

August 23, A.D. 79

Lupercus does not have school and I do not have sewing lessons with Mamma, so we are taking Evelina with us to the port.

Stepping out into the street, we start our journey. Though the sun has just risen, the streets are alive. Young children play on the streets outside of their house; girls with dolls and boys with wooden toys. Dogs bark at women bustling around to go early market shopping.

Crossing the town, the enticing aroma of fresh-baked bread greets us. Messages spattered on the city walls advertise the upcoming gladiator match.

Finally we reach the port. It smells fishy and the sea breeze blows my long brown hair back. The movement here creates a free and invigorating spirit. Lupercus, Evelina, and I smile as we look from stand to stand at what the vendors are selling. Once we tour the port we walk back home.

Though I have lived here all my life, I cannot stop admiring the beauty of our home. Before we reach the house, we walk through an angelic stone archway covered with white Cyprus vine flowers. The entire house is surrounded by a magnificent garden, except for the stepping stone entrance. Walking towards the house, we see Mamma planting lilies - usually slave work.

Mamma says her flowers are too precious for her to allow slaves to touch them.

After lunch, Lupercus and I walk around the garden discussing many things, mostly the sky, while Evelina naps. It is not very interesting.

Finally, after a dinner of fish and figs, my family sits under the stars.

“Mamma,” I ask, “will you love me forever?”

“Yes, Neiva, forever and ever,” Mamma replies.

“Will you always be there for me?”

“Yes, *cara mia*, but if I am not, promise me this: take care of Evelina and stay with Lupercus.”

"I promise," I vow. An easy promise to make because despite what I just heard, I know Mamma will never leave me.

August 24, A.D. 79

Something is wrong with Evelina. She is scared; I can tell. Following me wherever I go, she keeps pulling my hand saying that something is wrong. Around noon, I get so irritated that I take her outside. I point at the sky and say, "Look, Evelina. The sun is shining brightly. What could go wrong today?"

Sitting next to Evelina under our fig tree, I stroke her hair, consoling her. Suddenly we hear a deafening roar. I whip around to see what had caused it, and find my answer when I look in the sky. A huge, 9-mile long cloud that resembles an upside down tree bursting from Mt. Vesuvius extends across the sky. The sky starts raining hot ash and lightweight stone.

"Mamma! Papa! Lupercus!" I yell, alarmed.

They all rush out of the house. The moment Mamma and Papa see the cloud, Papa yells, "Run, children! Lupercus, lead them to the port and do not stop for anything! Do not worry about us!"

"Neiva! Come!" With that, Lupercus grabs Evelina and starts running.

I dash behind them, with Mamma and Papa hot on my heels, through streets that were so calm and cheerful just yesterday. Everyone is screaming in terror, pushing and shoving as they run toward safety - the port.

The day is growing darker by the minute. I can barely see Lupercus. We keep running through the growing night when I hear an archway crash to the ground and people shrieking. I turn to see what happened, but Lupercus shouts for me to keep running. I do what he says.

The port is no longer bright and free. The frightened people of Pompeii crowd the beach. It is

chaotic; people are running around looking and crying for their lost pets and family members.

When I hear their cries I grab Lupercus's arm and ask, "Where are Mamma and Papa?" He does not respond, so I just shake his arm harder. "Where are they?"

"They're dead!" he spits. "They're dead and not coming back!" Evelina is crying in Lupercus's arms.

I refuse to believe this.

"You're lying! You're lying!" I shout. In desperation, I call, "Mamma, Papa!" But I cannot avoid the truth for long and join the city's crying.

"How could you leave me?" I sob, thinking about Mamma. "You said you would love me forever!"

The sky is black and the ground is shaking. After what seems like an eternity of misery,

Lupercus yells, "Run! Follow me, Neiva! I see ships that will bring us to safety!" I run behind Lupercus, who is still carrying Evelina.

"Sir! Sir!" Lupercus cries to the captain of the ship. "Do you have any more room on this ship?"

"Only got room for one more adult or two young children!" the captain yells over the screams of the people.

Lupercus gives me a hard look. I realize he wants to put Evelina and me on the ship to safety, but leave himself here. "No, Lupercus! If you stay, we all stay!" I say.

"Neiva, board this ship and when you reach safety, take good care to Evelina," Lupercus says, handing me our younger sister and pushing us onto the boat.

"No, wait-" I start, but I never finish. I am interrupted by an explosion that deafened me in one ear - red hot liquid bursting from Mt. Vesuvius.

“The ship is leaving the dock!” the captain declares. We start moving away from the port and my brother.

“Lupercus!” I yell. There is no reply. “Lupercus!” I yell louder. I still hear nothing.

August 26, A.D. 79

We have reached safety in Naples. Evelina and I are now orphans in a city full of strangers. I will never forget the day Vesuvius erupted, but Evelina will never remember it. Everyone is talking about the huge explosion of Vesuvius, but they will never really understand. One day when Evelina is older, I will tell her about the day Mt. Vesuvius erupted - the day we lost everything.

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