XI September LXXIX AD

Dear Cornelius Tacitus,

I am writing to reassure you that I have been fortunate enough to escape the horrors of Pompeii. Luckily, I am one of the very few survivors from that dreadful day and now I feel that I am ready to share with you my story.

It started like any other day in August. I was sat on the terrace eating my breakfast whilst listening to the early morning birdsong. The air smelt sweet with the scent of dates and freshly baked bread. In the distance, I could see a fog gathering above Mount Vesuvius but I did not think too hard about it.

After my breakfast, I decided to take a leisurely stroll through the city. It was then that I started to notice that something was not quite right. The fog above Mount Vesuvius was growing and turning a menacing dark colour, looming angrily over the city. I stopped still in my tracks and listened carefully. Instead of the morning birdsong, I could hear dogs howling and babies crying. Looking around the streets, I noticed that the birds were flying away from the town. What did they know? What were they fearing?

It was then that I decided to return to my villa and pack a bag. Instinct told me that I needed to get out of Pompeii and make my way to safety. Desperately I tried warning my neighbours but they said that I was crazy. Therefore, I made up my mind that I would not wait a moment longer and fled the city leaving my home behind me.

After a couple of hours travelling I needed to stop for water and a rest. The sun was high in the sky telling me that it was noon. I sat on a hill some miles out of Pompeii and looked down upon my home. I could see that the destruction had started. From the peak of Mount Vesuvius, a thick black smoke billowed and the ground shook with an almighty force. Even at a distance I could hear the screams carrying in the wind and sounds of buildings collapsing under the strain of the tremors. I felt so helpless.

By 3pm, Pompeii was unrecognisable. Ash rained upon the buildings covering them in a thick blanket of white. The once bright, sunny Autumn day was now like a snowy winter wonderland. The sun was replaced with darkness as the rain began to hammer from the heavens. How could this be happening?

Terrifyingly, Mount Vesuvius began to spit huge balls of fire from his furious mouth. They hurtled into the homes of Pompeii without any thought for the people who lived there. Thunder crashed and lightning interrupted the darkness momentarily.Fire ripped through the buildings and flames racedover the rooftops like meteors across the sky.

Hopelessly, I sat on the hilltop and cried for my city. Tears streamed from my eyes until I could cry no longer and my body slumped into the soft grass of the hill. I lay motionless and noticed that my clothes were soaking wet with perspiration. I listened carefully but an eerie silence filled the air. No more dogs barking. No more children crying. No more people screaming. Just silence.

The darkness of the smoke-filled sky began to lighten as the sun pushed its last rays through the bleakness. The silence was broken by a deep rumbling as if a sleeping giant had been disturbed from his sleep. The fear inside me made my heart beat hard like the banging of a drum.

After hours of listening to the belly of Mount Vesuvius rumbling and stirring,I was almost deafened when from his mouth fired a humungous eruption of molten lava. The thick liquid rushed from the peak like a stampede of wildebeest, flattening and destroying everything in its path. A moment later and the whole of Pompeii was engulfed, leaving total devastation.

I feel lucky to be able to tell you my story of how I survived Mount Vesuvius. I simply wish that I had been able to save my friends but they would not listen to me.

Yours truly,

Pliny the Younger