

Author's Note: The Day of Pentecost took place in A.D. 30. The burning of Rome took place on July 18, A.D. 64. The deaths of Paul, Nero, and Peter took place in A.D. 68. Jerusalem was destroyed in A.D. 70. The Flavian reign ended when the last Flavian, Domitian, died in A.D. 96. The emperor Nerva was reigning in A.D. 98.

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*The Gaius Diary*

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# C H A P T E R 1

Only forty miles!”

The argument between the three men was long, and it was intense.

“We can almost see the Phoenix harbor from here. It is one of the best harbors on all the island of Crete,” grumbled the ship’s owner.

“But we are passing the last days before the Etesian winds,” retorted Julius, the captain of the guards, the man responsible for the two hundred prisoners on board. “Do you understand that according to the ancient ways of the Romans, if even one prisoner escapes, the officer in charge is killed? *I* am that officer.”

“If we do not make it,” said the captain of the ship, “you will not have to worry about having your head severed. We will all be at the bottom of the sea. There is little hope for any ship that is not harbored when those winds hit. On the other hand, sir, forty miles is not far! We can make it in less than a day.”

“If!” snapped the Roman captain.

The ship’s owner continued his argument: “If we stay here at Fair Havens, we will be aboard this ship for the next four months, *if* we survive! Four months for over two hun-

dred prisoners, *and* my crew, not moving a single foot. It would be the most miserable life imaginable. Your prisoners will almost certainly revolt, and the sailors may very well mutiny.”

“And your wheat would rot,” responded Julius dryly, then added, “I desire that you listen to one of my prisoners. Think not of him as a criminal. He is a man of God. I have found it wise to listen to this man.”

Julius presented Paul to the owner and the captain. “This is Paul of Tarsus, who, according to the letter that I have with me, has been falsely charged and will almost certainly be acquitted when he stands before Nero. Speak, Paul.”

The sea captain sniffed. The ship’s owner turned away in dismay.

“I am certain,” said Paul slowly, “if you try to reach the harbor of Phoenix, you will be setting a course for destruction. This ship will be lost—your cargo and also the crew, the prisoners, and the passengers.” Paul’s words sounded as though they had been dipped in doom.

“Now I am being asked to follow the wishes of a religious madman and criminal,” said the ship’s owner.

“In the end it is your decision,” the captain said, deferring to Julius. “Roman law placed you in charge of this ship the moment you stepped aboard.”

Julius’s eyes shifted back and forth. “Forty miles,” he replied. “You can make it in a day?”

“*If* the winds are with us.”

“Are the winds with you right now?”

“Yes. They are good winds, and they are warm ones. If these winds hold, we will make it safely.”

“Then hoist sails and move.”

Paul glared at the ship’s owner. “You are now a man devoid of one ship.”

Moments later the ship plied the waters of a smooth sea in what seemed to be an almost certain drive to the next harbor.

“Why, Paul?” asked Aristarchus, who had heard everything Paul had said.

“Why, what?” responded Paul.

“Why are you so certain of impending disaster? How do you know?”

“I have never been able to answer that question,” said Paul. “I simply know. It comes from listening to the Lord’s voice . . . within.”

Aristarchus took a deep breath, shook his head, and walked away.

“We are on the southern side of Crete. Does not the land itself give us some protection from bad winds?” asked Aristarchus as he turned back toward Paul.

“If the northeasters begin to blow, nothing—absolutely nothing—will be safe. From where we are now, if the winds change and blow upon us from the northeast, we will be driven southwest. Do you know what lies southwest of us?”

Aristarchus turned the question over in his mind. “Egypt.”

“The *shoals* of Egypt. These shoals have taken more ships to the bottom of the sea than has any other place in all the world! There is no land between here and that graveyard. *That* is where we will end up.”

A few hours later Aristarchus sensed the winds were beginning to change.

“The Etesian winds,” said Paul. “I can smell them. I can feel them. I consider those winds my mortal enemy. They have tried to take me more than once. Long ago an ancient sailor on the island of Cyprus gave me a word of warning: ‘Never sail the Etesian winds.’ And now, here I am, coming to the end of my life. . . .”

“Do not talk that way,” said Aristarchus.

“I am sorry, Aristarchus, but men who are in their sixties do not live much longer, no matter how good their health. As I was about to say, I stand in the latter days of my life, once more facing these horrid winds. Whether they crush us against the rocks or turn the ship upside down, neither you nor I nor any other mother’s son will ever see home again.”

(Paul’s last words were a quotation of an ancient saying among sailors when they perceived that their voyage was headed for calamity.)

“In a few hours this ship will be at the mercy of God. Where is Luke?” asked Paul.

“He is right where you always find him. He is at the front of the ship watching everything. I have never seen a man of the land so obsessed with the sea,” chuckled Aristarchus.

It was October the tenth.

One man wanted his grain to get sold in the marketplaces of Rome. Another wanted to be a good captain of a ship. Another had risked his very neck in order to secure a safe harbor. Another predicted total ruin.

Paul glanced up at Mount Ida, the highest point on Crete. “This may be the last time we will ever see sunlight,” he mused.

“It is coming, and it will be a typhonic,” muttered Luke as he greeted Paul.

A soaking rain began, the coast blurring under its cloak. The sun disappeared in dark clouds.

“Sails will not take this for very long,” said Paul grimly.

“Interestingly, I have no idea whether we should go below or stay here. This ship may sink very fast.”

At that moment the captain stepped to Paul’s side. “It is a levanter. I will never be able to hold the ship against these winds. All we can do is lower the sails and pray to whatever gods there be.”

“Can we make the island of Cauda?” asked Luke.

“There is a tiny port at Cauda but nothing that would help us now, nor is there any way to navigate into its port,” answered the distraught captain.

The captain walked away, calling to the sailors, “Pull up the dinghy. It is filled with water.”

Luke immediately joined the sailors. A few minutes later he reappeared. “That was not an easy task.”

“What are they doing now, Luke?” asked Aristarchus.

The answer froze the blood in his veins.