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ANICII MANLII SEVERINI BOETHII

PHILOSOPHIAE
CONSOLATIONIS

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THE CONSOLATION OF PHILOSOPHY

LIBER I

Carmina qui quondam studio florente peregi,
flebilis heu maestos cogor inire modos.
Ecce mihi lacerae dictant sribenda Camenae
et veris elegi fletibus ora rigant.

Has saltem nullus potuit pervincere terror,
ne nostrum comites prosequerentur iter.
Gloria felicitis olim viridisque iuventae
solantur maesti nunc mea fata senis.
Venit enim properata malis inopina senectus
et dolor aetatem iussit inesse suam.
Intempestivi funduntur vertice cani
et tremit effeto corpore laxa cutis.
Mors hominum felix quae se nec dulcibus annis
inserit et maestis saepe vocata venit.

Eheu quam surda miseros avertitur aure
et flentes oculos claudere saeva negat.
Dum levibus male fida bonis fortuna faveret,
paene caput tristis merserat hora meum.

BOOK 1

A Visitor in Prison

I, who once wrote songs with joyful eagerness,
 alas, am now forced to sing sad verses with weeping.¹

Behold, the Muses,² torn with grief, bid me write.

And so these mournful verses wet my cheeks with
 honest tears.

No terror can discourage these ladies, at least,
 from coming as my companions on this journey.

They once were the glory of my green and happy youth,
 now in my sad old age they comfort me.³

For age has come unexpected, hastened by evils,
 and sorrow has added her years to mine.

My hair is too soon white upon my head
 and my skin hangs loose on my trembling body.

Happy is death when it thrusts itself upon us not in the
 sweet years,

but comes instead to those wretches who call for it
 often.

Oh woe! It turns away with a deaf ear from the miserable
 and cruelly refuses to close my weeping eyes.

Once treacherous Fortune⁴ favored me with passing joys,
 then the bitter hour came that bowed my head.

BOOK 1

Nunc quia fallacem mutavit nubila vultum,
protrahit ingratas impia vita moras.
Quid me felicem totiens iactastis amici?
Qui cecidit, stabili non erat ille gradu.

Haec dum mecum tacitus ipse reputarem quæ-
rimoniamque lacrimabilem stili officio signarem,
adstitisse mihi supra verticem visa est mulier rever-
endi admodum vultus, oculis ardentibus et ultra
communem hominum valentiam perspicacibus co-
lore vivido atque inexhausti vigoris, quamvis ita ævi
plena foret ut nullo modo nostrae crederetur ætatis,
statura discretionis ambiguae. Nam nunc quidem ad
communem sese hominum mensuram cohibebat,
nunc vero pulsare caelum summi verticis cacumine
videbatur; quæ cum altius caput extulisset, ipsum
etiam caelum penetrabat respicientiumque homi-
num frustrabatur intuitum.

Vestes erant tenuissimis filis subtili artificio, in-
dissolubili materia perfectæ quas, uti post eadem
prodente cognovi, suis manibus ipsa texuerat. Qua-
rum speciem, veluti fumosas imagines solet, caligo
quaedam neglectæ vetustatis obduxerat. Harum in
extrema margine ·Π· Graecum, in supremo vero ·Θ·,
legebatur intextum. Atque inter utrasque litteras in
scalarum modum gradus quidam insigniti videban-
tur quibus ab inferiore ad superius elementum. esset

A VISITOR IN PRISON

Now in darkness she has changed her deceitful face,
so that my cursed life drags on with unwelcome days.
Why, my friends, did you so often call me blessed?
The one who fell was never on solid ground.

While I was silently thinking these things to myself and writing down this tearful lament with the help of my pen, there seemed to stand above my head a woman, awe-inspiring in her appearance. Her eyes burned with fire and penetrated far beyond what is common for mortals. She had a vivid color and inexhaustible strength, yet she seemed so ancient I could scarcely believe she belonged to our age. Her height was hard to say, for sometimes she seemed to confine herself within ordinary human measure, but at other times she seemed to touch the sky with the top of her head. Then, when she lifted herself higher still, she seemed to break through the heavens and disappear beyond the sight of mortals.

Her clothing was made of the most delicate, imperishable material woven with great skill—I later learned, for she told me, that she had made it with her own hands. But a dark film from long neglect covered her clothes, as with smoky images.⁵ On the bottom hem was woven the Greek letter *Pi*, while on the top of the garment was a *Theta*. Between the two letters was a ladder of steps rising from the lower to the higher, as if one might climb it.⁶ This

BOOK 1

ascensus. Eandem tamen vestem violentorum quorundam sciderant manus et particulas quas quisque potuit abstulerant. Et dextera quidem eius libellos, sceptrum vero sinistra gestabat.

Quae ubi poeticas Musas vidit nostro adsistentes toro fletibusque meis verba dictantes, commota paulisper ac torvis inflammata luminibus.

“Quis,” inquit, “has scenicas meretriculas ad hunc aegrum permisit accedere quae dolores eius non modo nullis remediis foverent, verum dulcibus insuper alerent venenis? Hae sunt enim quae infructuosus affectuum spinis uberem fructibus rationis segetem necant hominumque mentes assuefaciunt morbo, non liberant. At si quem profanum, uti vulgo solitum vobis, blanditiae vestrae detraherent, minus moleste ferendum putarem; nihil quippe in eo nostrae operae laederentur. Hunc vero Eleaticis atque Academicis studiis innutritum? Sed abite potius Sirenes usque in exitium dulces measque eum Musis curandum sanandumque relinquite.”

His ille chorus increpitus deiecit humi maestior vultum confessusque rubore verecundiam limen tristis excessit. At ego cuius acies lacrimis mersa caligaret nec dinoscere possem quaenam haec esset mulier tam imperiosae auctoritatis, obstipui visuque in terram defixo quidnam deinceps esset actura,

A VISITOR IN PRISON

same garment had been torn by the hands of violent men who each had carried off a scrap of cloth as they were able. In her right hand the lady carried books, but in her left she bore a scepter.

When she saw the Muses of poetry standing by my bed dictating words to accompany my tears, she grew angry for a moment and her eyes flashed with raging fire.

“Who,” she said, “allowed these theatrical whores to visit this sick man? Not only have they no remedies for his pains, but their sweet poisons make it worse! These are the women who choke off the rich fruit of reason with barren thorns of emotion. They accustom the minds of mortals to sickness rather than curing them. If you were seducing some ordinary man with your empty lies as you usually do, it wouldn’t matter so much to me. You wouldn’t be hindering my work so much then. But this man was nourished on the teachings of Parmenides and Plato!⁷ Get out of here now, you Sirens,⁸ you who so sweetly bring destruction to mortals! Leave him for *my* Muses to care for and make whole.”

Shamed by her words, they hung their heads while their blushes confirmed the truth. In sorrow then they departed my room. But I—whose vision was so blinded by tears that I couldn’t recognize this woman of such commanding authority—was struck dumb and lowered my eyes to the ground,

BOOK 1

expectare tacitus coepi. Tum illa propius accedens in extrema lectuli mei parte consedit meumque intuens vultum luctu gravem atque in humum maerore deiectum his versibus de nostrae mentis perturbatione conquesta est.

“Sed medicinae,” inquit, “tempus est quam querelae.”

Tum vero totis in me intenta luminibus:

“Tunc ille es,” ait, “qui nostro quondam lacte nutritus nostris educatus alimentis in virilis animi robur evaseras? Atqui talia contuleramus arma quae nisi prior abiecisses, invicta te firmitate tuerentur. Agnoscisne me? Quid taces? Pudore an stupore siluisti? Mallem pudore, sed te, ut video, stupor oppressit.”

Cumque me non modo tacitum sed elinguem prorsus mutumque vidisset, admovit pectori meo leniter manum et: “Nihil,” inquit, “pericli est; lethargum patitur communem inlusarum mentium morbum. Sui paulisper oblitus est; recordabitur facile, si quidem nos ante cognoverit. Quod ut possit,

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waiting in silence for what she would do next. She came closer and sat on the edge of my bed. Then she gazed at my face, so worn with grief and cast down to the earth in sorrow. Sadly she began to mourn the confusion of my mind.

Do You Remember Me?

“But now is time for medicine,” she said, “not complaining.”

Then looking at me intently with her eyes, she said:

“Are you that man who once was nursed on my milk and nourished with my food until you grew into the full strength of your mind? And didn’t I give you such weapons as would protect you even now, unconquered and steadfast, if you hadn’t thrown them all away? Don’t you recognize me? Why are you silent? Is it from shame or confusion? I would prefer it were shame, but, as I see now, it’s confusion.”

And when she saw that I was not only silent but completely speechless and unable to talk, she gently placed her hand on my chest and said: “There is no real danger here. He suffers only from forgetfulness, a common disease of deceived minds. He has forgotten for a little while who he is. He will

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paulisper lumina eius mortalium rerum nube caligantia tergamus.”

Haec dixit oculosque meos fletibus undantes contracta in rugam veste siccavit.

Haud aliter tristitiae nebulis dissolutis hausi caelum et ad cognoscendam medicantis faciem mentem recepi. Itaque ubi in eam deduxi oculos intuitumque defixi, respicio nutricem meam cuius ab adolescentia laribus obversatus fueram Philosophiam.

“Et quid,” inquam, “tu in has exilii nostri solitudines, o omnium magistra virtutum, supero cardine delapsa venisti? An ut tu quoque mecum rea falsis criminationibus agiteris?”

“An,” inquit illa, “te alumne desererem nec sarcinam quam mei nominis invidia sustulisti, communicate tecum labore partirer? Atqui Philosophiae fas non erat incommittatam relinquere iter innocentis; meam scilicet criminationem vererer et quasi novum aliquid acciderit, perhorrescerem? Nunc enim primum censes apud improbos mores lacescitam periculis esse sapientiam? Nonne apud

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remember⁹ easily enough, for he knew me once before. And so that he might remember, let's clear away for a time that blinding cloud of worldly cares from his eyes."¹⁰

Saying this, she gathered together the folds of her robe and wiped away the tears filling my eyes.

Recognition at Last

In this same way the clouds of my misery were scattered and I drank in the light. Then my memory returned enough to recognize the face of the one who healed me. When I turned my eyes to her and looked closely, I saw my nurse in whose home I had dwelled since my youth—Philosophy.

"Why," I said, "have you, teacher of all virtues, come down from the heights of heaven to my lonely place of exile? Are you here to suffer false accusations along with me?"

"Would I desert you, my child?" she replied. "Wouldn't I share with you this labor and burden you bear because of the hatred of my name? Is it right that Philosophy abandon an innocent man to walk his path alone? Did you really believe I would fear an accusation against me, as if that were something new? Did you think this was the first time wisdom has been threatened with danger from those

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veteres quoque ante nostri Platonis aetatem magnum saepe certamen cum stultitiae temeritate certavimus eodemque superstite praeceptor eius Socrates iniustae victoriam mortis me adstante promeruit? Cuius hereditatem cum deinceps Epicureum vulgus ac Stoicum ceterique pro sua quisque parte raptum ire molirentur meque reclamantem renitentemque velut in partem praedae traherent, vestem quam meis texueram manibus, disciderunt abreptisque ab ea panniculis totam me sibi cessisse credentes abiere. In quibus quoniam quaedam nostri habitus vestigia videbantur, meos esse familiares inprudencia rata nonnullus eorum profanae multitudinis errore pervertit.

Quod si nec Anaxagorae fugam nec Socratis venenum nec Zenonis tormenta quoniam sunt peregrina novisti, at Canios, at Senecas, at Soranos quorum nec pervetusta nec incelebris memoria est, scire potuisti. Quos nihil aliud in cladem detraxit nisi quod nostris moribus instituti studiis improborum dissimillimi videbantur. Itaque nihil est quod admirere, si in hoc vitae salo circumflantibus agitemur procellis, quibus hoc maxime propositum est pessimi displicere. Quorum quidem tametsi est numerosus exercitus, spernendus tamen est, quoniam nullo duce regitur, sed errore tantum temere

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of wicked ways? Didn't I in ancient days, before the time of my beloved Plato, often join in fierce battle against arrogant stupidity? And although Plato survived, his teacher Socrates won the victory of an unjust death while I stood by his side.¹¹ Afterward the crowds of Epicureans and Stoics¹² and the rest each in their own way tried to seize his legacy for themselves and so carried me away shouting and struggling as if I were part of their plunder. They tore at parts of the robe I had woven with my own hands, thinking as they went away that they had somehow obtained all there was of me. Since they were seen with some little scraps of my clothing, they were foolishly thought to be my companions and many of them were corrupted by the errors of the ignorant mob.

"But even if you don't know about the flight of Anaxagoras, the poisoning of Socrates, or the torture of Zeno—they did happen in foreign lands after all—surely you can recall those like Canius, Seneca, and Soranus whose memory is neither ancient nor obscure.¹³ The only reason they died was that they were devoted to my cause and were seen as utterly disinterested in the ways of evil. And so you shouldn't be surprised if we are tossed about on the seas of this life by storms blowing from all directions when our greatest goal is to displease wicked men. For even if their army is numerous,

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ac passim lymphante raptatur. Qui si quando contra nos aciem struens valentior incubuerit, nostra quidem dux copias suas in arcem contrahit, illi vero circa diripiendas inutiles sarcinulas occupantur. At nos desuper inridemus vilissima rerum quaeque rapientes securi totius furiosi tumultus eoque vallo muniti quo grassanti stultitiae adspirare fas non sit.

“Sentisne,” inquit, “haec atque animo inlabuntur tuo, an ὄνος λύρας?¹⁴ Quid fles, quid lacrimis manas? Ἐξαύδα, μὴ κεῖθε νόϕ. Si operam medicantis exspectas, oportet vulnus detegas.”

Tum ego collecto in vires animo: “Anne adhuc eget admonitione nec per se satis eminet fortunae in nos saevientis asperitas? Nihilne te ipsa loci facies movet? Haecine est bibliotheca, quam certissimam tibi sedem nostris in laribus ipsa delegeras? In qua mecum saepe residens de humanarum divinarumque rerum scientia disserebas? Talis habitus talisque vultus erat, cum tecum naturae secreta rimarer,

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we should hold them in contempt, for they are led by no general, rushing here and there as they are driven about by foolish error. And if ever their army attacks us with all their might, our leader withdraws her forces into her own citadel, leaving the enemy to busy themselves plundering our useless baggage. We look down on them and laugh while they grab at everything of least value, while we are safe behind a wall that cannot be scaled by such raging stupidity.

The Complaints of Boethius

“Do you understand what I’m saying to you?” she asked. “Have my words made their way into your head? Or are you like the donkey hearing a lyre?¹⁵ Why are you crying? Why are your cheeks covered with tears? As Homer says, ‘Speak up, don’t hide what’s on your mind.’¹⁶ If you want a doctor to treat you, you first must uncover your wound.”

So I gathered up my courage to its full strength and spoke to her: “Do I really need to explain to you even now how savage the attack of Fortune has been against me? Isn’t the cause of my pain obvious to you? Does this look like the library in my house which you yourself chose as your constant dwelling place? Isn’t that where you would sit with me and talk about the knowledge of things both human and

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cum mihi siderum vias radio describeres, cum mores nostros totiusque vitae rationem ad caelestis ordinis exempla formares? Haecine praemia referimus tibi obsequentes?

“Atqui tu hanc sententiam Platonis ore sanxisti: beatas fore res publicas, si eas vel studiosi sapientiae regerent vel earum rectores studere sapientiae contigisset. Tu eiusdem viri ore hanc sapientibus capessendae rei publicae necessariam causam esse monuisti, ne improbis flagitiosisque civibus urbium relictis gubernacula pestem bonis ac perniciem ferrent.

“Hanc igitur auctoritatem secutus quod a te inter secreta otia didiceram transferre in actum publicae administrationis optavi. Tu mihi et qui te sapientium mentibus inseruit deus conscii nullum me ad magistratum nisi commune bonorum omnium studium detulisse. Inde cum improbis graves inexorabilesque discordiae et quod conscientiae libertas habet, pro tuendo iure spreto potentiorum semper offensio.

“Quotiens ego Conigastum in inbecilli cuiusque fortunas impetum facientem obviis excepi, quotiens

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divine? Did my clothes or face look like this when I used to probe the secrets of nature with you or when you traced the path of the stars for me with your measuring rod or when you shaped my very reasoning and the course of my whole life according to the heavenly order? Is *this* how you reward those who follow you?

“Aren’t you the one who decreed through the words of Plato that blessed is the state ruled by philosophers or by rulers who love wisdom?¹⁷ You warned us through the words of that same man that this is why those devoted to wisdom should enter into political life—to prevent power from falling into the hands of wicked and unprincipled men and so bring ruin and disaster on the good.

“That is why, following your own command, I chose to devote myself to public service and make use of what I learned from you during our quiet hours together. You and the God who planted you in the minds of the wise are my witnesses that I had no other motivation for entering political life than a desire to benefit all good people. But because of this I have faced bitter and relentless conflict with the wicked. And because of my freedom of conscience and upholding of the law, I have faced the constant anger of those more powerful than me.

“How many times did I confront Conigastus when he was trying to steal the wealth of some

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Trigguillam regiae praepositum domus ab incepta, perpetrata iam prorsus iniuria deieci, quotiens miseros quos infinitis calumniis impunita barbarorum semper avaritia vexabat, obiecta periculis auctoritate protexi! Numquam me ab iure ad iniuriam quisquam detraxit.

“Provincialium fortunas tum privatis rapinis tum publicis vectigalibus pessumdari non aliter quam qui patiebantur indolui. Cum acerbae famis tempore gravis atque inexplicabilis indicta coemptio prof ligatura inopia Campaniam provinciam videretur, certamen adversum praefectum praetorii communis commodi ratione suscepi, rege cognoscente contendendi et ne coemptio exigeretur, evici.

“Paulinum consularem virum cuius opes Palatinae canes iam spe atque ambitione devorassent, ab ipsis hiantium faucibus traxi. Ne Albinum consularem virum praeiudicatae accusationis poena corripere, odiis me Cypriani delatoris opposui.

“Satisne in me magnas videor exacerbasse discordias? Sed esse apud ceteros tutior debui qui mihi

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powerless man? How often did I stop Trigguilla, who was in charge of the king's household, when he planned to commit some injustice—or even when he already had?¹⁸ How often did I protect some unfortunate soul from the greed of the barbarians (who were never punished) even though using my authority put me in danger? Never has anyone turned me away from justice toward injustice.

“When the estates of families in the provinces were devastated first by greedy individuals and then by state taxation, I grieved as much as those who suffered these injustices. When in a time of terrible famine, a ruinous and indefensible forced sale of grain¹⁹ was imposed on Campania that would have pushed the province into destitution, I took up the fight against the Praetorian prefect for the good of all. I argued before the king himself against the enforcement of this edict—and I won.²⁰

“I rescued the former consul Paulinus from the very jaws of the palace dogs who would have devoured him, as they had already devoured his wealth in their ambitious greed. And then to keep Albinus, also a former consul, safe from the judgment of those who would have condemned him without trial, I earned the hatred of his accuser Cyprian.²¹

“Doesn't it seem like I have stirred up enough raging anger against myself? But shouldn't I in doing so have made myself more secure among

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amore iustitiae nihil apud aulicos quo magis essem tutior reservavi.

“Quibus autem deferentibus perculsi sumus? Quorum Basilius olim regio ministerio depulsus in delationem nostri nominis alieni aeris necessitate compulsus est. Opilionem vero atque Gaudentium cum ob innumeras multiplicesque fraudes ire in exilium regia censura decrevisset cumque illi parere nolentes sacrarum sese aedium defensione tuerentur compertumque id regi foret, edixit: uti ni intra praescriptum diem Ravenna urbe decederent, notas insigniti frontibus pellerentur. Quid huic severitati posse astrui videtur? Atqui in eo die deferentibus eisdem nominis nostri delatio suscepta est. Quid igitur? Nostraene artes ita meruerunt? An illos accusatores iustos fecit praemissa damnatio? Itane nihil fortunam puduit si minus accusatae innocentiae, at accusantium vilitatis?

“At cuius criminis arguimur summam quaeris? Senatum dicimur salvum esse voluisse. Modum desideras? Delatorem ne documenta deferret quibus senatum maiestatis reum faceret impedisse criminamur.

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those outside the royal court²² since my love of justice caused me to show no favor to those at court to make myself safer there?

“Who are the informers then who have brought me low? One was Basilius, a man previously dismissed from royal service, who was forced to denounce me because of his debts. Then there were Opilio and Gaudentius.²³ A decree had gone out from the king sentencing them both to exile for their countless frauds, but they sought sanctuary in a holy temple.²⁴ When the king found out, he ordered them to leave Ravenna before the appointed day or else have brands burned into their foreheads and then be driven from the city. What could be a harsher acknowledgment of their guilt than that? Yet on that very day those same men made an accusation against me and their denunciation was accepted. Tell me, did my actions merit that? Did my prearranged conviction somehow turn these accusers into just men? Shouldn’t Fortune have been ashamed, if not because an innocent man was accused then at least because the accusers were so vile?

“Do you want to know what the heart of the accusation against me is? It’s that I desired the safety of the Senate. And do you want to know how I did that? By trying to prevent an informer from bringing forward documents claiming the Senate was guilty of treason.

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“Quid igitur, o magistra, censes? Infitiabimur crimen, ne tibi pudor simus? At volui nec umquam velle desistam. Fatebimur? Sed impediendi delatoris opera cessavit. An optasse illius ordinis salutem nefas vocabo? Ille quidem suis de me decretis, uti hoc nefas esset, effecerat. Sed sibi semper mentiens imprudentia rerum merita non potest inmutare nec mihi Socratico decreto fas esse arbitror vel occulisse veritatem vel concessisse mendacium. Verum id quoquo modo sit, tuo sapientiumque iudicio aestimandum relinquo. Cuius rei seriem atque veritatem, ne latere posteros queat, stilo etiam memoriaeque mandavi.

“Nam de compositis falso litteris quibus libertatem arguor sperasse Romanam quid attinet dicere? Quarum fraus aperta patuisset, si nobis ipsorum confessione delatorum, quod in omnibus negotiis maximas vires habet, uti licuisset. Nam quae sperari reliqua libertas potest? Atque utinam posset ulla! Respondissem Canii verbo, qui cum a Gaio Caesare Germanici filio conscius contra se factae coniurationis fuisse diceretur: ‘Si ego,’ inquit, ‘scissem, tu nescisses.’

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“And so, my teacher, what do you think? Should I deny the charge to avoid causing you shame? But I *did* want the Senate to be safe and I always will. Should I confess then? But the effort to stop the informer has ended. Shall I say instead it was wrong to want to protect the Senate? Indeed, the Senate by its own decree against me has declared it wrong.²⁵ But such foolishness, always lying to itself, cannot change the merit of anything. I must follow the teaching of Socrates to neither hide the truth nor be a party to falsehood.²⁶ But I leave it to your judgment and that of other wise people to decide what is right. I have recorded with my pen the truth of this whole matter and the sequence of events so that they might be remembered and not forgotten by future generations.

“And concerning those false letters in which I supposedly argued for the freedom of the Roman people, what more is there to say? It would have been obvious they were frauds if I had been allowed to use the confessions of my accusers—always the most powerful defense in such matters. But what liberty can be hoped for now? How I wish there were some hope. If so I would have responded using the same words as Canius, who when Caligula accused him of participating in a plot against him said, ‘If *I* had known about it, *you* would not.’

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“Qua in re non ita sensus nostros maeror hebetavit ut impios scelerata contra virtutem querar molitos, sed quae speraverint effecisse vehementer admiror. Nam deteriora velle nostri fuerit fortasse defectus, posse contra innocentiam, quae sceleratus quisque conceperit inspectante deo, monstri simile est. Unde haud iniuria tuorum quidam familiarium quaesivit: ‘Si quidem deus,’ inquit, ‘est, unde mala? Bona vero unde, si non est?’

“Sed fas fuerit nefarios homines qui bonorum omnium totiusque senatus sanguinem petunt, nos etiam quos propugnare bonis senatuique viderant, perditum ire voluisse. Sed num idem de patribus quoque merebamus? Meministi, ut opinor, quoniam me dicturum quid facturumve praesens semper ipsa dirigebas, meministi inquam, Veronae cum rex avidus exitii communis maiestatis crimen in Albinum delatae ad cunctum senatus ordinem transferre moliretur, universi innocentiam senatus quanta mei periculi securitate defenderim. Scis me haec et vera proferre et in nulla umquam mei laude iactasse. Minuit enim quodam modo se probantis conscientiae secretum, quotiens ostentando quid factum recipit famae pretium.

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“In all this my wits are not so dulled by grief that I merely whine about wicked men seeking to do evil deeds against the good. What astounds me is that they actually get what they wish for. We may grant that it’s a common human failing to have evil desires, but for every evil man to be able to carry out his plans against the innocent while God looks on is simply monstrous. It’s not without reason that one of your followers wondered: ‘If God exists, where does evil come from? But then, where does good come from if he doesn’t?’²⁷

“It is understandable if wicked men who seek the blood of all good people and the Senate should seek to destroy me too, since they saw me fighting for good men and for the Senate. But surely I didn’t deserve the same treatment from the senators themselves! You’ll remember, I think—since you were always by my side directing me whenever I was about to say or do anything—again I say you’ll remember that when at Verona²⁸ the king, who was eager to destroy the whole Senate, tried to expand the charge of treason against Albinus to include all the senators, I defended the innocence of the whole Senate with no thought for my own safety. You know that I am speaking the truth, since in no way do I ever try to praise myself. For whenever someone boasts of what he did and earns some reward, by that much

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“Sed innocentiam nostram quis exceperit eventus vides; pro verae virtutis praemiis falsi sceleris poenas subimus. Et cuius umquam facinoris manifesta confessio ita iudices habuit in severitate concordes ut non aliquos vel ipse ingenii error humani vel fortunae condicio cunctis mortalibus incerta submitteret? Si inflammare sacras aedes voluisse, si sacerdotes impio iugulare gladio, si bonis omnibus necem struxisse diceremur, praesentem tamen sententia, confessum tamen convictumve punisset. Nunc quingentis fere passuum milibus procul muti atque indefensi ob studium propensius in senatum morti proscriptionique damnamur. O meritos de simili crimine neminem posse convinci!

“Cuius dignitatem reatus ipsi etiam qui detulere viderunt, quam uti alicuius sceleris admixtione fuscarent, ob ambitum dignitatis sacrilegio me conscientiam polluisse mentiti sunt. Atqui et tu insita nobis omnem rerum mortalium cupidinem de nostri animi sede pellebas et sub tuis oculis sacrilegio locum esse fas non erat. Instillabas enim auribus cogitationibusque cotidie meis Pythagoricum illud:

A VISITOR IN PRISON

in praising himself he diminishes the hidden benefits to his conscience.

“But now you see the result of my innocence. Instead of a reward for true virtue, I am punished for a crime I didn’t commit. And in what sort of crime did even a full confession ever merit judges so united in their severity that none of them could be swayed by the fallibility of human nature or by the unpredictability of Fortune common to all mortals? If I had been accused of burning down holy temples or slitting the throats of priests with an unholy sword or plotting the slaughter of all good citizens, I would have at least been allowed to be present at my sentencing after I had confessed or been convicted. But here I am nearly five hundred miles away,²⁹ silenced and unable to defend myself, condemned to death and my property confiscated, all for being too zealous in my support of the Senate. How they richly deserve that no one else will ever be convicted on a similar charge!

“Even those who invented this accusation could see the dignity it gave me, and so to blacken my standing they lyingly added the wicked claim that in my ambition for high office I had defiled myself by indulging in sorcery.³⁰ But you yourself dwell deep within my spirit and have driven out any desire for earthly things. Under your gaze there is certainly no place for unholy arts. For you instilled every day

BOOK 1

ἔπου θεῶ. Nec conveniebat vilissimorum me spirituum praesidia captare quem tu in hanc excellentiam componebas ut consimilem deo faceres. Praeterea penetral innocens domus, honestissimorum coetus amicorum, socer etiam sanctus et aequae ac tu ipsa reverendus ab omni nos huius criminis suspitione defendunt.

“Sed, o nefas, illi vero de te tanti criminis fidem capiunt atque hoc ipso videbimur affines fuisse maleficio, quod tuis inbuti disciplinis, tuis instituti moribus sumus. Ita non est satis nihil mihi tuam profuisse reverentiam, nisi ultro tu mea potius offensione lacereris.

“At vero hic etiam nostris malis cumulus accedit, quod existimatio plurimorum non rerum merita sed fortunae spectat eventum eaque tantum iudicat esse provisa quae felicitas commendaverit. Quo fit ut existimatio bona prima omnium deserat infelices. Qui nunc populi rumores, quam dissonae multiplicesque sententiae, piget reminisci. Hoc tantum dixerim ultimam esse adversae fortunae sarcinam, quod dum miseris aliquod crimen affingitur, quae perferunt meruisse creduntur. Et ego quidem bonis omnibus pulsus, dignitatibus exutus,