

CHAPTER XXIX

CALIGULA was twenty-five years old when he became Emperor. Seldom, if ever, in the history of the world has a prince been more enthusiastically acclaimed on his accession or had an easier task offered him of gratifying the modest wishes of his people, which were only for peace and security. With a bulging treasury, well-trained armies, an excellent administrative system that needed only a little care to get it into perfect order again—for in spite of Tiberius's neglect the Empire was still running along fairly well under the impetus given it by Livia—with all these advantages, added to the legacy of love and confidence he enjoyed as Germanicus's son, and the immense relief felt by Tiberius's removal, what a splendid chance he had of being remembered in history as "Caligula the Good", or "Caligula the Wise", or "Caligula the Saviour"! But it is idle to write in this way. For if he had been the sort of man that the people took him for, he would never have survived his brothers or been chosen by Tiberius as his successor. Claudius, remember what scorn old Athenodorus had for such *impossible contingencies*: he used to say, "If the Wooden Horse of Troy had foaled, horses to-day would cost far less to feed."

It amused Caligula at first to encourage the absurd misconception that everyone but myself and my mother and Macro and one or two others had of his character, and even to perform a number of acts in keeping with it. He wanted also to make sure of his position. There were two obstacles to his complete freedom of action. One was Macro, whose power made him dangerous. The other was Gemellus. For when Tiberius's will was read (which for secrecy's sake he

had had witnessed by a few freedmen and illiterate fishermen) it was found that the old man, just to make trouble, had not appointed Caligula his first heir, with Gemellus as a second choice in case of accidents: he had made them joint-heirs, to rule alternate years. However, Gemellus had not come of age and so was not even allowed yet to enter the Senate, while Caligula was already a magistrate of the second rank, some years before the legal age, and a pontiff. The Senate was therefore very ready to accept Caligula's view that Tiberius had not been of sound mind when he made the will and to give the whole power to Caligula without encumbrance. Except for this matter of Gemellus, from whom he also withheld his share in the Privy Purse, on the ground that the Privy Purse was an integral part of the sovereignty, Caligula observed all the terms of the will and paid every legacy promptly.

The Guards were to receive a bounty of fifty gold pieces a man; Caligula, to ensure their loyalty when the time came for Macro's removal, doubled the amount. He paid the people of Rome the four hundred and fifty thousand gold pieces bequeathed them and added three gold pieces a head; he said that he had intended to give them this when he came of age, but the old Emperor had forbidden it. The armies were awarded the same bounty as under Augustus's will, but this time it was paid promptly. What was more, he paid all the sums owing under Livia's will, which we legatees had long ago written off as bad debts. To me the two most interesting items in Tiberius's will were: the specific bequest to me of the historical books which Pollio had left me but which I had been cheated of, together with a number of other valuable volumes, and the sum of twenty thousand gold pieces; and a bequest to the Chief Vestal, the grand daughter of Vipsania, of a hundred thousand gold pieces to be spent as she pleased, either on herself or on the College. The Chief Vestal, as the granddaughter of the murdered Gallus, melted the coin down and made it into a great golden casket for his ashes.

With these bequests from Livia and Tiberius I was now quite well off. Caligula astonished me by further paying me back the fifty thousand that I had found for Germanicus at the time of the mutiny: he had heard the story from his mother. He did not allow me to refuse it and said that if I made any further protest he would insist on paying me the accumulated interest too: it was a debt he owed his father's memory. When I told Calpurnia about my new wealth she seemed more sorry than pleased. "It won't bring you any luck," she said. "Much better be modestly well off, as you have been, than run the risk of having your whole fortune stripped from you by informers on a charge of treason." Calpurnia was Acte's successor, you remember. She was very shrewd for her years—seventeen.

I said, "What do you mean, Calpurnia? Informers? There are no such things in Rome now, and no treason-trials."

She said: "I didn't hear that the informers were packed off in the same boat with the Spintrians." (For Tiberius's painted "orphans" had been banished by Caligula. As a public gesture of pure-mindedness he had sent the whole crew of them off to Sardinia, a most unhealthy island, and told them to labour honestly for their living as road-makers. Some of them just lay down and died when picks and shovels were put into their hands, but the rest were whipped into work, even the daintiest of them. Soon they had a stroke of luck. A pirate vessel made a sudden raid, captured them, and carried them off to Tyre, where they were sold as slaves to rich Eastern profligates.)

"But they wouldn't dare to try their old tricks again, Calpurnia?"

She put down her embroidery. "Claudius, I'm no politician or scholar, but I can at least use my prostitute's wit and do simple sums. How much money did the old Emperor leave?"

"About twenty-seven million gold pieces. That's a lot of money."

"And how much has the new one paid out in legacies and bounties?"

"About three million and a half. Yes, at least that amount."

"And since he has been Emperor how many panthers and bears and lions and tigers and wild bulls and things has he imported for the huntsmen to kill in the amphitheatres and the Circus?"

"About twenty thousand, perhaps. Probably more."

"And how many other animals have been sacrificed in the temples?"

"I don't know. I should guess between one and two hundred thousand."

"Those flamingoes and desert antelopes and zebras and British beavers must have cost him something! So what with buying all those animals and paying the huntsmen in the amphitheatres, and then the sword-fighters, of course—sword-fighters get four times what they got under Augustus, I'm told—and all the State banquets and decorated cars and the theatre shows—they say that when he recalled the actors whom the old Emperor banished he paid them for all the years they were out of work—handsome, eh?—and my goodness the money he has spent on racehorses! Well, what with one thing and the other he can't have much change left out of twenty million, can he?"

"I think you're right there, Calpurnia."

"Well, seven million in three months! How is the money going to last at that rate, even if all the rich men who die leave him all their money? The Imperial revenue is less now than it used to be when your old grandmother ran the business and went over the accounts."

"Perhaps he'll be more economical after the first excitement of having money to spend. He's got a good excuse for spending: he says that the stagnation of money in the Treasury under Tiberius had a most disastrous effect on trade. He wants to put a few million into circulation again."

"Well, you're better acquainted with him than I am. Perhaps he'll know just when to stop. But if he goes on at this rate he won't have a penny left in a couple of years, and then who's going to pay? That's why I spoke of informers and treason-trials."

I said: "Calpurnia, I'm going to buy you a pearl necklace while I still have the money. You're as clever as you are beautiful. And I only hope you are as discreet."

"I'd prefer cash," she said, "if you don't mind." And I gave her five hundred gold pieces the next day. Calpurnia, a prostitute and the daughter of a prostitute, was more intelligent and loyal and kind-hearted and straightforward than any of the four noblewomen I have married. I soon began to take her into my confidence about my private affairs and I may say at once that I never regretted having done so.

The moment that Tiberius's funeral was over, Caligula had taken ship, in spite of very bad weather, to the islands where his mother and his brother Nero had been buried; he gathered up their remains, half-burned, and brought them back, burned them properly, and piously interred them in Augustus's tomb. He instituted a new annual festival, with sword-fighting and horse races, in his mother's memory and annual sacrifices to her ghost and that of his brothers. He called the month of September "Germanicus", as the previous month had been called after Augustus. He also heaped on my mother by a single decree as many honours as Livia had been given in her lifetime, and appointed her High-Priestess of Augustus.

He next pronounced a general amnesty, recalling all banished men and women and releasing all political prisoners. He even brought together a large batch of criminal records covering the cases of his mother and brothers and publicly burned them in the Market Place, swearing that he had not read them and that anyone who had acted as informer or contributed in any other way to the deplorable fate of his loved ones need have no fear: all record of those evil days was destroyed. As a matter of fact, what he

burned were only copies: he kept the originals. He followed Augustus's example by making a strict scrutiny of the Orders and rejecting all unworthy members of either, and Tiberius's example in refusing all titles of honour except those of Emperor and Protector of the People and in forbidding statues of himself to be set up. I wondered how long this mood of his would last, and how long he would keep by the promise he had made to the Senate on the occasion that they voted him the Imperial power, to share it with them and be their faithful servant.

After six months of his monarchy, in September, the Consuls in office finished their term and he undertook a Consulship for himself for a while. Whom do you suppose he chose as a colleague? He actually chose me! And I who had twenty-three years before begged Tiberius to be given real honours, not empty ones, would now willingly have resigned my appointment in anyone's favour. It was not that I wanted to go back to my writing (for I had just completed and revised my Etruscan history and had begun on no new work), but that I had quite forgotten all the rules of procedure and legal formulas and precedents that I had once studied so painfully, and that I felt thoroughly ill at ease in the Senate. From being so little at Rome, too, I knew nothing about how to pull strings and get things done quickly, or who were the men with real power. I got into great trouble with Caligula almost at once. He entrusted me with the task of having statues made of Nero and Drusus, to be set up and consecrated in the Market Place, and the Greek firm from whom I commissioned them promised faithfully to have them ready on the day fixed for the ceremony early in December. Three days before I went along to see how the statues looked. The rogues hadn't begun on them. They made some excuse about the right coloured marble having only just come in. I flew into a temper (as I often do on occasions of this sort, but my anger doesn't last long) and told them that if they didn't get workmen busy on the blocks and keep them at the job night and day I would have the

whole firm—owner, managers and men—thrown out of the City. Perhaps I made them nervous, because though Nero was done on the afternoon before the ceremony—it was a good likeness too—a careless sculptor somehow broke Drusus's hand off at the wrist. There are ways of repairing a break of this sort, but the join always shows and I couldn't present Caligula with a botched piece of work on so important an occasion. All that I could do was to go at once and tell him that Drusus wouldn't be ready. Heavens, how angry he was! He threatened to degrade me from my Consulship and wouldn't listen to any explanation. Fortunately he had decided to resign his own Consulship the next day, and ask me to resign mine, in favour of the men who had originally been chosen for it; so nothing came of his threat and I was even chosen again as Consul with him for four years ahead.

I was expected to occupy a suite of rooms at the Palace and because of Caligula's stern speeches against all sorts of immorality (in the manner of Augustus) I could not have Calpurnia there with me, though I was unmarried. She had to remain at Capua, much to my annoyance, and I was only able to get away occasionally to visit her. His own morals seemed not to come into the scope of his strictures. He was growing tired of Macro's wife, Ennia, whom Macro had divorced at his request and whom he had promised to marry, and used to go out at night in search of gallant adventures with a party of jolly fellows whom he called "The Scouts". They consisted usually of three young staff-officers, two famous sword-fighters, Apelles the actor, and Eutyclus, the best charioteer in Rome, who won nearly every race in which he competed. Caligula had now come out strong as a partisan of the Leek Greens and sent all over the world in search of the fastest horses. He found a religious excuse for public chariot-racing, with twenty heats a day, almost whenever the sun shone. He made a lot of money by challenging rich men to take his bets against the other colours, which for politeness they did. But what he got this way was a

mere drop, as the saying is, in the ocean of his expenses. At all events with these jolly "Scouts" he used to go out at night, disguised, and visit the lowest haunts of the City, usually coming into conflict with the night-watchmen and having riotous escapades which the Commander of the Watchmen was careful to hush up.

Caligula's three sisters, Drusilla, Agrippinilla and Lesbia, had all been married to noblemen; but he insisted on their coming to the Palace and living there. Agrippinilla and Lesbia were told to bring their husbands with them, but Drusilla had to leave hers behind; his name was Cassius Longinus and he was sent to govern Asia Minor. Caligula demanded that the three of them should be treated with the greatest respect and gave them all the privileges enjoyed by the Vestal Virgins. He had their names joined with his own in the public prayers for his health and safety, and even in the public oath that officials and priests swore in his name on their consecration . . . "neither shall I value my own life or the lives of my children more highly than His life and the lives of His sisters." He behaved towards them in a way that puzzled people—rather as if they were his wives than his sisters.

Drusilla was his favourite. Although she was well rid of her husband, she always seemed unhappy now, and the unhappier she grew the more solicitous were Caligula's attentions. He now married her, for appearances only, to a cousin of his, Æmilius Lepidus, whom I have already mentioned as a slack-twisted younger brother of that Æmilia, Julilla's daughter, to whom I was nearly married when I was a boy. This Æmilius Lepidus, who was known as Ganymede because of his effeminate appearance and his obsequiousness to Caligula, was a valued member of the Scouts. He was seven years older than Caligula but Caligula treated him like a boy of thirteen, and he seemed to like it. Drusilla could not bear him. But Agrippinilla and Lesbia were always in and out of his bedroom laughing and joking and playing pranks. Their husbands did not seem to mind.

Life at the Palace I found extremely disorderly. I don't mean that I wasn't made very comfortable or that the servants were not well trained or that the ordinary formalities and courtesies were not observed towards visitors. But I never quite knew what tender relations existed between this person and that: Agrippinilla and Lesbia seemed to have exchanged husbands at one time, and at another Apelles seemed somehow intimately connected with Lesbia and the charioteer with Agrippinilla. As for Caligula and Ganymede—but I have said enough to show what I mean by "disorderly". I was the only one among them past middle-age, and did not understand the ways of the new generation at all. Gemellus also lived in the Palace: he was a frightened, delicate boy who bit his nails to the quick and was usually to be found sitting in a corner and drawing designs of nymphs and satyrs and that sort of thing for vases. I can't tell you much more about Gemellus than that I got into talk with him once or twice, feeling sorry for him because he was not really one of the party, any more than I was; but perhaps he thought that I was trying to draw him out and force him into saying something against Caligula, for he would only answer in monosyllables. On the day that he put on his manly-gown Caligula adopted him as his son and heir, and appointed him Leader of Cadets; but that wasn't the same thing by any means as sharing the monarchy with him.

Caligula fell ill and for a whole month his life was despaired of. The doctors called it brain-fever. The popular consternation at Rome was so great that a crowd of never less than ten thousand people stood day and night
A.D. 38 around the Palace, waiting for a favourable bulletin. They kept up a quiet muttering and whispering together; the noise, as it reached my window, was like that of a distant stream running over pebbles. There were a number of most remarkable manifestations of anxiety. Some men even pasted up placards on their house-doors, to say that if Death held his hand and spared the Emperor, they vowed

to give him their own lives in compensation. By universal consent all traffic noises and street cries and music ceased within half a mile or more of the Palace. That had never happened before, even during Augustus's illness, the one of which Musa was supposed to have cured him. The bulletins always read: "No change."

One evening Drusilla knocked at my door and said, "Uncle Claudius! The Emperor wants to see you urgently. Come at once. Don't stop for anything."

"What does he want me for?"

"I don't know. But for Heaven's sake humour him. He's got a sword there. He'll kill you if you don't say what he wants you to say. He had the point at my throat this morning. He told me that I didn't love him. I had to swear and swear that I did love him. 'Kill me, if you like, my darling,' I said. O Uncle Claudius, why was I ever born.' He's mad. He always was. But he's worse than mad now. He's possessed."

I went along to Caligula's bedroom, which was heavily curtained and thickly carpeted. One feeble oil-lamp was burning by the bedside. The air smelt stale. His querulous voice greeted me. "Late again? I told you to hurry." He didn't look ill, only unhealthy. Two powerful deaf-mutes with axes stood as guards, one on each side of his bed.

I said, saluting him, "Oh, how I hurried! If I hadn't had a lame leg I'd have been here almost before I started. What joy to see you alive and to hear your voice again, Cæsar! Can I dare to hope that you're better?"

"I have never really been ill. Only resting. And undergoing a metamorphosis. It's the most important religious event in history. No wonder the City keeps so quiet."

I felt that he expected me to be sympathetic, nevertheless. "Has the metamorphosis been painful, Emperor? I trust not."

"As painful as if I were my own mother. I had a very difficult delivery. Mercifully, I have forgotten all about it.

Or nearly all. For I was a very precocious child and distinctly remember the midwives' faces of admiration as they washed me after my emergence into this world, and the taste of the wine they put between my lips to refresh me after my struggles."

"An astounding memory, Emperor. But may I humbly enquire precisely what is the character of this glorious change that has come over you?"

"Isn't it immediately apparent?" he asked angrily.

Drusilla's word "possessed" and the conversation I had had with my grandmother Livia as she lay dying gave me the clue. I fell on my face and adored him as a God.

After a minute or two I asked from the floor whether I was the first man privileged to worship him. He said that I was and I burst out into gratitude. He was thoughtfully prodding me with the point of his sword in the back of my neck. I thought I was done for.

He said: "I admit I am still in mortal disguise, so it is not remarkable that you did not notice my Divinity at once."

"I don't know how I could have been so blind. Your face shines in this dim light like a lamp."

"Does it?" he asked with interest. "Get up and give me that mirror." I handed him a polished steel mirror and he agreed that it shone very brightly. In this fit of good humour he began to tell me a good deal about himself.

"I always knew that it would happen," he said. "I never felt anything but Divine. Think of it. At two years old I put down a mutiny of my father's army and so saved Rome. That was prodigious, like the stories told about the God Mercury when a child, or about Hercules who strangled the snakes in his cradle."

"And Mercury only stole a few oxen," I said, "and twanged a note or two on the lyre. That was nothing by comparison."

"And what's more, by the age of eight I had killed my father. Jove himself never did that. He merely banished the old fellow."

I took this as raving on the same level, but I asked in a matter of fact voice, "Why did you do that?"

"He stood in my way. He tried to discipline me—me, a young God, imagine it! So I frightened him to death. I smuggled dead things into our house at Antioch and hid them under loose tiles; and I scrawled charms on the walls; and I got a cock in my bedroom to give him his marching orders. And I robbed him of his Hecate. Look, here she is! I always keep her under my pillow." He held up the green jasper charm.

My heart went as cold as ice when I recognized it. I said in a horrified voice: "You were the one then? And it was you who climbed into the bolted room by that tiny window and drew your devices there too?"

He nodded proudly and went rattling on: "Not only did I kill my natural father but I killed my father by adoption too—Tiberius, you know. And whereas Jupiter only lay with one sister of his, Juno, I have lain with all three of mine. Martina told me it was the right thing to do if I wanted to be like Jove."

"You knew Martina well then?"

"Indeed I did. When my parents were in Egypt I used to visit her every night. She was a very wise woman. I'll tell you another thing. Drusilla's Divine too. I'm going to announce it at the same time as I make the announcement about myself. How I love Drusilla! Almost as much as she loves me."

"May I ask what are your sacred intentions? This metamorphosis will surely affect Rome profoundly."

"Certainly. First, I'm going to put the whole world in awe of me. I won't allow myself to be governed by a lot of fussy old men any longer. I'm going to show . . . but you remember your old grandmother, Livia? That was a joke. Somehow she had got the notion that it was she who was to be the everlasting God about whom everyone has been prophesying in the East for the last thousand years. I think it was Thrasyllus who tricked her into believing that

she was meant. Thrasyllus never told lies but he loved misleading people. You see, Livia didn't know the precise terms of the prophecy. The God is to be a man not a woman, and not born in Rome, though he is to reign at Rome (I was born at Antium), and born at a time of profound peace (as I was), but destined to be the cause of innumerable wars after his death. He is to die young and to be at first loved by his people and then hated, and finally to die miserably, forsaken of all. "His servants shall drink his blood." Then after his death he is to rule over all the other Gods of the world, in lands not yet known to us. That can only be myself. Martina told me that many prodigies had been seen lately in the near East which proved conclusively that the God had been born at last. The Jews were the most excited. They somehow felt themselves peculiarly concerned. I suppose that this was because I once visited their city Jerusalem with my father and gave my first divine manifestation there." He paused.

"It would greatly interest me to know about that," I said.

"Oh, it was nothing much. Just for a joke I went into a house where some of their priests and doctors were talking theology together and suddenly shouted out: 'You're a lot of ignorant old frauds. You know nothing at all about it.' That caused a great sensation and one old white-bearded man said: 'Oh? And who are you, Child? Are you the prophesied one?' 'Yes,' I answered boldly. He said, weeping for rapture: 'Then teach us!' I answered: 'Certainly not! It's beneath my dignity,' and ran out again. You should have seen their faces! No, Livia was a clever and capable woman in her way—a female Ulysses, as I called her once to her face—and one day perhaps I shall deify her as I promised, but there's no hurry about that. She will never make an important deity. Perhaps we'll make her the patron goddess of clerks and accountants, because she had a good head for figures. Yes, and we'll add poisoners, as Mercury has thieves under his protection as well as merchants and travellers."

"That's only justice," I said. "But what I am anxious to know at once is this: in what name am I to adore you? Is it incorrect, for instance, to call you Jove? Aren't you someone greater than Jove?"

He said: "Oh, greater than Jove, certainly, but anonymous as yet. For the moment, I think though, I'll call myself Jove—the Latin Jove to distinguish myself from that Greek fellow. I'll have to settle with him one of these days. He's had his own way too long."

I asked: "How does it happen that your father wasn't a God too? I never heard of a God without a divine father."

"That's simple. The God Augustus was my father."

"But he never adopted you, did he? He only adopted your elder brothers and left you to carry on your father's line."

"I don't mean that he was my father by adoption. I mean that I am his son by his incest with Julia. I must be. That's the only possible solution. I'm certainly no son of Agrippina: her father was a nobody. It's ridiculous."

I was not such a fool as to point out that in this case Germanicus wasn't his father and therefore his sisters were only his nieces. I humoured him as Drusilla advised and said: "This is the most glorious hour of my life. Allow me to retire and sacrifice to you at once, with my remaining strength. The divine air you exhale is too strong for my mortal nostrils. I am nearly fainting." The room was dreadfully stuffy. Caligula hadn't allowed the windows to be opened ever since he took to his bed.

He said: "Go in peace. I thought of killing you, but I won't now. Tell the Scouts about my being a God and about my face shining, but don't tell them any more. I impose holy silence on you for the rest."

I grovelled on the floor again and retired, backwards. Ganymede stopped me in the corridor and asked for the news. I said: "He's just become a God and a very important one, he says. His face shines."

"That's bad news for us mortals," said Ganymede. "But

I saw it coming. Thanks for the tip. I'll pass it on to the other fellows. Does Drusilla know? No? Then I'll tell her."

"Tell her that she's a Goddess too," I said, "in case she hasn't noticed it."

I went back to my room and thought to myself, "This has happened for the best. Everyone will soon see that he's mad, and lock him up. And there are no other descendants of Augustus left now of an age to become Emperor, except Ganymede, and he's not got the popularity or the necessary force of character. The Republic will be restored. Caligula's father-in-law is the man for that. He has the most influence of any man in the Senate. I'll back him up. If only we could get rid of Macro, and have a decent commander of the Guards in his place everything would be easy. The Guards are the greatest obstacle. They know very well that they'd never get bounties of fifty and a hundred gold pieces a man voted them by a Republican Senate. Yes, it was Sejanus's idea of turning them into a sort of private army for my uncle Tiberius that gave monarchy its oriental absoluteness. We ought to break up the Camp and billet the men in private houses again as we used to do."

But—would you believe it?—Caligula's divinity was accepted by everyone without question. For awhile he was content to let the news of it circulate privately, and to remain officially a mortal still. It would have spoilt his free and easy relations with the Scouts and curtailed most of his pleasure if everyone had had to lie face-down on the floor whenever he appeared. But within ten days of his recovery, which was greeted with inexpressible jubilation, he had taken on himself all the mortal honours that Augustus had accepted in a lifetime and one or two more besides. He was Cæsar the Good, Cæsar the Father of the Armies, and the Most Gracious and Mighty Cæsar, and Father of the Country, a title which Tiberius had steadfastly refused all his life.

Gemellus was the first victim of the terror. Caligula

sent for a colonel of the Guards and told him, "Kill that traitor, my son, at once." The colonel went straight to Gemellus's rooms and struck his head off. The next victim was Caligula's father-in-law. He was one of the Silanus family—Caligula had married his daughter Junia but she had died in child-birth a year before he became Emperor. Silanus enjoyed the distinction of being the only Senator whom Tiberius had never suspected of disloyalty: Tiberius had always refused to listen to any appeal from his judicial sentences. Caligula now sent him a message, "By dawn tomorrow you must be dead." The unfortunate man thereupon said good-bye to his family and cut his throat with a razor. Caligula explained in a letter to the Senate that Gemellus had died a traitor's death: during his own dangerous illness the lad had offered no prayer for his recovery but had tried to ingratiate himself with the officers of the body-guard. He had moreover taken antidotes against poison whenever he came to dine at the Palace, so his whole person smelt of them. "But is there any antidote against Cæsar?" His father-in-law, Caligula wrote, was another traitor: he had refused to come to sea with him that stormy day when he had sailed to Pandataria and Ponza to collect the remains of his mother and brother, and had stayed behind in the hope of seizing the monarchy if tempests wrecked the ship.

These explanations were accepted by the Senate. The truth of the matter was that Silanus was so bad a sailor that he nearly died of sea-sickness every time he went out in a boat, even in fine weather, and it was Caligula himself who kindly refused his offer to accompany him on that voyage. As for Gemellus he had an obstinate cough and smelt of the medicine that he took to soothe his throat, so as not to be a nuisance at table.