

---

**Bridge**

*The third year of Caligula's reign brought two events that may serve to demonstrate both the arrogance and insanity of the man. Sometime after recovering (or seeming to recover) from his illness, it apparently came to Caligula that being an emperor was insufficient honor, and so he began to call himself a god, replacing the heads of the statues of the Greek gods with representations of his own. For us, this was of no consequence, for concerning the false deities of the Romans, one head is as good as another; but when he ordered statues of himself placed in the synagogues, the entire matter took on greater import. Ironically, Caligula's blasphemous action served to ease the tensions that had grown between our community and other Jews...*

Despite the occasional animosity some Jewish unbelievers had toward the followers of Christ, most of the Jews in the church of Rome continued to attend synagogue services on the Sabbath. Fortunately, with the growing number of Jews in Rome, there were several synagogues from which to choose, and the Jewish disciples found one that was willing to accommodate not only the "Jesus sect," as some referred to them, but also Gentile proselytes. Hence, Ampliatus would attend on occasion, as would Diodorus, since the liberal leader of this synagogue never asked about the status of his foreskin.

The disciples did this because they viewed themselves not so much as a new religion but a higher form of Judaism, strictly maintaining their roots in the sacred Scriptures. These they now viewed as primarily pointing toward the Messiah, who they knew to be Jesus, but they still frequently found the teaching and discussion in the synagogue to be enlightening. The leader of the synagogue was a student of Philo of Alexandria, who had been insultingly rebuffed by Caligula earlier that year when he led a delegation of Jews in defense of a dispute with Alexandrian Greeks.

There were a number of issues involved in the disagreement, but the only one that was of interest to Caligula was the charge that the Jews, alone among the subjects of the Empire, refused to worship the emperor or to permit his statue in their synagogues. This apparently infuriated Caligula so much that he not only dismissed Philo's delegation without hearing them, but also ordered that his image be placed in every synagogue and temple in the Empire.

So it was that on that Sabbath day in the spring of the second year of his reign, the people arrived at the synagogue to find a statue of the Emperor prominently displayed on the lectern. Many of the people took offense at this sacrilege, most particularly the followers of Christ who, despite their growing skepticism about the Law, nevertheless took the first three Commandments very seriously.

"We should throw that abomination into the street," Onias cried out with others echoing those sentiments.

“Brethren,” the synagogue leader said, “we must learn to coexist with the Roman authorities in order to maintain our religion. It does no good to defy them, for they have the power to impose their will. Better that we comply voluntarily than antagonize the emperor. If he sees that we Jews are compliant to his demands, he will soon lose interest in making his point, and we can then remove the statue.”

“Perhaps it would please him all the more if we draped his statue with silk,” Stachys said, just loud enough for most of the crowd to hear him, but not the leader, who was perplexed by the sudden laughter. Everyone knew that the emperor eschewed customary dress and frequently donned outrageous costumes, including silk, which men were prohibited from wearing by law.

“Or perhaps we should put the likeness of a goat at his feet,” Stachys added, egged on by the reaction to his first jest. This one, however, drew a collective gasp from most of the assembly since Caligula had cajoled the senate into passing a law making it a capital offense to even mention goats in his presence. This was the Emperor’s reaction to numerous jokes passed around the city about his remarkable resemblance—with his bald head but otherwise grotesquely hairy body—to a goat.

Unfortunately, the latter remark had reached the leader’s ears, and he glared at Stachys. “You would do well to hope,” he said in a low ominous tone, “that there are no informers in our midst, for otherwise you and your head would surely be separated by this time tomorrow.”

Andronicus, who was standing next to Stachys, glanced furtively around the room to be certain that no one seemed to be taking note of the speaker. If there were Jews in the assembly who despised the followers of Christ and who knew Stachys, he had no doubt they might seize the opportunity to discredit their group before the Emperor. He was relieved to see no one paying much attention, but he nonetheless quietly spirited his friend from the assembly at the first opportunity.

“Stachys,” he said when they were out on the street, “do you give no thought to the fact that you are a member of a group that some would dearly love to destroy? You may have thought your remark clever, but it could endanger us all.”

“You are correct, of course,” Stachys said.

Seeing Stachys' long face, Andronicus softened, laughed lightly, and slapped him on the back. “Just be certain you know your surroundings the next time.”

But Caligula was intent on humbling the entire Jewish race, so he ordered Publius Petronius, the governor of Syria, to erect a statue in the Temple of Herod in Jerusalem, equipping him with a large body of soldiers. This ultimate insult enraged Jews throughout the Empire, and when Petronius chose to winter his army in Ptolemais, Jews from every city converged to protest.

---

Onias was particularly incensed by Caligula's order and successfully petitioned Andronicus for the funds to join the Jewish delegation going to Ptolemais from Rome. When Onias returned early the following spring, he was full of admiration for the Jews. "They opposed Petronius to his face," he related, "saying if he meant to desecrate the Temple, he would have to kill all ten thousand Jews assembled in Ptolemais. At first, Petronius was angry, but when he came to recognize our resolve, it is said he took a small party and headed for Galilee to test the resolve of the Jews there. I have no doubt he will find there even larger and more determined opposition."

In fact, Petronius found exactly that, gained a grudging respect for the perseverance of the Jews, and sought to avoid the confrontation. Caligula did not relent, and even intended to replace Petronius because of what he viewed as cowardice, but the stalemate ended with Caligula's death. The fact that Onias, a disciple of Christ, had joined in the opposition at Ptolemais reduced, for a time, the friction between the Jews and the "Jesus Sect."

The other act of Caligula that both directly and indirectly affected the believers was his preposterous plan to build a temporary bridge across the Bay of Baiae, a distance of more than three miles. This might have been laughable had the Emperor not employed virtually the entire fleet of merchant ships that would otherwise have been transporting corn to the capital city.

For this reason, there was a severe shortage of corn for the entire summer and fall, bringing many near to starvation. This was particularly true of those of low status, since what there was went first to the citizens. It was only an emergency voyage to Carthage by Stachys' four ships, combined with a number of gold coins from Demas' moneybox that rescued the believers. Even so, Stachys was forced to sail to a point north of Portus Augusti and ferry the cargo of food ashore one rowboat at a time to avoid detection. The believers did not feast, however, while the rest of Rome starved. They ate only enough to survive and gave the rest to the poor and needy as they encountered them.

In addition to the corn shortage, Caligula's bridge nearly cost one of the believers his life. Ampliatus' father owned a modest villa on the Bay of Baiae near the mole at Puteoli, which was the eastern terminus of the bridge. After all the ships had been lashed together, Caligula had ordered tons of earth piled on their planks to form a more-or-less level, continuous road. On the second day after the bridge was readied, Caligula arrived in Puteoli driving a chariot and proceeded to invite all the onlookers to join a parade to Baiae.

Ampliatus stood in front of his father's villa, watching the procession pass. The Praetorian Guard followed the emperor, then came a large group of chariots carrying his closest friends. Behind the chariots, the frenzied masses choked the street as the people joined in the parade. There was a festival atmosphere to the event, and despite his private ridicule of the entire project, Ampliatus found himself caught up in the mood and carried onto the bridge.

---

Soon, the combined weight of the earth and the massive crowd made the makeshift bridge unstable. Ampliatus had reached the fourth ship when he saw ships ahead of him rocking dangerously, throwing the people to one side, where several were pitched into the sea. Then, so quickly that it seemed unreal, one ship capsized, and screaming people filled the sea. Immediately, the panicked crowd on the other ships turned.

The scene rapidly became a riot, as the people on the bridge thrust toward the shore, while those on the shore, unaware of the peril, continued to surge toward the bridge. Ampliatus and hundreds of others were caught where the opposing forces met. Few Romans had any need for swimming skills, so they desperately strained to maintain positions on the ships.

As the pressure mounted, some people literally suffocated, so tightly crushed against others that they could not even move their chests. Passing out, these unfortunate souls were temporarily held upright by the surrounding swarm; but as some people realized that were pressed up against dead bodies, they would squirm away, allowing the corpse to slip down. As the number of corpses increasingly covered the decks, they became an obstacle over which others stumbled and fell to be trampled by the crowd.

Inexorably, the force on Ampliatus, caught near the edge of the confluence, grew until suddenly it reached a critical point and burst sideways, sending hundreds of people spilling over the sides of the ships with Ampliatus. Kicked in the chin as he fell toward the water, Ampliatus was momentarily stunned, but the cool water quickly revived him.

Lowering his feet, he was surprised to find himself able to stand on the sandy bottom. The water reached his shoulders, which, since he was quite tall, meant that it was over the heads of most others near him. Looking around he saw dozens of people thrashing desperately, and he began shoving and carrying a number of them toward the shore.

When he finally reached dry ground, he turned and saw that several other ships had capsized and the sea had become a maelstrom of terrified humanity. As a boy, he had developed rudimentary aquatic skills playing in the surf. Spotting a number of children among the struggling masses, he took no time to consider his own safety, racing back into the light surf and swimming into the watery carnage.

How many he rescued, no one could say, but as he carried or encouraged people to shore, they joined the growing crowd witnessing his efforts. A few other men, also possessing some swimming ability and inspired by his example, joined the effort. Over and over, Ampliatus grabbed a child, an old man, a young woman, or whomever he encountered, transported them to the beach, and returned to the sea. It was a spectacle few of the observers understood—why would anyone risk his own life to come to the aid of strangers?

Finally, his strength waning, he collapsed on the sand, but immediately rolled over and sat up when a woman screamed and pointed toward the water. Following her gesture, he peered out and saw a young woman struggling to maintain her hold on a plank. In one hand, she held a tiny bundle, and together they were being carried out to sea by a current.

“A baby!” Ampliatus thought and rushed back into the water, swimming frantically in her direction. Just before he reached them, he looked up and saw the woman finally lose her grip on the plank, and sink beneath the surface, but even as she submerged, she threw the baby toward Ampliatus. He caught the child and reached down, groping for the mother’s extended arm. Her fingers brushed his, and he strained to reach further but realized in doing so he might drown the child, so with a cry of frustrated agony, he turned toward the shore.

He met two other men swimming out and thrust the now-screaming baby to them. “Save the child!” he pleaded and turned back, intending to return to the spot where its mother had disappeared, but one of the men grabbed him.

“She is gone,” he said, “and you will also die if you go on.” Ampliatus realized the truth of the man’s words, and he didn’t have the energy to pull away from the man’s grasp. “You can stand here,” the man added, and Ampliatus lowered his feet and stood, staring sadly out to sea.

After a long time, several pairs of hands took him and gently guided him back to the beach, where he sat, his head bowed in total exhaustion. Many people gathered around him, patting his back, embracing him, and kissing him. He barely heard their many expressions of gratitude.

“You saved my son.”

“I owe you my life.”

“My wife would have drowned if not for you.”

No conscious thought had crossed his mind since the moment he fell from the ship, but now one entered, and the tangle of people surrounding him were surprised to see his shoulders shudder and hear a tortured cry pass his lips. Looking up and gazing out to the scene of the disaster, he said, “I could not reach her. I had to choose between mother and child. I could not save them both.”

They could not understand—this man was a hero; he had saved dozens of men, women, and children, and yet his first words after finally completing his rescues were of the one he could not save. He ought to be basking in the glory of the triumph; instead, he was denouncing his deed because of a single failure.

After a time, the crowd around Ampliatus dispersed, many offering final thanks before they departed. Finally, Ampliatus sat alone on the beach, weeping quietly. A young woman stood a short distance away watching him silently. Slowly, she threaded her way through the rocks and onto the sand, sitting beside him and gazing out at the ruined bridge.

---

“Why?” she whispered without looking at him.

“Madness,” he replied, turning toward the woman. “This bridge was madness, and the procession across it even greater madness.”

“No,” she said. “Why did you do it?”

Ampliatus was silent for a long moment. He had not considered the why of his actions, but when he did in response to the woman’s curiosity, he had only one explanation. “The love and sacrifice of Christ Jesus compels me to do good because of the example He set in His life.”

Ampliatus expected the woman to react with either the puzzlement or skepticism most people usually exhibited upon first encountering the name of Christ Jesus, but the woman’s expression showed neither.

“It is strange,” she said almost dreamily. “This is the second time in the past month I have heard this name.”

“You have heard of Jesus?”

The woman nodded, and Ampliatus waited patiently for her to offer the details. She was not beautiful, he noted as they sat in silence, but her face revealed both dignity and intelligence. She had the rather large, straight nose typical of native Romans and a strong, pronounced chin. She wore her chestnut hair substantially shorter than most women with tight curls piled on top of her head and gently waving strands hanging to just above her shoulders. Other than a subtle darkening of the lower eyelid below her light brown eyes, there was no evidence of any make-up, nor did he see any jewelry.

Even though her features were distinctly Roman, her dress was Greek. She wore only a surprising short wool tunic and a broad cloth belt. The fabric of her garment was woven rather loosely, and to both his relief and embarrassment, Ampliatus could see that she wore a breastband underneath. On the verge, he feared, of inappropriate thoughts, he turned his head back to the bay.

“I live in Neapolis,” the woman finally said, “but I have a good friend who lives in Rome most of the year. Together we share a perfume business—she oversees our shop there for nine months of the year, while I tend to the one in Neapolis.” Ampliatus sniffed silently, but there was no discernible scent to the woman, at least none that rose over the smell of the sea.

“About three weeks ago, she told me about a man—either a slave or a freedman—who came into the shop to buy some perfume, probably for his master’s wife. He was an exceedingly handsome young man, and my friend,” she continued with a tiny laugh, “rarely misses an opportunity to lure handsome young men to her bed. She told me that the man initially seemed dull-witted, unable to recognize meaning of her suggestions, so she made her desires plain.”

---

Ampliatius found her comments remarkable, not so much because of the story, but rather because of the frankness with which she spoke of her apparently brazen friend. He was intrigued with the speaker, because her tone revealed neither approval nor condemnation of her friend's actions, although for some ill-defined reason, he was certain she did not mirror the friend's behavior.

"The man rejected my friend's advances, which she found remarkable in itself, for she wears a special scent she developed that she insists makes her irresistible to men. What struck her about this man was that his rejection was so gentle and inoffensive—in addition to being inexplicable.

"But I should get to the point," she said. "The man's rejection made my friend all the more determined to entrap him. In repeating his refusal, he invoked the name of Jesus, saying that being a disciple of Him, he was called to remain pure. My friend asked if he was offended by her behavior, but he merely said that all people sin and therefore offend God, but since all are sinners, no one is qualified to condemn others."

Ampliatius thought of a number of candidates among the church who might have been the man involved in this exchange. Clearly, he was unmarried and not given to judging others. He thought of Urbanus but immediately realized it was rather unlikely that a stable hand would be sent to purchase perfume. He decided it could not have been either Taurus or Allassus since they had come to Puteoli with his household and had therefore not been in Rome for over a month.

"Do you know the man's name?" he asked when it was apparent that the woman had concluded her story.

She furrowed her brow in thought, looking up and left. "Phlegon," she said after a long pause. "Yes. Phlegon—that is the name she mentioned."

"Phlegon?" Ampliatius said. "Are you certain?"

"Yes, I am certain that was what she told me."

"And this was in Rome?"

"Yes," she said. "Our shop is on the Palatine Hill."

"Phlegon," he said again curiously. "I am certain there is no man with that name in our assembly."

The woman shrugged and said, "Perhaps he did not use his real name. But that is enough about him; I would like to learn more about you."

"There is not much to tell," he said. "I am a wretched sinner saved only by the blood of Christ Jesus..." Despite his initial words, Ampliatius found himself telling the woman a great deal about his past, but even more about Jesus. He found the conversation pleasant and her periodic questions insightful and stimulating. When he ran out of words, he was surprised to see the sun hanging low over Baiae.

---

A chilly breeze rolled across the bay and washed over them, causing the woman to bring her knees up and hug her legs. He knew it would soon become dark and it was apparent it would be a cold evening, but he found he did not wish to seek the shelter of his father's villa. He wanted to remain with this woman for as long as possible.

"What does it take to become part of your group?" she asked unexpectedly.

"Only belief in Christ Jesus," replied Ampliatus, hiding his excitement.

"And how does one develop such belief?"

"I am not certain you can develop belief," he said hesitantly, uncertain of his ground because he was generally uncomfortable with proselytizing. "I think if you have an open heart and a desire to seek the one true God, belief is the natural outgrowth."

She nodded and looked out at the setting sun, resting her chin on her knees and hugging her legs more tightly as she shivered slightly.

"You are cold," Ampliatus said. "Would you like my cloak?"

"No, unfortunately, I must go. My hosts here in Puteoli will probably begin worrying about me if I do not appear soon."

He felt his heart sink at her words. "I would enjoy speaking with you again," he said quickly.

She turned toward him, giving him a long searching look, squinting her eyes and pursing her lips. Ampliatus smiled pleasantly but held both her eyes and his breath throughout her gaze. Finally, she said, "I would also enjoy that," and Ampliatus expelled his breath, much too loudly, and blushed.

"You like me, unless I misread you," she said, taking Ampliatus completely by surprise and leaving him speechless. Embarrassed, he looked down at the sand.

"I like you as well, Ampliatus" she said, "Because you speak the truth with no hint of boast or base motive. Are you free to travel around the bay?"

He nodded silently, disturbed by something he could not quite grasp.

"I must return to Neapolis in the morning," she explained. "I only came up here to see the emperor's monstrosity, but I cannot leave the shop closed another day. Will you come to visit me there? It is easy to find; we are located on the main street and the shop bears an unusual and creative name—'Perfume,'" she concluded with a broad smile.

"When?" Ampliatus asked.

"Anytime—I am there every day."

Ampliatus helped the woman climb over the large, jagged rocks behind the beach, although he was almost certain she required no such assistance and only allowed it only out of courtesy. They exchanged simple good-byes, and he watched her walk quickly down the road and disappear around a corner. Suddenly Ampliatus realized what had disturbed him—she had spoken his name

---

despite that fact that he had not said it, and, more importantly, he had not learned her name. He ran down the street to the spot where she had disappeared, but when he looked around the corner, he did not see her. Had he not already known where he could find her, he would certainly have panicked.

Early the next morning, Ampliatus awoke abruptly soon after dawn even though he was accustomed to rising late during the month his family resided on the Bay of Baiae. He dressed quickly and shoved an extra set of clothing into a bag. Leaving the bag in his room overlooking the bay, he headed for his father's room two stories below. As he expected, his father was already busily receiving friends and associates in the room that doubled as bedroom and business office.

Ampliatus was content to wait his turn patiently, but as soon as his father spotted him, he rose and greeted him warmly. "We were surprised you did not join us for dinner last night, son," he said. "We had hoped to toast the hero." His father had been among those in chariots near the front of the parade before the crowd destroyed the bridge, so he had been unaffected by the disaster.

"It sounds as if you were both brave and foolish," he said with a smile, "but according to the accounts I have heard, you rescued anywhere from twenty to one thousand people. One story has you carrying ten people at a time," he laughed.

"It was nothing, Father," Ampliatus said, wishing to avoid any notoriety the incident might bring. "I fell overboard when the crowd lost control, and I helped a few people to the shore as I swam to it. The rumors are wildly exaggerated."

"They usually are," his father said although the witnesses were at least consistent enough to know that Ampliatus was being modest, and he was proud. "Perhaps Ampliatus will amount to something after all," he thought. His youngest son had been publicly presented six years earlier at the traditional age of sixteen, but he showed little inclination for law or oratory in general. For the first two or three years afterward, it had seemed his only vocation was sharing wine and women with some of the slaves, but then he had mysteriously changed, abandoning his nocturnal adventures.

At that point, his father had suggested possible wives on several occasions, but Ampliatus had firmly, but politely, claimed he was not yet prepared for married life. He had also suggested he was interested in philosophy, although his father maintained that the Greeks' interest in that subject had been their downfall. "They forever discussed the construction of the perfect bridge until we Romans built the bridges over which the army of conquest crossed," he said with scorn. Even so, he tolerated Ampliatus' dalliances, confident he would eventually assert his rightful place representing their respected family.

Consequently, he was neither surprised at nor opposed to Ampliatus' announced intention to spend a few days in Neapolis, where the Greek culture flourished. For most Romans, Neapolis was a living museum, where they could relive the culture of earlier days. Ampliatus' father saw no harm in his son's visit, although he was a bit surprised when he declined the offer of a slave or two to see to his needs.

When Ampliatus arrived at Neapolis, walking the eight miles in less than two hours, he first secured lodging, taking a room at the cleanest inn he could find and paying for six nights in advance. He deposited his bag in the small room and asked the innkeeper if he knew of a perfume shop in the town.

"I know of only one," the innkeeper said. "It is very near to here—one street over and perhaps eight or ten buildings toward the sea."

"Is it run by a woman?" Ampliatus asked.

"Some say she is a woman," he said. Ampliatus did not care for the man's tone any more than he cared for the insinuation. He assumed the man referred to her short hair, but in Ampliatus' eyes, there was no question she was a woman. He did not wish to antagonize the innkeeper nor delay his arrival at the shop, so he decided not to confront the man—at least, not at that time.

Ampliatus followed the innkeeper's directions and soon saw a sign saying "Perfume" jutting out above the second of five doorways entering a four-story building, the largest on the street. Signs hung over each doorway except the middle one: "Holiday Memories," "Perfume," "Jewelry," and "Books." He was curious about the first shop and peered through the window. The small shop had a great number of shelves, on which sat hundreds of small glass vials. Nearest the window, he could see one that contained a tiny tower and was labeled "Lighthouse." He had seen such items at homes of his father's friends—they pictured local sites and were avidly collected by some as trophies of their travels, intended as ostentatious displays of the family's wealth.

Not the least bit interested in such gimcrack, but not wishing to be seen by the perfume woman yet, he slowly sidled along the shop window until he reached the partition between the two shops. There he glanced into the perfume shop. It appeared to be identical, although its shelves were loaded with bottles of many shapes and sizes, each containing liquids of varying colors. The shop appeared to be empty, and he was momentarily disappointed, but then he saw her chestnut curls peeking over the top of a low counter.

He was suddenly extraordinarily nervous. He had encountered many women, of course, in his days of frequenting taverns in Rome, but these had been approached for only one reason—and there was never a question of their response. Now, however, he would be approaching a woman

---

because he liked her, and he feared rejection. He knew the feeling was ludicrous; she had invited him, but still he felt his belly flutter—a disquieting but not altogether unpleasant sensation.

He opened the door slowly, hoping to enter surreptitiously and surprise her; but when the door was halfway open, a small bell tinkled above him. He looked up in annoyance then smiled sheepishly as the woman looked up at him.

“Ampliatius,” she cried excitedly. “You actually came!”

“Yes,” he said, “but you have an immediate advantage on me—you know my name, but I do not know yours.”

“I wondered when you would ask. It is Cynthia.”

That was as much as he had planned, so he nodded as if her words were a deep philosophical revelation, but said nothing. However, he was thinking, “Ampliatius and Cynthia—it has a nice sound,” a thought that surprised him even more than his nervousness.

After a moment, when Ampliatius did not move, Cynthia said, “Do you intend to block my doorway the remainder of the day or will you come in?”

He laughed nervously and entered the shop, closing the door behind him. To give himself some time to plan his next words, he pretended to inspect the bottles of perfume. He opened a couple of bottles and sniffed them, disliking the first but finding the second enormously pleasing.

“There is no reason for you to be nervous,” Cynthia said after he returned the second bottle to its shelf. “I already told you I like you.”

Berating himself for his foolishness, Ampliatius decided to return her frankness with his own. “Yes,” he said, “but even so I am nervous.”

“It pleases me that you say so,” she said with another of her broad smiles.

“You want me to be nervous?”

“That will pass quickly. What pleases me is that you are honest enough to admit it. I have little patience with most men because they attempt to hide what I can see they are thinking.”

“You can read all men’s minds then?” he asked, wondering if she were some sort of magician.

“Not at all,” she said. “It is their facial expressions, the tone of their voices, and their body movements that belie their words. I would never wish to read their minds,” she added, “for even I would blush at such depravity.”

“Do you believe all men to be depraved?” Ampliatius asked.

“You may be the first exception.”

“Believe me, Cynthia, I was absolutely depraved before Christ Jesus banished my former self and clothed me with His goodness—would you like some examples of my old life?”

She looked at him thoughtfully for a moment. Ampliatius was distressed that she seemed to be considering his farcical offer, and he was stunned when she responded, “Yes, tell me.”

He uttered an incoherent wide-eyed response, looking down and covering his eyes with one hand. She laughed, and he looked at her through spread fingers. He laughed with her and said, “I am happy to learn you were making a joke.”

“No, I was serious—tell me,” she repeated with mischievous insistence. “Tell me your most depraved incident, although you need not be overly specific.”

Half of his mind sorted through his substantial catalog of examples, while the other considered whether to refuse or be honest. Both halves reached their conclusions at the same moment, and he told her of his naked appearance at his father’s banquet, including his similarly unclothed escort and the resulting punishment. He did not go so far as to also mention their intended actions, thinking that overly specific.

“That is not depraved, Ampliatus,” Cynthia claimed. “For your actions were open for all to see...” She stopped, realizing the pun, and they both laughed. “To me,” she continued after a time, “depravity involves things done in secret, hiding from the eyes of others to avoid their scorn.”

“I do not agree, Cynthia. My actions were doubly sinful because I did not even concern myself with the thoughts of others.”

“You cannot be concerned with what others think,” she said. “Whatever you do, there will be those who disapprove. I would wager, for example, that there are those who would disapprove of your actions yesterday, considering it foolish to have ignored the risk to your own life. Because this is so, you must only be concerned with doing what you think is right.”

“An interesting philosophy,” Ampliatus said, “but how would you resolve a conflict between what you think is right and someone who thinks the opposite is right?”

“Until yesterday, I thought there was such a thing as natural law,” Cynthia said.

“Stoicism?”

“You are certainly full of surprises, Ampliatus. Have you studied the teachings of Zeno?”

Ampliatus nodded and said, “I have studied them all— Thales, Musaeus, Diotima, Anaximander, Pythagorus, Anaxagorus, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, Zeno—some of them tickled the edges of Truth, but they all had a missing ingredient that leaves us itching for something unknown. So people conclude that there is nothing, and ethics reduce to self-interest and respect for property.” He looked at her, and she smiled.

“But there is something else, is there not? That is what you spoke of yesterday—there is Logos, not as the Stoics teach, but an all-powerful God—not the petty gods we pretend to serve while in fact serving ourselves, seeking to avoid their displeasure or gain some advantage.”

“Yes,” Ampliatus said with deep satisfaction. “And, incredible as it may seem, that God, whose laws are just, came to walk with us in the form of the man Jesus. He taught us to love each

---

other, to serve others as if it were our own self-interest; but even more than that, He did what He taught when He died on a tree for all of us.”

“It is difficult to make me cry, Ampliatus,” she said as her eyes moistened, “but learning that a god—the God—cares about me is a rather astonishing experience. I have never quite accepted that the colors and gentle curves of a seashell, the structure and power of a bird’s wing, or the beauty and innocence in a newborn’s eyes were an accident of random atoms, so the existence of a single omnipotent God comes as no surprise, but to learn He is my God...” She broke off as tears flowed freely, and Ampliatus embraced her gently.

She looked up at him and whispered, “I cannot regret that I will never see this Jesus because I believe I saw Him yesterday in your selfless deed. And,” she continued, looking into his eyes, “I believe I see Him even now in your eyes, Ampliatus Aurelius.”

“But you will see Him, Cynthia, if you have faith—He will be sitting with the Father, welcoming you to the Kingdom when you leave the mortal life behind and rise to eternal life, just as Christ Jesus did.”

That evening Ampliatus and Cynthia returned to the beach where they had met the day before and looked out at the ships being unlashd. Crewmen busily shoveled the dirt into the sea. One ship floated free of the chain and raised its sail, the setting sun behind it showing as a golden circle through the fabric. He led her over the rocks and across the narrow sands into the gentle surf toward a new life—not only for her, but for both of them.