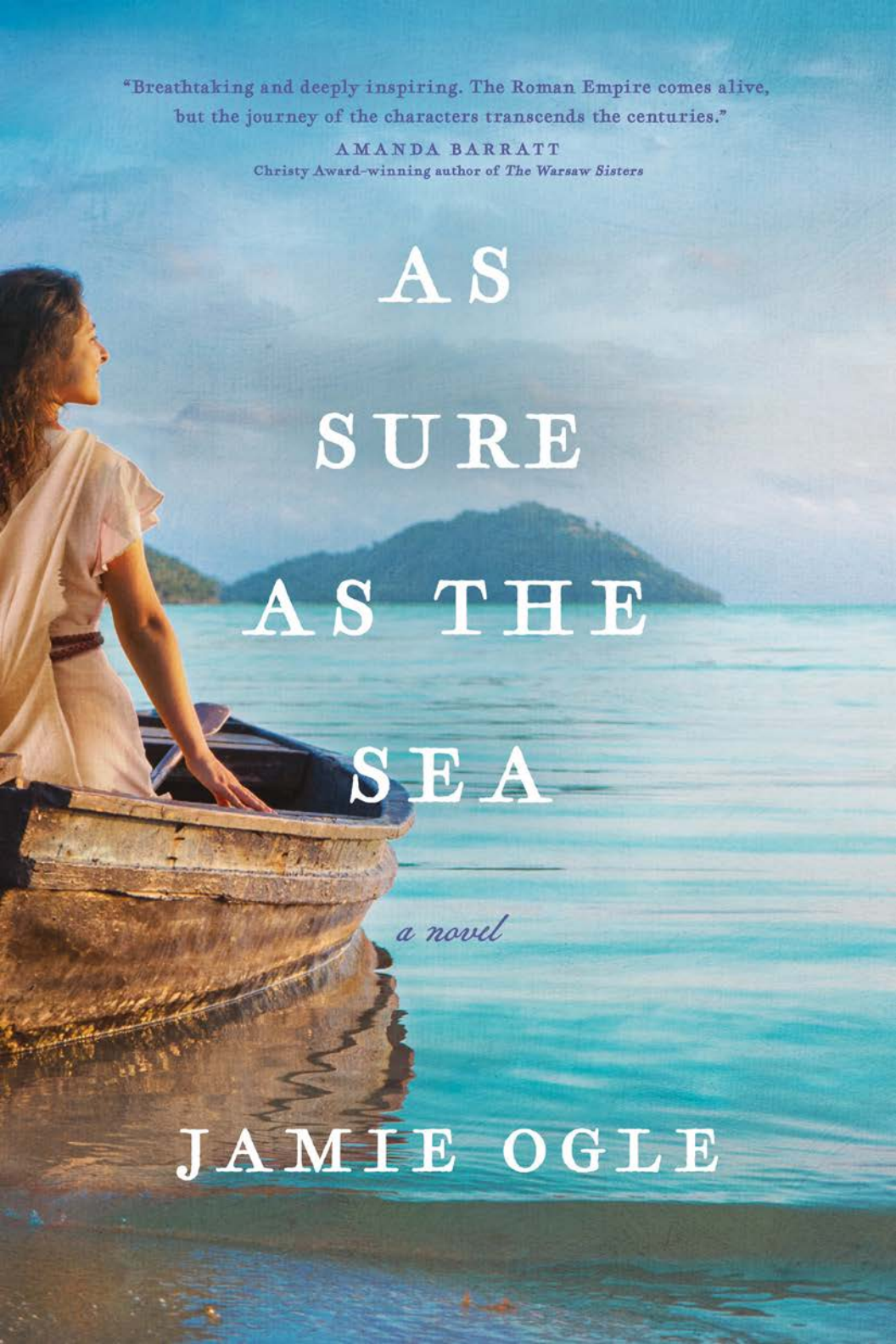


"Breathtaking and deeply inspiring. The Roman Empire comes alive,
but the journey of the characters transcends the centuries."

AMANDA BARRATT

Christy Award-winning author of *The Warsaw Sisters*



AS
SURE
AS THE
SEA

a novel

JAMIE OGLE

Praise for Jamie Ogle

In this powerful novel of unquenchable faith in the midst of persecution, Jamie Ogle excavates the stories of the legendary Nikolas of Myra. The turbulent Roman Empire comes alive through expert research and vibrant settings, but the journey of the characters transcends the centuries. Breathtaking and deeply inspiring, this is a story readers will hold in their hearts long beyond the last page.

AMANDA BARRATT, Christy Award–winning author of *The Warsaw Sisters*, on *As Sure as the Sea*

With rich detail and beautiful writing, Jamie Ogle has written my new favorite book of the year—*As Sure as the Sea*. The diving aspects and incredible depths to the story are a testament to this author’s brilliant research. I found myself craving to be a part of the early church (which was not an easy life!) and relating to Demi in profound ways. I devoured the book and yet, I didn’t want the story to end.

KIMBERLEY WOODHOUSE, bestselling and award-winning author of *A Hope Unburied*

A terrific read, rich in historical detail. With vividly drawn settings and complex characters, Jamie Ogle brings ancient Rome to life in this immersive and heart-wrenching story about early Christians who sacrificed everything for their faith. Fascinating from the first page to the last.

FRANCINE RIVERS, *New York Times* bestselling author, on *Of Love and Treason*

Jamie Ogle has breathed pulsing, throbbing life into third-century Rome in this profoundly moving episode in the saga of the early church. Fans of Amanda Barratt’s novels and Francine Rivers’s *Mark of the Lion* series will rejoice over this astounding debut. It’s one of the best novels I’ve read all year.

JOCELYN GREEN, Christy Award–winning author of *The Hudson Collection*, on *Of Love and Treason*

What a triumph! *Of Love and Treason* is for anyone who's ever wondered why bad things happen to good people. It offers no clichés or easy answers. . . . A tender love story and boost to faith!

MESU ANDREWS, author of *Brave*

Of Love and Treason overflows with heart and hope, courage and conviction. . . . [A] well-researched, timeless novel set in third-century Rome.

LAURA FRANTZ, Christy Award-winning author of
The Seamstress of Acadie

A beautifully wrought tale. . . . Jamie Ogle is a brilliant storyteller with original, heartfelt stories to tell!

JOANNA DAVIDSON POLITANO, author of
The Elusive Truth of Lily Temple, on *Of Love and Treason*

Ogle provides an illuminating peek at the lives of ordinary Romans. . . . A well-plotted story of politics and love set against the drama of the early Church.

HISTORICAL NOVEL SOCIETY on *Of Love and Treason*

AS
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JAMIE OGLE



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PART ONE

*“One gives freely, yet grows all the richer;
another withholds what he should give,
and only suffers want. Whoever brings
blessing will be enriched, and one who
waters will himself be watered.”*

PROVERBS 11:24-25

ONE

LYCIAN COAST

27 APRILIS, AD 310

Seawater closed over her head with a roar of bubbles in her ears. Twenty-year-old Demitria closed her eyes, body relaxing, heart slowing as the stone tied around her ankle pulled her to the depths of the Mediterranean.

The rush in her ears quieted to a dull hum, punctuated by the familiar clicks and burbles of the underwater world. She opened her eyes. Sunlight poured in brilliant shifting shafts through the cerulean water, illuminating the rainbow of coral and plants studding the rocky seafloor, fast coming into clear view. She scanned the bottom, eye snagging on a flash of red in the shadow of an outcropping. The coral stretched from the seabed like an arm, fingers splayed, reaching toward the light above.

There you are.

As the stone hit the bottom in a cloud of pale sand, Demi slipped her foot from the loop in the twine and kicked toward the coral, scanning the bottom as she swam. Air bubbled out between her lips.

She wiggled the little iron hammer from the mesh bag tied around her waist, fighting to stay near the seafloor as she made her way toward the coral. Prized for its mythical powers of protection and healing, and for the way the blood-red color didn't fade to white when harvested and cut into beads, a piece of coral this size might have fed her family for months. Too bad Mersad, self-proclaimed *jeweler of the seas* and their controlling employer, would get the lion's share of the profits.

Remorse flickered through her as she smashed the hammer against the coral, red fingers snapping free. Fish scattered from the destruction in flashes of silver and yellow. Demi tucked the coral into the bag and paused to run her fingers over the jagged space scarring the reef. What a waste. To destroy something so beautiful for the vanity of red jewelry. At least Mersad used divers to harvest only the red coral, instead of dredging the seafloor with weighted beams and destroying entire coral beds like other harvesters. Even so, she much preferred oyster hunting to coral collecting. Though not always reliable for pearls, at least oysters served the dual purpose of filling their bellies.

Curious fish darted around her legs, fins whispering against her skin.

A large shadow flickered over her. She looked up to see her brother, Theseus, swimming for the place where the reef swelled upward in a near vertical wall. Only a year younger, his strokes were sure, strong, and so much like their father's.

How had three years passed since Pater, Mitera, and Hediste had been so violently taken from them? Three years since she and Theseus had filled Pater's place as Mersad's best divers—for quarter pay. Not that either of them would dare complain. They were among the lucky few Christians to have jobs.

Lucky. A strange word to use in these times.

Six and a half years ago, after a seer had accused Christians of interfering in her attempts to read the future for Emperor Diocletian, the emperor had passed a series of edicts and demanded the other three rulers of the Roman tetrarchy enforce them in their own regions. The first edict had removed Christians from the military and public office; the second called for the imprisonment of church leaders and the burning of Christian literature and Scripture. The latest edicts had mandated all citizens of the empire to burn incense to the emperor and the chief god of the empire, the Sol Invictus. In return for declaring the emperor as lord, they'd receive a *libelli* token which enabled them to work, buy, and sell. Living without a *libelli* was difficult, and in some regions violently prohibited. Thousands upon thousands had lost their lives refusing to utter the words "*Kyrios Caesar.*" Caesar is lord.

Demi's lungs began to burn, and not from the lack of oxygen. Without libelli, she and Theseus shouldn't be able to hold jobs, but Mersad was no fool. He'd employed their father and knew they were the best divers in Myra and Andriake. He'd never asked to see their libelli, and if he suspected their beliefs, he kept it to himself. But he paid them less and less each season, as if he knew they wouldn't dare complain.

Theseus slipped toward a tangle of red growing in the shade of a rocky outcropping. A good find. She twisted and started to follow, her gaze catching on a fist-sized shell. Her heart beat a double rhythm. Coral be drowned if that oyster held a pearl. She released more air and curled downward, kicking toward the rough, dark prize.

She tried to wiggle the shell free. No good. Her hand slipped and a thin stream of pink swirled from one of her fingertips followed by a stinging burn. She took up the hammer once more and attacked the shell, jarring it free. The protest in her lungs turned insistent.

Tucking the oyster and hammer in the mesh bag alongside the coral, Demi arced upward. She glanced toward Theseus.

Bubbles from her own startled exhale clouded her vision but not the image of her brother, locked in a struggle with a thrashing moray eel. Longer than Theseus was tall, the moray's mottled brown-gray skin flashed in the light as it writhed, jerking her brother with it.

Let it go, Theseus.

And then she saw he couldn't.

The moray's ugly jaws were locked on her brother's wrist.

Blood swirled in the water around them. Her chest burned as she started for Theseus, black spots dotting the edges of her vision. She'd been down too long.

Demi straightened and made for the surface, panic and prayers jumbling in her mind. Theseus was sure to follow. *Surface at the first sign of trouble.* That was Pater's rule, pounded into their ears since childhood. She tilted her head back, spitting saltwater and sucking in a lungful of air as she emerged. Calm sea breezes ruffled the turquoise water, the sun shining white in a cloudless sky. Perfection masking the terror below.

She turned in a circle, scanning for her brother's dark head above the

waves. They'd hunted eels before while they dove. Dragged them out of the depths and wrestled them into the boat. Why did Theseus not surface now? Perhaps he couldn't.

Demi drew another breath and ducked under, working the tiny stone knife from her bag as she kicked downward. The roar of thrashing bodies deafened her ears.

Morays were not normally aggressive, but they wouldn't back down from a fight if they wanted one. She'd heard of another diver who'd been bitten on the ankle and the moray wouldn't—or couldn't—release him until after he'd killed it. A fight with a moray was often a fight to the death. But whose? A burst of fear and anger drove her forward. She'd lost too much already. Her parents, her sister, her future husband. A pang shot through her chest.

She would not lose her only brother too. Scrambling for her knife, she swung hard, striking toward the eel's slithering spine. The animal recoiled but didn't relinquish its grip on Theseus's arm. She slashed at it, but the jerking and thrashing made accuracy impossible. The flick of a dark tail struck her shoulder. She reached for it. Missed.

Pater's voice echoed in her ears again. *Surface at the first sign of trouble. Your life is worth more than all the coral or pearls.* Maybe to Pater. Not to Mersad.

Theseus beat at the bulging head as the eel writhed. Frustration mounted. Why wasn't he—her gaze lowered, and then she saw it. Her brother's foot caught in the coral.

Demi curled downward, fingers shaking and fumbling as she exchanged the stone knife for her coral hammer. Theseus jerked his foot, but it stuck fast, blood swirling in the water. She cracked the hammer against the coral, scattering a slow spray of shards. Free. She pivoted toward him, pointing upward.

Her hand drooped.

Theseus's arms and legs splayed, limp. Eyes open, face slack. He drifted away from her, the eel clamped to his wrist and curling beside him like a thick oily ribbon in the water.

Fear struck like a knife to her heart.

Not Theseus too, God. Grant me strength.

Ignoring the moray, she tucked an arm around Theseus's chest and kicked, propelling them upward, dragging the struggling eel behind. Her prayers and strokes grew stronger with the streaming light, blocked only slightly by the dark shadow of the boat. The rope ladder dangled over the side, frayed ends waving in the water. God be praised they'd remembered to leave it out this time.

Demi sputtered as her head emerged then ducked under once more, her free arm flailing for a grip on the boat. She kicked, bracing Theseus's back against her chest as she swam for the ladder, fighting the downward pull of the moray. Her muscles ached and shook.

Steady. Steady. Be strong. Theseus will not die. Not if I can help it.

She gripped the wet ropes, wrestling Theseus's head and one arm through the ladder before scrambling up herself. *In the event of an accident, secure, leverage, and pull.* Pater's voice ran through her mind, as clear as if he were standing beside her barking the emergency orders himself. She spread her feet, gripped the top of the ladder, and heaved with everything she had.

The eel roiled and fought.

The opposite side of the boat rose up behind her, threatening to capsize. With a final burst of strength, she rolled Theseus inside. Demi fell back, landing on baskets of coral fragments and oyster shells. The boat rocked from side to side as she scabbled through the mess, searching until her fingers gripped the extra knife. The eel curled and twisted. She threw herself on the slimy body, fighting it still as she hacked at the head. The eel never once loosed its grip on Theseus. It thrashed, even headless, as she flipped the tail to the end of the boat and dropped to her brother's side, the moray's jaws still clamped to his bleeding arm.

Lungs heaving, Demi flopped Theseus onto his back, dropping her whole weight against her fists on his wide chest.

"Wake up, Theseus." Her voice sounded strange to her ears. Strangled and choked. "Come on. Wake up!" She screamed the words into his still face, willing him to blink, willing his mouth to twist into that lazy grin of his that had won the heart of her best friend.

Theseus lay in a pool of brine and blood, droplets on his tanned chest gleaming like shards of red coral.

“Please, Theseus.” Her voice dropped to a whimper. She stared at him, as if by sheer will and determination she could make him draw a breath. “Don’t leave me here alone. Not you too.”

Demi pumped at his chest again, tears rolling down her cheeks, movements jerky and weakening as the seconds scraped by. Nothing.

Do not take Theseus too, God.

She couldn’t go through it again. The loss, the fear, the terrible . . . loneliness.

Take me too. Why won’t You take me too?

“Where are You?” The question came on quivering lips. “Do You hear us? Do You see Your people anymore?”

Theseus lay still.

God was silent. And she shouldn’t be surprised. Not after what she’d done.

Tears burned. She sank back against the side of the boat, chest aching, pressing the back of her hand against her teeth as sobs rolled up her throat.

Nydia would be devastated. Demi’s best friend had set her heart on marrying Theseus since she was twelve years old.

I’m sorry, Nydia. I’m so, so sorry.

Theseus lurched upright, spewing water. He twisted to his side, shoulders heaving as he vomited into the bottom of the boat.

Sobs strangled by a cry of relief, Demi scrambled to support him, unable to speak. Shells and coral fragments cut into her knees.

Theseus flopped back, staring at the sky. Coughing. Breathing. Alive.

Thank You.

Demi cradled his head, stroking the hair from his face like she’d done when he was hardly more than a baby and she, barely old enough to remember. His dark eyes connected with hers, then went distant as his body began to shake.