there.

(We hear a "No, don't. . .please. . .O, dispatch me quickly, ye gods!")

JOLEAN: Wait! That is him! I hear that same guy every time he comes to town. Oh, for joy! I must get ready. I must do something to please him. I must. . .I must. . .what are you people doing?

(She catches them on the way out. They're scared out of their wits and can't overcome it.)

BLACK MS: Oh, we're just clearing the way for him to see you.

WHITE MS: Yes. He wouldn't want us here.

DS LADY: No. He dislikes me intensely.

JOLEAN: Really?

DS LADY: Oh, yes. He can't stand me.

JOLEAN: Hmm. Seems like he would've killed you – not that I'd want that to happen. You know how much I care for your good, strong hands as well as your everyday reliability. My lifestyle, with its many ups and downs, depends on a center. And you are at the center of that. . .center.

(They thank her in unison.)

JOLEAN: Well, if you must. But don't go anywhere. I may need you.

(They assure her, each in their separate ways, that they'll be at her very beck and call.)

(Soon we hear trumpets, followed by an elephantine roar, indicating, in all likelihood, that there are real elephants somewhere. Then a leonine roar (ditto), then the moaning of captured enemies.)

JOLEAN: How glorious! He's conquered another nation! I didn't know there were so many!

(CALIGULA enters.)

CALIGULA: There are more than you can possibly imagine, my darling. Shall I flay this fellow for you? He was a king yesterday. Now he's in my rather itchy fingers.

JOLEAN: I don't mind if you overdo it, but I really don't need all these victims. I keep on telling and telling you!

CALIGULA: Really? I thought you enjoyed a good writhe.

JOLEAN: To be honest, honey, I can take it or leave it.

CALIGULA: Huh. How 'bout that!

JOLEAN: Just send him to prison or make a slave out of him.

CALIGULA: If that's what you want.

JOLEAN: I do, I do.

CALIGULA: I love to hear those words. Oh, wait a minute. *(He applies a whip to his captive, who heroically endures it.)* All right. Go on.

CAPTIVE: Really?

CALIGULA: So long as you don't start another country. Or go back to the old one.

CAPTIVE: I won't! I promise. I never will. I was forced into it. Really. I hate politics. All the false promises, the endless campaigns, and the . . . people don't like you because they walk out one day and their garden is withered. What, do I control the weather now?

CALIGULA: Why are you talking to me?

CAPTIVE: Hysterical Pardon Syndrome. The relief of having been spared.

CALIGULA: Before I captured you, we hadn't exchanged five words.

CAPTIVE: Words aren't your strong suit. No criticism intended.

CALIGULA: For the second time, why am I talking to you? Go! Just get out!

CAPTIVE: Yes, omnipotent one, I will take my leave. I will, as one might say, go now.

CALIGULA: Then do it.

CAPTIVE: Thank you. Thank you. Oh, thank you!

(He goes.)

CALIGULA: It's so easy to conquer people like that. I mean, it's not a challenge, y'know?

JOLEAN: Tell me about it. I'm bored stiff.

CALIGULA: Aren't you glad to see me?

JOLEAN: Sure. But, to tell you the truth, it's been so long that. . .did you always have so much nose-hair?

CALIGULA: Well, I'm sorry. You're marching, you're pillaging, you're raping – I do just enough of these to maintain my image – and you don't have time to think about stuff like that. Tell you what. Next time, I'll bring clippers. I mean it. I can adapt. You have. If you can, I can.

(He goes off and sulks. Another servant comes in and dashes away. CALIGULA considers calling him back, but shrugs it off.)

JOLEAN: Here. Let me rub your back.

CALIGULA: You don't have to.

JOLEAN: I want to. You're my man.

(The director steps forward and says "Cut!")

CALIGULA: What's wrong?

DIRECTOR: Bor-ing!

CALIGULA: I thought you wanted my softer side.

DIRECTOR: Yeah, but not all by itself. Last week, you would've killed six people by this time.

CALIGULA: I killed a bunch of 'em offstage. I mean, out there.

DIRECTOR: I guess you don't get this medium. It's show, not tell. If you don't show it, it's like it didn't happen.

CALIGULA: Okay. I'll kill people.

DIRECTOR: Bring those servants back.

JOLEAN: Not them! They do stuff for me.

DIRECTOR: You rule, baby. But you know what? You can get other people to do stuff. *(To CALIGULA, with an admonitory tone.)* If you don't start hacking away at something, we're gonna lose ratings. Bigtime.

CALIGULA: So you're saying they really don't care about me as a person?

DIRECTOR: They do. They really do, but as a killer-person first and foremost.

CALIGULA: So take a dagger out of my hand or somehow minimize my sadism and I have no other source of appeal?

DIRECTOR: That's about right.

CALIGULA: Just asking.

JOLEAN: You are not going to kill those people!

DIRECTOR: Are you talking to me?

JOLEAN: Whoever will listen.

CALIGULA: I'm listening. Have you noticed what a caring husband I've become?

JOLEAN: Yes, you have and I appreciate it. I really do. But you aren't killing my only companions. Allow me to repeat: they do stuff.

DIRECTOR: Have it your way, but I think I'll be making that call to Attila.

JOLEAN: An idle threat. Besides, he has no personality. And he's not photogenic in the least.

DIRECTOR: Yadda yadda. That's all I've gotta say. Look. I'm a fair-minded guy. Why don't you two sit by the pool over there – in which there is no blood – and discuss it among yourselves? No camera, no waivers to sign, just the two of you. I'm sure you'll work something out.

JOLEAN: Okay. Come on over here, my good husband, and we'll discuss the *salient* points. Or is it *salient points*?

(The DIRECTOR exits. As he walks away, we can hear him ask whether somebody's gotten Attila or not.)

JOLEAN: What's wrong with you?

CALIGULA: A lotta guys. . .a lotta guys go to some distant outpost and smite large hairy men. Or they kill a few elephants – which I really don't like to do. You sit on one of those things for a while and you kinda bond with it. Him. Y'know?

JOLEAN: I don't think I know you anymore.

CALIGULA: Maybe you don't. Tell you the truth, I'm tired.

JOLEAN: This is what I wanted to hear. From a guy whose murderous rampages are known and feared throughout civilization. Even six months ago, you'd come back and tell me about all the carnage and slaughter; all

the palaces you'd sacked; and the gratuitous killing that happened when there was some downtime and you had to sign these papers and. . . I mean, it was really fun. You always had new and exciting stuff to talk about. And now you're. . . tired? (*Something that used to occur to her a lot.*) Well, there is an age difference between us.

CALIGULA: Only fifteen years.

JOLEAN: Yeah, but when life is nasty and brutish, fifteen years is all some people have.

CALIGULA: (*Tormented.*) I know, I know. But what am I to do? I just don't have fire in my belly anymore. I mean, I can look at a person now and maybe I don't like this person that much or maybe I am a little antagonized by his air of cheerful independence, but I'm like: "So what?" I just don't see people as severed heads or limbs anymore. I mean, I see them as possible victims – I'm still *moderately* evil – but I'm sometimes curious about their thoughts. You know, in the old days, I'd come into a place and just burn the sucker down. Men, women, children; houses, homes, temples – I'd just torch the whole bloody thing and have done with it. Now I want to talk to these people about their lives. Is that so bad?

JOLEAN: Not for a forensic anthropologist, but for you: yes. I'd say emphatically yes. Aside from losing our contract, we'd lose our whole way of life. And while I don't like to admit it, I'd lose my respect for you. And, consequently, you know. My attraction. You know that special thing you like? That honey ain't comin' from me anymore.

CALIGULA: Wow. It's come to this. I mean, I never thought we'd have such a discussion.

JOLEAN: I never think so far ahead, so I can't tell what whether I did or not.

CALIGULA: Maybe this is a good thing.

JOLEAN: How so?

CALIGULA: It may mean a completely new direction in our lives.

JOLEAN: Maybe my life, but not yours. Do you realize how many enemies you have?

CALIGULA: I think I could convince them that I've changed. I think I really could.

JOLEAN: Oh, really? All that scorched earth, all of those groaning bodies? The collective voice of humanity almost stilled. I mean, for a while there, I thought you might kill everyone.

CALIGULA: I was aiming for it. But some of those places out there. . .they're really far away. You wonder, as you're traversing a steppe, or gazing down into some chasmy space . . ."Is all this really worth it? Perhaps the whole paradigm can be re-framed." And, like I was saying, I think the people I've, through the other, less nuanced paradigm, killed, might have something to tell us. I don't mean the people I killed, of course. I mean the possible survivors. And I know there are at least a few.