

Mons Vesuvius

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The ground trembled again as Caius descended the stairs of the Tempio di Apollo after his weekly prayer to Apollo. While the grumbling of Mons Vesuvius had troubled him when he had first taken up residence in Pompeii, Caius had grown quite accustomed to it over the last fifteen years. Even so, it had been unusually restless over the last several days. No matter. Only the first earthquake in the eighth year of the reign of Nero, two years prior to his arrival, and its lesser cousin soon after he had taken up residence, had done any real harm. These were probably just more of the aftershocks, and would settle down soon enough in all likelihood.

As he strolled across the forum, he saw his friend Atticus chatting with an older gentleman towards the via dell'Abbondanza. Caius gave them a friendly wave and made his way over.

"Caius, my friend, how are you on this fine day?" Atticus said with a warm smile. "How have you been enjoying the recent trembling of the earth?"

"Well enough, thank you," he replied. "How have you been faring?"

"Splendidly. I decided to pay the Stabian baths a visit and ended up talking the morning away with this fascinating fellow, Septimus." He clapped his companion on the shoulder. "I swear my fingers still feel shrivelled."

"And whose fault is that for arguing so stubbornly about the optimal time of the year?" retorted Septimus.

"I told you, autumn is—"

Boom!

The ground shook much more violently this time, but the tremors quickly passed. The gasps of surprise, however, did not. Here, a priest of Jupiter was pointing towards Mons Vesuvius. There, a pair of ladies had clamped their hands over their mouths, staring at the mountain in shock. Caius turned to see what all of the fuss was about, and his eyes went wide. A great plume of smoke had erupted from Vesuvius's peak and was climbing higher and higher into the sky, as if it meant to reach Apollo himself. Another tremor rippled through the ground, and more smoke spewed forth from Vesuvius, this time in a much wider spray.

"Atticus, my friend," said Caius, "I fear your debate may have to wait."