# Escape from Vesuvius



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PM+

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## Chapter 1

# Marcus's Journal



***Pompeii***
***18 August***

*Cronus, my tutor, was not pleased with my essay on Julius Caesar. He wants me to practise writing, so he suggested that I begin a journal. He has no desire, however, to read this journal. It is simply to be a record of my thoughts and observations, written as though I were speaking to a friend.*

*I will begin by telling you something about myself. My name is Marcus Gracchus, and I am thirteen. My father is Lucius Gracchus, an oil merchant. My mother is the Lady Octavia Claudia, and I have a younger sister, Lucia. I also have a dog called Ixion.*

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*We live in a large house on a hill overlooking the Bay of Naples, and have ten slaves (including Cronus). My father's cargo ship is anchored in the bay, and we have a small boat, which we use for short trips.*

*My best friend is Chiro. He is fourteen, and an expert fisherman. Chiro lives farther along the coast, in Herculaneum. Just beyond Herculaneum lies Mount Vesuvius. Father owns many of the olive groves on the slopes of Vesuvius. He is going to inspect them tomorrow. As usual, I will go with him, and I'm allowed to take Ixion. If Chiro isn't busy fishing, perhaps we will be able to spend some time together.*



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## Chapter 2

# Warning Signs



*Pompeii*
*19 August*

*We were lucky – by the time we reached Herculaneum, Chiro already had a full haul of fish, so he was free for the afternoon.*

*Chiro, Ixion and I accompanied Father to the olive groves, then set off to explore the mountainside.*

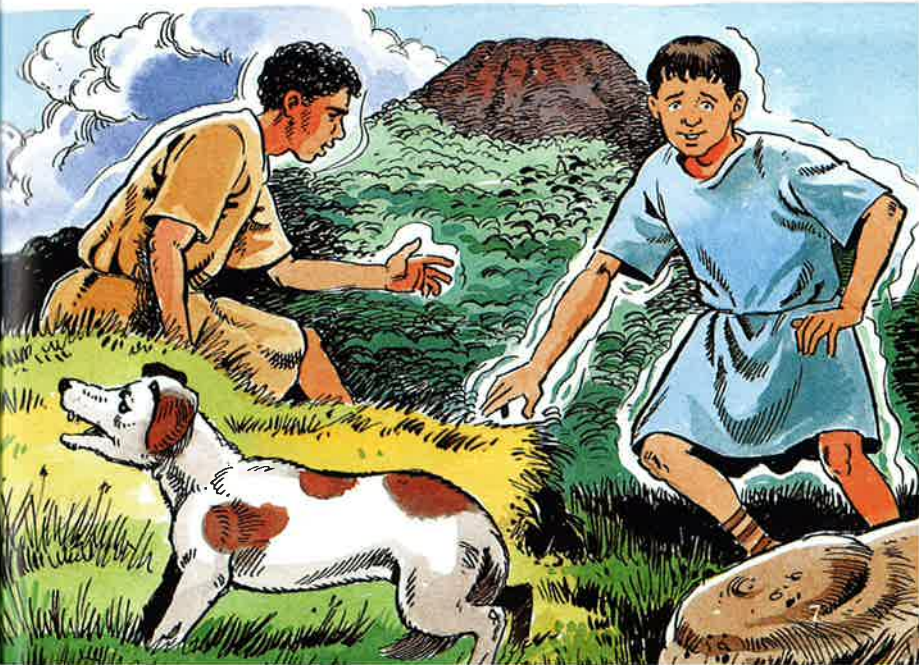
*We climbed higher than we ever had before – up beyond the olive groves, orchards and vineyards, to where the woods begin. Then we rested, and I noticed a peculiar thing – the ground beneath me felt very warm.*

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I was about to mention this to Chiro, when something disturbing happened. The earth began to shake! It felt as though the grassy floor of the woods had become liquid, like the sea, and we had been helplessly cast adrift on its heaving surface. Ixion barked. I tried to go to him, but I was unable to stand.

Then, just as suddenly as it had begun, the shaking stopped. "What was that?" I asked Chiro.

"A tremor," he answered. "We've had a lot of them lately, but my father says they're nothing to worry about."



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Although I admired Chiro's confidence, I was a little unsettled by the tremor, so I mentioned it to Father during the journey home. Like Chiro's father, he said it was nothing to worry about. I hope he's right, but I suspect that he was less concerned with the earth tremor than with the condition of his olive groves. Some of the wells on Mount Vesuvius have dried up, and the stream he relies on for irrigation has ceased flowing. The olives are a good size, but without water from the stream, their quality will suffer.

It was nightfall when we reached home, and Lucia greeted us excitedly. Mother's plans for tomorrow night's dinner party were well under way, and Helen (our cook) had already made the special seasoning my sister loves – a mixture of dried figs, honey and bay leaves.

I was going to warn Lucia not to steal too much of the seasoning, when suddenly a tremor passed through the house. Lucia screamed, and I managed to calm her, though I did not feel the least bit calm myself.