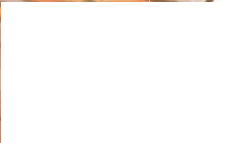
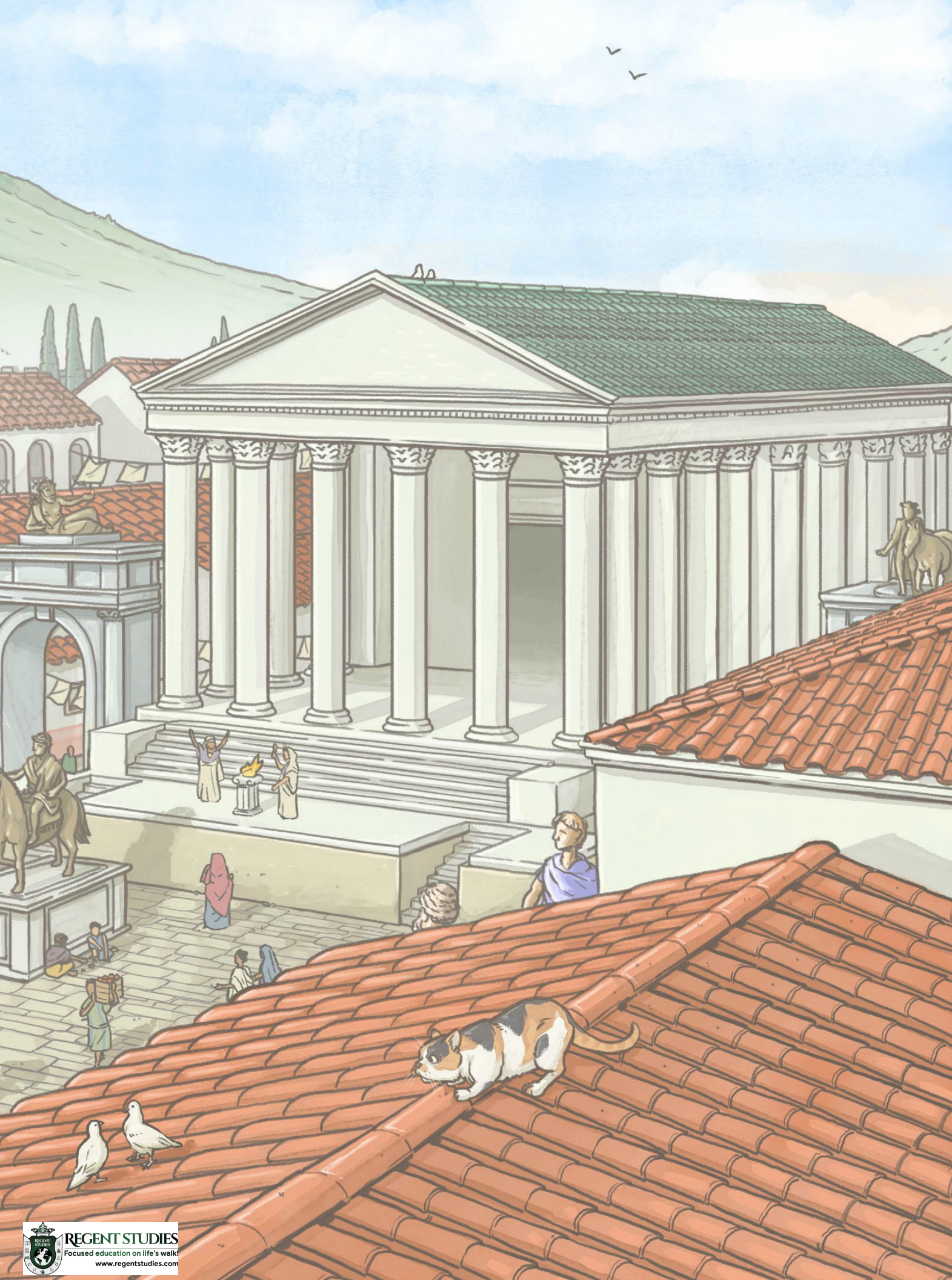


The  
**Pack**  
of  
**POMPEII**









# The Pack of POMPEII





## Teacher Note

This story, written for key stage 2, details the events of the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in Pompeii in 79AD. While handled in a sensitive manner, there are some potentially distressing elements of the subject matter which teachers may wish to be aware of or discuss with children before reading:

- The story takes place over the course of one day and includes the volcanic eruption up to the point where Pompeii is destroyed by pyroclastic flows.
- The story is told from the perspective of dogs rather than humans.
- The story aligns itself with historical facts: that the town of Pompeii was completely destroyed and that many people were killed and buried. No specific human deaths are described although some are implied. Some background knowledge about the historical event is recommended, in order to avoid the ending coming as a surprise.
- At the end of the story, although the main character escapes with her life, there are casualties involving named characters. 'Delta' was a real dog who perished in 79AD as a result of the Vesuvius eruption, but the events told here are a work of fiction.
- Consider discussing modern-day advances in predicting eruptions, as well as the location of volcanoes in the world, to ensure that students feel safe.

It is recommended that you read the story before sharing it with children so that you are familiar with the content. Please be aware of any children in your class who may find the above elements distressing. However, 'The Pack of Pompeii' is designed to be informative, exciting and engaging, so above all, enjoy the story!

# Contents

**One**

Page 1

**Two**

Page 4

**Three**

Page 8



**Four**

Page 15

**Five**

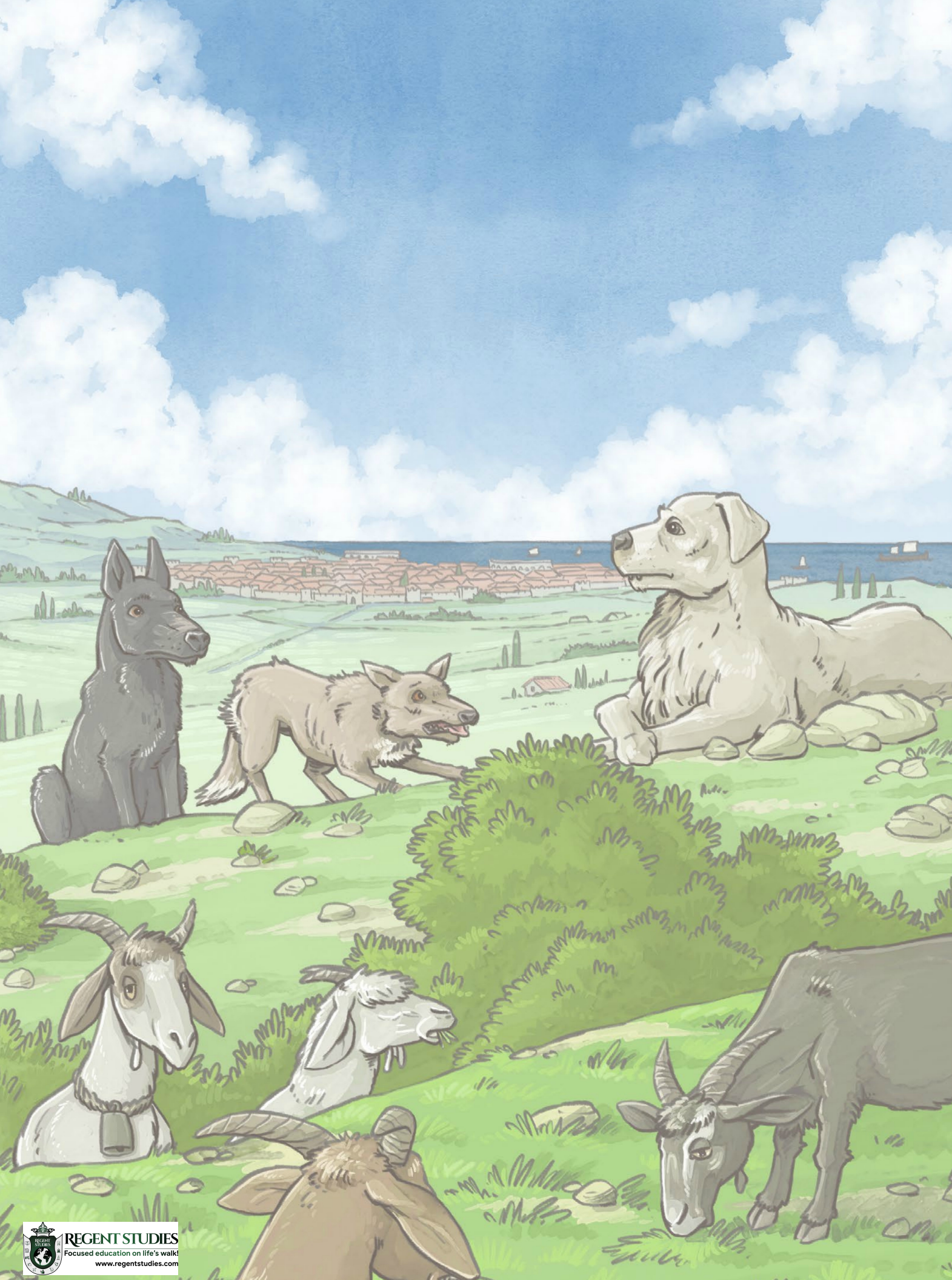
Page 20

**Six**

Page 24

**Seven**

Page 30



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# One

I hear Claudia approach my sleeping hollow long before she limps around the nearest cluster of rocks. Of the three of us who work the Gentle Mountain with our two-legged shepherd, Claudia is by far the noisiest dog.

She limps thanks to the sharp teeth of a fox in her youth and, sometimes, her hind leg drags as we work the grassy slopes above the two-leg settlement. I keep her nearby whenever the wolves come raiding. Her ears are flattened against her head today, telling me that she comes to share a worry.

“Trouble?” I drag my head up off a cushion of crushed weeds. It has been an uncomfortable night.

“The goats are acting strangely,” she pants.

“You’d act strangely if the only things you had to eat all day were spiky grass and thistle leaves. Leave them to the shepherd.”

In the morning light, Claudia’s coat gleams like the reflected light off the hillside. She’s the smallest of us and, sometimes, when she curls up beside one of the rocks, I can only find her by scent.

“The shepherd is down in the town with the other two-legs,” she complains. “The sun will be high soon and he is late.”

“You moan as much as the goats, Claudia.” Claudia wishes that we had a more attentive shepherd, but he has his own pack in the town, with his own little ones to care for.

Sometimes, I wonder if Claudia would complain this much if I were male. Male alphas have less patience and are quicker to snap. She should be grateful that she has a female leader, but I’m too weary to remind her and the sun drains my energy.

## EXTREME EARTH COLLECTION

Claudia rests her chin on her large brown and white paws. “They say that the mountain is too warm.”

I roll onto my back, pressing against the stony ground to scratch an itch. “Goats complain about snow in winter and heat in summer.”

We’re joined by Alba, my second. “They say that they want to leave. Where is the shepherd? He should be here.”

I give Alba’s black coat an envious sniff; it makes her almost invisible at night. Better for outwitting wolves.

She slashes her thick tail towards me. Sometimes, I forget that she was a pup less than two summers ago. “I’m hungry, Livia! The rabbit burrows are empty. A raven told me that they fled last night.”

“Fled?”

“They must have felt the rumbling,” Claudia whimpers. “I can feel it through my paws.”

Alba snaps, twitching her pointed ears. “No more talk about the rumbling, Claudia! We must eat.”

I bark. “We *must* tend to the goats. Until the shepherd returns, there is only us.”

“I’ll have withered from hunger by then.” Alba sniffs at my nose, before retreating to a spot in the bare sunlight.

I chase away any lingering tiredness by pressing my back into a long, low arch, and look across the valley that sweeps from the mountain above us.

Fields stretch out almost as far as my eyes can see. Some are wild grassland, littered with shrubs. Others are owned by the two-legs. This is where they grow their crops, to eat and trade with the other two-legs.

## The Pack of Pompeii

Two settlements lie within walking distance: one to the left of the mountain, another around the headland to the right. Our shepherd gives them names: Pompeii and Herculaneum. Most live in the much larger Pompeii, where many two-legs trade, work and raise their families. Both have spread across the land, replacing the trees and plants with shelters made of stone. All is flat and everywhere, walls of rock separate the two-legs from one another. Some of their shelters are humble but others are grand, towering with arches and columns of stone. The two-legs' ugly sprawling streets only stop when the earth meets the beautiful blue ocean.

“It’s late. Let’s go down there and raise the shepherd,” I say.

“And see what breakfast scraps we can find?” Alba follows, her tongue lolling.

“Maybe the young two-leg will share her meal with us again,” Claudia suggests hopefully.

I don’t answer but, as we begin to head down the hillside, I wonder whether Claudia has learned to read my thoughts or has grown as fond of the two-leg girl as I am. The young one’s life with the shepherd is a full stomach, a bed to sleep in and a pack who live for more than the threat of wolves and the low, angry moan of the mountainside.

Before our last alpha died, he warned me that it isn’t wise to grow too attached to two-legs, even if some of them do provide an easy meal.

*Mountain dogs like us need to keep our instincts sharp and our wits even sharper. Free meals can make us lazy and slow – easy prey for hungry wolves.*

We trot down the grassy slope towards the edge of the town. On the outskirts, horses whinny nervously and scratch at the ground with their hooves. It seems that all the animals can sense something unusual, heavy and threatening in the air.

## Two

I slow my pace a little but Alba scampers towards the first few two-leg shelters, hungry and eager. Before she can get close, however, something stops her in her tracks.

“Livia...” She turns her head to look at me, ears taut and alert, and I can see alarm in her eyes. A split second later, I know why. A rumble, low and distant, rolls through the dirt under our paws. All three of us stare in surprise at the ground, searching for the source, and then it happens.

The whole world suddenly begins to tremble with a violent urgency and, at once, everything around us is moving. It is as though the solid rock beneath us were alive – and angry. Walls and trees shake on the edge of my vision and I sink my claws into the earth. The horses tug at their ropes and bray loudly; several two-legs drop to their knees and clutch at the ground to steady themselves. Alba and Claudia, each crouching low, catch my eye, but they are shaking so much that I can’t maintain my focus.

Just as quickly as it came, the trembling stops. The walls and the trees are still and silent once more; the distant rumbling sound dies away; the two-legs pick themselves up and take tentative steps as if making sure the ground won’t swallow them whole.

My heart pounds against my ribs and I smack my lips together to ease my clenched jaw. Claudia, ears flat with fright, shivers. She presses against me, tail tucked between her back legs. “The ground is angry.”

“What do we do?” Alba asks. She shifts her weight a little, as though she no longer trusts the dirt track beneath her.

Staying low and listening hard to the ground, I lead my pack into the city. Echoes of the old alpha’s words still float around in my head but I brush them aside – we must find the shepherd, we must find food and we must stay together.

## The Pack of Pompeii

Several streets later, Claudia pants as we all skulk behind a scrum of large urns. “Livia, it’s busier than their market day.”

I look around. We’re in the yard of a place where the two-legs come to eat. We often come here early, while the two-legs still sleep, and search for discarded leftovers that lie hidden beneath the tables. At this time, the area is almost always deserted – but not today.

The town is heaving with two-legs. Many dash between buildings, having hurried conversations, and some carry armfuls of clothing and food. Some of the two-legs in the biggest homes are packing belongings into wooden carts as though making to leave.

This is wrong.

“Something’s different,” I say. “Can you smell it on the air?”

Alba yaps in agreement as Claudia observes the rushing crowds.

“Maybe they’ve been talking to the goats,” Claudia whimpers. “Maybe it’s too warm for them, too.”

The earth gives another distant groan and Alba spins. “We should go and see the girl, get our food, then leave.”

Before I can respond, a cluster of large urns beside us shakes and topples. Claudia yelps, hurling herself backwards as she narrowly avoids being crushed. She rolls over on her damaged leg and yelps in pain. I make to leap to her, but hardened clay smashes at our feet and another ripple sends more noise from the panicked two-legs.

“Claudia? Can you stand?” I say.

She responds by pushing herself up on her strong forelegs. A quick shake of her mane allows the determination of her years to return to her face. “I am ready, Livia.”

My paws are hot and sweaty but I try to hide the worry that drums





## The Pack of Pompeii

against the inside of my chest. Wailing two-legs rush out of their shelters. When the ground shakes again, the shudder is strong enough to rattle my claws and, this time, I have to be quick to avoid large stones which fall free from the wall of a trader's shop. Behind us, one of the two-legs' large, stone carvings falls from its perch, shattering when it hits the earth.

"Out of the way!" A two-leg aims a badly timed kick at Claudia but regrets it almost instantly.

"Hey!" Alba barks, flashing her teeth, before snapping at the man's heels all the way to his home. Another enormous ripple slides across the ground and the red-tiled roof groans and falls in, sending up clouds of dust as the thunderous sound fades. The ground continues to rumble and, for a second, we all stand watching as the dust clears and the two-leg peers anxiously into the pile of rubble.

As more buildings threaten to fall around us, I know that a difficult decision has to be made.

"Let's go!" I order. "We're not safe here."

# Three

We pass mostly unnoticed as we head back out of town. I lead the pack through a throng of two-legs jostling along the city's narrow streets, and dodge families with sobbing children. Traders are too busy trying to save their wares to pay us any attention. Some men pull great carts piled high with glassware and pottery, which shatter to the floor as the ground shakes yet again. Some even carry sacks filled with freshly baked bread and pungent meats: my mouth waters.

Smaller homes are crowded with two-legs dressed in plain clothes, the doors slammed shut and shuddering under the weight of their trembling roofs. I think that they hope to hide there until the ground calms itself – not everyone has the means to leave – but I wonder if their homes will be strong enough. Already, more tiles have come loose and some smaller walls have collapsed.

Alba growls when she sees two butchers, perhaps father and son, stumbling as they struggle to carry half a slain sheep across their shoulders. I can see the glint in my second's eyes – she is hoping that the angry earth will shake the carcass free of their grip.

She whimpers her frustration when the men follow a small crowd which rushes through the doorway of a large shelter. It seems that they have chosen to seek safety beneath the roof of the town's largest building, rather than join the panicked herd of two-legs who are heading to the outskirts of town, ready to flee. My gaze follows the hunk of meat out of sight and my stomach growls.

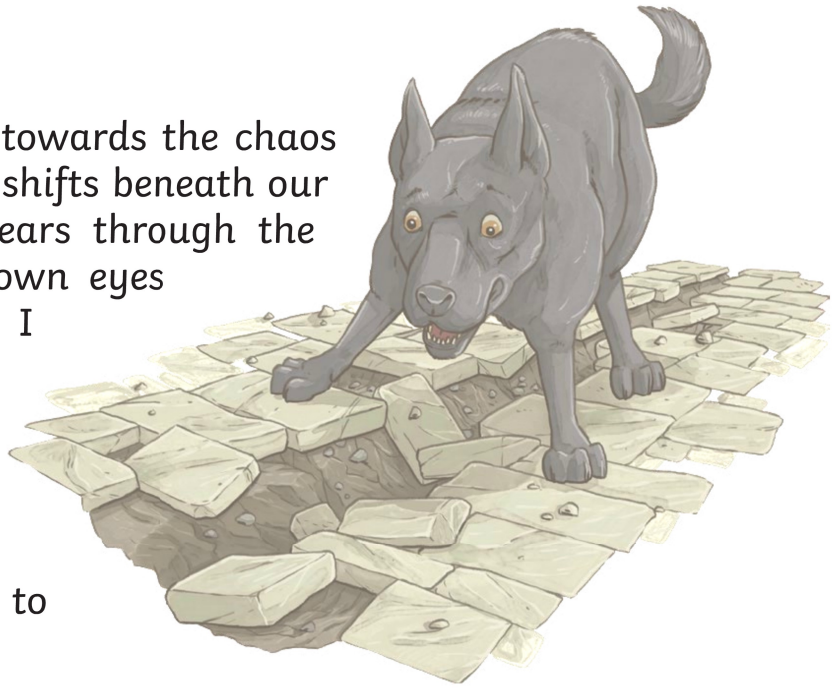
When I glance up at the passing two-legs, I see fear twisting their faces. Their limbs jerk with hurried panic as many rush towards where the sea meets the land. Screams and shouts of family members separated from one another are beginning to fill the air, and I wonder what has become of our shepherd and his little ones. Something, a new feeling, tugs me around and I change direction, to head back into the town.

## The Pack of Pompeii

“Follow me.”

Alba snarls as she glances towards the chaos of the city. When the earth shifts beneath our paws and a great crack tears through the stoned street, I see her brown eyes shine with something that I rarely see in her: fear.

Claudia drops her head, submissive as always, but then dares to catch my eye. “We should get back to the fields, Livia.”



I show them both my teeth and slash my tail. Both dogs shuffle backwards. “The young two-leg is part of the pack. She feeds us. The shepherd protects us. We must keep the pack together.” I don’t wait for their reply.

Some of the two-legs keep dogs as house pets. Alba says that those dogs are weaker than cats and wouldn’t last the night on our hillside. She is right, but I have wondered for a long while what a life alongside the two-legs would be like. I am not as young as I once was and, sometimes, when I grow tired of the goats, of my stony sleeping hollow and of chasing rabbits, I crave a more comfortable life. This I keep to myself, of course – the pack have always scorned the ways of house dogs. I spin and head towards a familiar shortcut, steering them down a back alley.

We’re flanked on both sides by rows of abandoned buildings. The two-legs have built these places to rest and sleep, using rocks and stones and wood, but the angry earth has already torn deep lines through the walls. The city seems to be made up of many rows like these, crammed together so tightly – I’m surprised that the two-legs don’t lose themselves in the maze. Most seem to prefer their houses to the beautiful trees and grassy fields beyond the city walls.

CAURONA



## The Pack of Pompeii

Elsewhere, much grander shelters are supported by rows of stone columns that rise from the floor like tree trunks. The biggest of these even have life-sized figures of two-legs, carved from solid rock, gazing down onto the streets below. The shaking earth has already sent several of these crashing down to the ground; Claudia whimpers as we hear another topple and explode on the very next street. Red tiles ripple like water along the rooftops and then shower onto the ground and the cries of infants jostle for space in the air with new, strange smells and sounds.

“The rabbits were smart,” Alba grumbles. Her ears point towards the cloudy sky. “We should follow them and leave.”

“Once we find the shepherd!” I snap.

We’re silenced by an unexpected sound. “Pssst!”

Something hits the ground beside me and rolls across the stone floor.

“Meat!” Alba sniffs the air.

A large leg of what smells like sheep comes to a halt just in front of us. Alba rushes to snag a meal, then remembers her place and reluctantly drops the hunk of meat at my paws. When I see another chunk of food drop over the top of a tall counter, I edge forwards and look up.

The familiar face of a small two-leg smiles down at me, and it relieves me to see that she is safe, for now. She reaches with straining fingers, trying to touch my fur. As always, I back away instinctively.

Her brown eyes blink in disappointment. I sense that she looks forward to our visits and, with a shameful thought for my old alpha, I realise that I do, too. I see longing in the girl’s features: this two-leg would happily offer us a home inside her shelter.

She rips a strip of meat from its bone and drops it in front of me. She makes a different sound, now. I think that she is trying to communicate but her gentle, chirruping voice makes no sense to me. She has not yet mastered the whistles and grunts that the shepherd uses to communicate.

## EXTREME EARTH COLLECTION

He and the rest of his pack busy around inside, pulling urns down from shelves and collecting food into large pots with earnest.

We eat quickly. Eventually, the girl drops the rest of the food and leans as far over the counter as her small legs can manage. Her brow is furrowed and her voice becomes more urgent and, when her hand waves towards the fields that lie past the city walls, I suddenly understand her.

*Leave.*

We flee. Our bellies are full and the shepherd is safe – and yet, an unfamiliar thought burrows like a grub inside my head: perhaps I should have told the girl to leave, too, or at least stayed with her. There is a danger hanging above this city today – something far more threatening than wolves.

The streets are even more crowded now, bustling with terrified two-legs who surge like a swarm of insects to find somewhere safe from the angry rumbling – but I'm not sure that anywhere is safe in this town.

I lead Alba and Claudia away from the panic. We rush down quieter side streets and narrow alleys, avoiding the panicked two-legs as much as we can. Soon, we're heading towards the outskirts of town.

I'm already smelling the reassuring whiff of wild asparagus when suddenly, the floor shifts beneath our paws again. Claudia yelps; Alba flashes her an irritated snarl but then whimpers as the high wall of a shelter splits in half right beside us.

Before I can bark a warning, huge slabs of stone topple forward from a great height. As if in slow motion, I watch the giant wall of rock tumble towards my pack. It misses Claudia by an inch –

– but Alba isn't so lucky.

I watch through widened eyes as a stack of heavy, unsteady stones wobbles and buckles, as if pushed by a giant hand.

Alba freezes. The rocks will kill her.



## EXTREME EARTH COLLECTION

My legs propel me – not away, but towards the falling rocks. My shoulder slams into Alba, sending her rolling across the dusty floor and I follow her, escaping the deafening crash of shattering stone by the width of a tail hair.

“You saved me,” Alba pants. “You could have died.”

“We are the pack, Alba. We are one.” I silently promise myself that we will still all be together at the end of the day but, as the two-leg shelters shake and topple, I wonder if I can keep my word.

A sharp bark draws a glance over my shoulder. Claudia has stopped. The wooden gate to a large two-leg shelter draws her attention.

“Claudia! Those places aren’t safe.” I growl, but I know what it is about this gate that has stopped her in her tracks. This is the home of Delta: a well-known house pet and the ‘hero’ of her two-leg pack.

Alba snarls, “Delta will be covering in a corner, waiting for the two-legs to release her.”

Claudia spins and shows her fangs. “I heard that she wears a hero’s collar. I heard that she saved her two-leg three times – once from the waves, once from attackers, and once –”

Alba dismisses Claudia’s claim with a tail swipe. “I know the stories. The famous Delta chased off a lone wolf, but we do that every day.”

“Enough!” My bark echoes off weakened walls which collapse with the next tremor. “Delta has her two-legs to worry about. If she is as brave as you say, Claudia, she will lead them to safety. We have our charges on the mountainside, so we leave together.”

Claudia hesitates outside Delta’s gate and gazes through a small crack.

“Now, Claudia.”



# Four

I'm relieved when we all leave the town behind and return to our hillside but, even here, something is not right. The air is thick. The ground moves beneath our paws but at least I can think clearly.

"These goats are almost as stupid as the two-legs," Alba chunters as we count the herd.

Time is running out, but what is waiting for us, I do not know. Small rocks shift and tumble past us; elsewhere, small waves of dirt and dust pour down the steeper slopes. When I glance back towards the city, I fear for the two-legs.

Thankfully, none of our shepherd's goats are missing. I wonder if the wolves have already left to find steady ground. I press the humming earth with my paw then take a long sniff. There's a strange smell – not a nice one. Like when the goats have eaten too many brown thistles.

Alba scratches the ground, too, her paw drawing wobbly lines as the earth shifts underneath her. "I don't like this. The ground is too warm on my feet."

Then, something strange happens – even stranger than the day so far. Large, grey-white flakes begin to fall from the heavens, gentle and serene against the afternoon sky. We don't notice them until one lands right on the end of Claudia's nose.

"Snow!" barks Alba.

"No," I say, sniffing at the dry flakes now dappling her fur. There is something wrong with them – they aren't melting. "This isn't snow."

Before we can investigate further, an unexpected breeze ruffles my fur. When I turn, I find myself nose to beak with Cato, the old eagle.



## The Pack of Pompeii

“What are you still doing here?” the bird asks. “Don’t you know that the rabbits and foxes left before sunrise?”

“What’s happening?” I ask. “Why is the ground shaking and so warm?” I flick my tail upwards. “What is this strange snow?”

He shrugs his wings and pecks at the rocks by his long talons. “This is not the first time that the ground has shaken. I was barely out of my egg but I remember the mountain behaving like this almost twenty summers ago.”

“The mountain?”

Cato nods. “It shook so hard that many two-legs had to rebuild their stone nests.”

Alba snorts. “Their nests have already broken again. It will be a cold winter for them.”

“Or no winter,” Cato says. He points with his beak up towards the very top of the Gentle Mountain, and we look up. What we see makes Alba gasp and Claudia has to sit down on the warm ground.

A thick column of grey and black rises from the top of the mountain, blocking out part of the sky. It reaches up for miles and the dark clouds spread across the city. Still more white flakes pour down like rain, making it hard to see.

Cato shakes his head sadly. “I am leaving, and if you wish to survive the day, you should do the same.”

A low rumble, like early thunder, accompanies my racing thoughts. The ground below us lurches again and we all stare up at our beloved mountain, disbelieving.

“We’ll follow you, Cato,” says Alba, panting. “You must help us find another mountain – a place where the goats can graze and we can live.”

## EXTREME EARTH COLLECTION

I stare back down at the crumbling town below. More of it falls with each tremor, sending lines of screaming two-legs rushing towards the waves or onto the tracks that lead away from danger. They stumble and fall each time the ground shakes, tripping over broken carts and dodging walls that crumble then collapse into dusty heaps. The town is falling into ruin and, with it, my one chance of a life with a full belly and a warm bed.

When a new tremor sends Cato flapping into the sky, I growl at my friends.

“Go! Follow Cato.” I leap out of the path of a tumbling rock and watch as more skitter down the mountainside. The herd is panicking. “Take the goats somewhere safe.”

Alba swishes her tail and bares her teeth. “I’ll make these goats run faster than hares. I hope you can keep up, Claudia.”

Ignoring Alba’s challenge, Claudia offers me one of her wet-eyed looks. “I’ll run close to you, Livia.” She shakes her coat to dislodge some of the false snow.

I growl. She steps back and lowers her head. I don’t like scaring her, but she mustn’t try to follow me. “Do as Alba says. She will lead the goats today.”

“Why?” Worry flattens Claudia’s ears.

When I glance towards Alba, I see her proudly licking her coat. She has been waiting for her chance to lead, and I have made my decision.

“I must go back and find the shepherd,” I say. In the distance, the town crumbles and the mingled sounds of screaming and falling stone invade my mind. My throat feels dry when I think about the small girl that I have left behind, as though I have made a mistake.

“It doesn’t have to be you, Livia,” Claudia snaps.

## The Pack of Pompeii

“They don’t care about us,” Alba agrees. “Or the goats.”

“He is our master,” I say, not wanting approval.

“You’ll die,” Alba warns me.

I look to both of them, my pack, my family, and say, “I’ll find you.”

# Five

Grey flakes fall from the clouds, thick and fast now, as though the sky itself is breaking into pieces and tumbling down to the ground. My frantic paws barely skim the unploughed earth as I race towards the town and I'm just yards from a vegetable patch when –

*BOOM.*

The mountain roars. The sound fills my insides as though it is rolling through every dog, tree, rock and two-leg: a heavy, impossible sound that I feel in my bones. The mountain's fury tears great claw marks across the earth and bundles me off my feet, pulling down walls and toppling olive trees. I pant desperately through the dust, and dart away just in time to avoid a wooden roof as it slides downwards and crumbles on impact with the ground. I feel my legs trembling and I wonder if Claudia was right – maybe I *should* be saving myself.

Steeling myself, I glance back at the fields that were once my home...

...and the sight of what dominates the sky roots me to the spot.

The Gentle Mountain is no longer a mountain. Its top has gone and, in its place, there is a huge cloud of flying rock and darkness, reaching up and claiming the sun, creating instant nightfall. Dark descends upon the town of Pompeii.

It takes an age for my eyes to finally get used to the sudden blackness. I can hear the two-legs screaming behind the walls of the city, though I can barely see it through the grey snow that falls across my face and makes me splutter.

It would be easy to turn on my hind legs and sprint for safety. I could catch Alba and Claudia and we could be free and clear of the danger before darkness consumes this place – but that is not my path. Today, without really understanding why, I have decided to treat the two-legs as family, too.



## EXTREME EARTH COLLECTION

When I see orange flickers appearing in the dark city, I clamber across toppled buildings and creep inside the town's walls towards them. A symphony of terrified shrieks and painful cries hustle me through the narrow streets and it is impossible to know where to look first – there are many two-legs and, everywhere I look, they are in desperate need of help. During my brief spell up on the hills, the situation in town has become much more serious.

I cower beside what was once a small home, panting to catch my breath. It is now just a pile of rocks and splintered wood. The roof has vanished, too – its wooden beams are split in two and the tiles are snapped and crushed. I think that some two-legs might be trapped beneath what remains – I can hear muffled coughing and panicked voices. Neighbours try to reach them but the rocks are too heavy and the pile is too high. The grey flakes fall thick and fast, settling on the ground and everything above it like a blanket, and I shake myself to remove the weight of it.

Many two-legs are carrying burning sticks for light as they run through the spaces between debris, but all of them seem blinded by panic and tears. I bark at them to push them towards the water for safety but they cannot hear me, or choose not to. So, I push on through the chaos and round the next bend to find the home of the shepherd and the young two-leg, their pack –

The building lies in ruins.

Walls have buckled, shaken loose from their foundations; the door lies flat upon the grey-dusted ground. The falling dry snow gives the wreckage the odd impression of having been there a very long time already. Roof timbers are piled high and it is impossible to see what is underneath.

I growl at myself, angry and sickened that I might have arrived too late. The young two-leg was so small – just a pup. Have they escaped? I stare at the nearby crowd, but see no familiar faces.

Then, from inside, I hear sobbing.



## The Pack of Pompeii

Peering desperately through the darkness and between running legs, I see that there is a gap in the ruined wall where the door used to be and it's big enough for me to squeeze through. Stumbling with every tremor of the ground, I wriggle in among the debris and follow the pitiful sound.

In a back room, recoiling from the mountain's wrath behind a broken wooden board, is the young two-leg. She is alone and the dirt staining her face is broken by wet tear tracks. When she sees me, she yelps. I think she is pleased that I'm here; her home is smashed to pieces and there is no sign of the shepherd or the rest of her pack.

"Come!" I bark, and more floating flakes catch in my throat. "We can't stay here."

As gently as I lift newborn goats when the wolves attack, I put my teeth around the girl's wrist and pull her from the shelter. She resists at first, but then seems to understand and lets me lead her. Hardly bigger than me, she squeezes out into the street –

– where a new danger awaits us.

The mountain cloud is dropping hot rocks like a storm of smoking hailstones. Pieces of the tremendous mountain – stones which have watched over me since I was a pup – race towards the ground, big and small; one rolls towards my feet and I can see the hot air rising from it in the two-legs' torchlight. Raised fur across my shoulders warns me that time is against us – the Gentle Mountain has betrayed us all.

# Six

We dodge the danger as it rains down, and join groups of two-legs who rush towards the waves. Some shield their heads with soft pillows and bundles of cloth. Others, like us, take their chances and hope that they can outrun the terrible storm.



The young two-leg is wide-eyed with fright and screams every time a rock falls close to her. Using my nose, I nudge her one way then another, guiding her through the melee. One time, she mistakes my nudge as an instruction to run and bolts the wrong way through the crowd. I pursue her, battling through the torrent of confused two-legs, until I can seize her sleeve between my jaws and steer her back towards safety. Her thin fingers grasp the fur above my shoulder and squeeze hard; though my heart races and my breath comes in short, sharp gasps, I am glad that I have returned for her.

## The Pack of Pompeii

Our route through the back streets sends us past another familiar shelter: Delta's home. Despite the mountain's anger, it still stands, but the gate is sealed. Only a splintered section of wood shows the yard beyond. I slow when we hear voices coming from inside. Children cry, adults shout and then, a dog barks. Delta!

As we pass, clambering over debris, Delta runs towards the gate. Once a large, black dog with a glossy coat, she now looks just like all the rest, coated in bone-dry grey and white specks. The only difference between me and her now is her collar and the tag which dangles from it, swinging and glistening in the light of a nearby fire.

She pushes her nose through the gap in the gate and gasps as though expecting to find clean, cool air beyond it. The way she looks back at her pack tells me that she wants to leave and find safety elsewhere, but that the two-legs aren't listening. What I had always taken to be a pampered house pet now seems trapped by her place among the two-legs, and I find myself desperate to find my freedom once more.

If Claudia were here, she would want to help Delta. My young two-leg seems to feel the same way, straining to glance back towards the shelter's gates as we run past – but time is against us and the mountain grows more furious with every passing moment, so I pull at her sleeve again, dragging her away. Delta turns back towards her pack and, in a fluttering cloud of grey, she is gone.

I lead the girl towards water, hoping for a way out of the city. The two-legs jostle and fight as they squeeze between narrow walls. Fear makes them aggressive and I have to snap and snarl and bark to thread a pathway to the place where the waves meet the land.

Finally, we burst free of the buildings and race to the shore. When my paws reach the end of the stone plinth, I look out at the water and find that it has almost completely gone. The waves have receded away from the land and only a few inches of water is left by the edge of the dock. Two-legs are jumping into the shallows to splash out towards retreating vessels, and there is just one boat left by the edge.

## EXTREME EARTH COLLECTION

“Hurry!” I growl at my two-leg, dragging her across the cobbles and heaving her towards it. The boat is already almost full and crowds jostle behind us to be the next on board.

I feel relief when she clambers up onto the boat. She reaches down towards me, plainly expecting me to join her.

I hesitate.

New tears pour down the small girl’s dusted cheeks as our eyes meet. Her pack is gone. My pack is gone, hopefully to safety but I cannot say for sure. Burning rocks crash into the water all around me and the constant growl of the earth vibrates through my paws. One leap from the edge of this dock and I know that I’ll be saved.

Looking into her eyes, I can see that she needs me, and I know that I want to be hers. Summoning all my energy, I crouch and fix my gaze on the boat’s edge, ready to make the jump.

“Livia!”



## The Pack of Pompeii

The bottom drops out of my stomach and I spin, staring back towards the carnage of the crumbling city. There, two familiar figures stare back at me.

“I told you both to go,” I bark loudly.

Alba bays her reply. “We came to find you.”

“We want to stay together,” Claudia calls.

When I turn back towards the boat, I see that it is already being hauled away by the wind. The girl screams and reaches for me, almost falling into the water. Older two-legs pull her back and, as she sails away, I feel happy. The girl is safe. She will escape the mountain and live.

“Move!” I growl, leading my pack back over the town. The streets are barely recognisable now and I disregard them, and search for the quickest route over the rubble. “We have to leave.”

Claudia slows to sniff a weeping couple. They are old and hold each other as they cower beneath what remains of a shattered roof. The man has a badly twisted leg, perhaps crushed by a falling wall, and is unable to walk.

“There is no time.” I nip Claudia’s tail to make her run, and she does so without argument.

The mountain hurls its smoking rocks like a storm cloud drops rain. The streets are less packed with two-legs, now – instead, they crouch and crawl in hordes under the only structures that they can find: tiny rooms that still have roofs, dog shelters, storage buildings.

It’s hard to breathe. The warm blizzard fills my nose and mouth, and covers the floor so thickly that my legs sink almost to the shoulder whenever I take a new step. We dogs are all starting to look the same shade of grey and we are leaving deep tracks; small particles fly along in our wake.

Worse is the foul smell. The smartest two-legs have strips of cloth over

## EXTREME EARTH COLLECTION

their mouths but others cough and splutter, gasping for air like stranded fish. My well-trained nose picks up the scents of sweat and fear, bleeding through the acrid stench that belches its way down from the mountain.

As we head towards the asparagus fields, desperate to reach the crowded tracks that stretch towards safety, we leap across fallen walls and an abandoned cart that lies broken across the road. Sensing that we are close to freedom and blinking through the pain which begins to take hold of my lungs, eyes and muscles, I round a corner to find myself outside a familiar gate, broken and charred but locked.

“Is this Delta’s place?” Claudia pants, her throat audibly sore. “It’s still here.”

“Not for long,” Alba snarls.

I turn to Claudia. Then, I see eyes like mine staring out through the cracked wood again. A curious, dry nose sniffs at me.

“I thought that mountain dogs were supposed to be smart,” Delta says. “Go!”

At first, I cannot respond because the air seems to be thick inside my lungs. My attention is drawn to the glittering collar wrapped around Delta’s neck. Finally, I shake the carpet of flakes and dust from my shoulders and croak, “You must come with us!”

“My two-legs want to shelter here,” Delta tells me. “The master thinks that it’s too late to flee and that the mountain will calm itself in the end. I must stay – my job is to protect them.”

I’m surprised to find that I empathise with her – but death is chasing us through this city and no one is safe. “Staying here won’t protect them,” I say. “The mountain wants to bury you in rock and flames.”

Hearing its cue, the mountain roars dangerously and the four of us stumble as one. A burning pebble shoots down past Alba’s ear and ricochets off the ground.

## The Pack of Pompeii

“Come with us,” Claudia urges. “We can help you find safety.”

Delta’s laugh comes out as a growl. “There isn’t time. I have lived a good life and will accept what comes. These two-legs are my pack. Surely, you understand this?”

As Alba’s lips curl in a silent snarl, I nod. “I do. But the only way to protect them is to get them out of here.”

Delta sighs as she begins to back away from the broken gate. “There is nothing I can do to convince them. If they stay, I stay, too.”

“No! Wait!” Claudia desperately presses her nose through the crack in the wood. “We could save you. We could save you all.”

A glint of hope lights up the black dog’s eyes, but this disappears when the mountain throws a cascade of huge, flaming rocks straight at Delta’s home.



# Seven

*CRASH!*

A searing flash turns everything around us into rubble.

At first, I see and hear nothing. My mouth is thick with dust and my ears ring painfully. My eyes feel as though they are on fire. I wriggle to free myself from the mound of rocks that covers me. Delta crawls towards me, panting and bleeding; the collision has torn the wall and gate apart.

We hear screams and cries from inside Delta's broken home. Delta's black ears leap to attention and any pain that she feels seems to vanish. "They need me!"

I clamp her tail between my teeth. When she whirls round angrily, I stand my ground and summon Alba and Claudia. Like me, they are unharmed but they pant heavily and Claudia is dragging her old leg again. We are all exhausted.

"Help Delta to round up her family of two-legs and bring them all to me." I give her a reassuring nod. "There's still time to reach the track that takes you away from this place. I know the way – let me lead you."

My eyes water as I wait and my legs tremble from the effort that traversing the city has taken. The smell from the mountain is getting stronger and I pant to breathe. My tongue lolls forwards and is instantly coated in falling flakes and grit – I have to choose, now, between keeping my mouth open for more air and breathing in white dust.

I hear all three dogs gasping loudly as they return.

Delta has fewer two-legs than I have goats. They seem just as bewildered and frightened as my animals, though; I hope that they are easier to guide. As I turn to leave, it is Delta's turn to grasp my tail.



## The Pack of Pompeii

“One is missing. The smallest boy. We cannot find him.”

“There’s a smell behind the rocks. It could be him,” Claudia tells us.  
“Perhaps if we all dig –”

“There’s no time!” Alba snaps.

Delta spins, ready to fight, but we are all knocked from our feet when the weight of white powder and showering rocks brings the remains of the neighbouring shelter thundering to the ground.

We stagger back upright but one of Delta’s two-legs bleeds from a wounded shoulder. The others weep and wail. The master desperately looks at Delta for hope.

The black dog shakes herself and takes a deep breath. “Okay. Take us to the track.”

Delta lets me lead and soon, we are all threading our way towards the edge of town, where the winding track begins its journey south, away from the towns of Pompeii and Herculaneum. The falling flakes have already smothered my paw prints, so I rely on my memory to plot the route. The two-legs are able to wade through the now heavy blanket of grey but we dogs have to bound across it with the little energy that we have left. Rocks, some as big as Delta, explode against the floor all around us. I feel the fur stand up on the back of my neck and I fight the urge to seek shelter under the remaining roofs like so many of the two-legs.

Claudia and Alba press against me as we move through the last of the burning streets. I can sense their fear but Delta is stronger. Her eyes show no weakness – just a determination to save her two-legs. She runs from one to the next, nipping at their heels to keep them moving like I do with the herd. I am starting to see how this house pet earned her reputation.

Eventually, we reach the edge of town and skid to a stop. Before we can succumb to relief, however, the sight of what lies outside the city limits sends a new wave of terror washing over us.

## EXTREME EARTH COLLECTION

Across the open fields, which stretch out over the landscape away from Pompeii and Herculaneum, rocks, dust and dirt pour down from the mountain cloud in a never-ending torrent. It's no wonder that so many two-legs have chosen to shelter under their stones and tiles – the other option is to take their chances out here, where there is no refuge from the raining fire and destruction.

We are not alone. Hordes of two-legs race to escape across the land. They jostle and stagger, four or five abreast in places, all desperate to flee their former home. Many hold each other up for support; others are burdened by their possessions or wrestling startled mules and cattle.

I scan the slow-moving crowd until I find what I am looking for. A kind man ushers the old and young onto a convoy of horse-drawn carts. The carts are heavily loaded with far too many people, and the animals are frightened and desperate to leave. Like me, they know that staying any longer will bring certain death. Finally, I spot space on one of these carts for Delta and her pack of frightened two-legs.

“Hurry,” I bark, snapping and growling until the two-legs rush towards it. Once there, strong arms reach down to haul them aboard. Once the last of Delta's pack is safe, Claudia and Alba follow, leaping up onto the wooden platform – only then do I finally take my place.

I'm exhausted. My lungs burn and breathing is harder than ever. I stumble into a corner of the wooden cart, wondering if we can escape the angry mountain before one of its falling rocks finds our convoy...

...and then my legs collapse underneath me.

\*

I must only be asleep for seconds but, when I finally open my eyes and raise my head, I cannot see Delta.

Something is wrong.

“Delta has gone back to the shelter,” Alba croaks, too weary to lift her



## EXTREME EARTH COLLECTION

head, “to find the one that we left behind.”

“She wouldn’t listen to me,” Claudia whimpers. “I told her that it wasn’t safe but she said that she couldn’t leave the boy.”

I peer back down the track. Behind us, groups of yelling two-legs pour from the town’s broken walls, many limping and bleeding, others carrying the wounded. Eventually, I spot a familiar figure. Delta weaves her way against the current of two-legs, almost unnoticed, until she reaches what remains of the town’s perimeter.

I hope that she will look back, but she doesn’t. Instead, as if sensing that time is running out, she gives her fur a dusty shake before leaping past a crumbled building and disappearing back into the warren of near-deserted streets.

\*

Hours pass. The line of carts continues its rickety retreat south at full speed, taking the two-legs and their wares away from Pompeii and towards hope that lies... where? I cannot tell. Some carts lose their horses to the burning hailstorm; others break apart under the weight of too many refugees. We are some of the lucky few. Over the course of the long night, the sobs and moans of devastated families quieten as sleep takes hold of each of their weary bodies.

Eventually, mercifully, the little cart passes beyond the reach of the mountain’s flaming attack. A few chunks are missing from its sides and one wheel has buckled slightly, but the horse continues to run through the night. It is a different kind of dark, now: a breeze rolls in from the sea and, looking up, I see stars poking through the cloud cover. Waves of grey flakes are still pulled along on the wind after us, but the ground has stopped shaking, for now. Perhaps we will find safety after all.

Claudia slumbers deeply in one corner of the cart, between the feet of Delta’s two-leg pack. They have long since cried themselves into a fitful sleep over their missing boy and Delta. I watch them blearily for

## The Pack of Pompeii

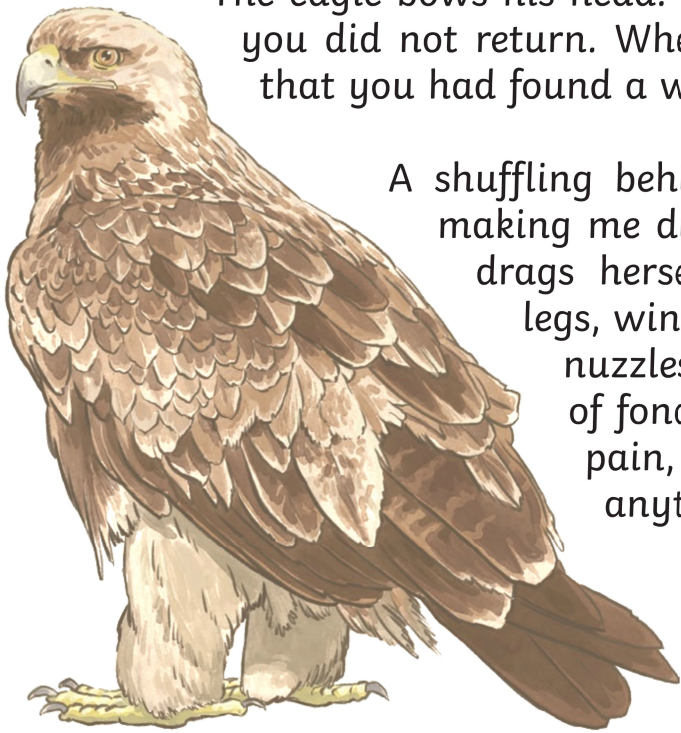
a while, my thoughts returning to the small child on her boat and the chance that I might have had to know that kind of belonging.

Just as my eyes begin to close again, the familiar sound of beating wings calls down to me. I look up just in time to see Cato settling himself on the side of the wagon. He stares down at me and there is a terrible sadness in his eyes. Around us, the two-legs sleep on.

“I am glad to find you,” he says slowly. There are a few bent feathers in his tail but otherwise, he seems unharmed.

Alba sits down beside me. “We were lucky,” she says. She is right – our fur carries stains and our bodies are weak, but we are alive.

The eagle bows his head. “Indeed. I circled the town when you did not return. When I could not find you, I hoped that you had found a way to flee.”



A shuffling behind me forces my head around, making me dizzy. Claudia has woken and she drags herself between the jumble of two-legs, wincing from the pain in her leg. She nuzzles close to me and I feel a surge of fondness and hope. If, in spite of her pain, she can survive, then perhaps anything is possible.

“Cato,” Claudia pants earnestly. “When you circled the town, did you see Delta, the house dog?”

He shakes his head sadly. “No, Claudia, I’m sorry –”

“Perhaps she’s still there – you could find her!”

Cato closes his eyes. “You don’t understand. I saw what happened to the town after your carts left it.”

## EXTREME EARTH COLLECTION

I shudder. What more horrors could the mountain possibly have brought to the city?

“It happened very quickly. The cloud above the mountain faltered and a wave of heat poured down the slopes. The grass, the trees... everything it touched was devoured. I was out over the water, searching the boats for you, and I saw the town consumed. Stone columns crumbled, buildings burned... nothing could have survived it.”

A shocked silence follows. Claudia sinks to the floor of the cart, her nose between her paws.

“I’m sorry,” Cato says. “The grey snow and stones are still falling. By now, the city will be almost completely buried.”

No one can think of anything to say for a long time. I know that we are all thinking of Delta and her unshakeable devotion to her family.

I glance at the two-legs who share our cart. When a young girl looks up from her sleeping mother’s tight embrace, her timid eyes meet my own. In spite of my weariness, I feel my ears lift up at the sight of her. After a moment, she smiles, and my tail wags gently of its own accord. Tentatively, she edges closer to me and rests a hand on the fur around my neck.

Hidden in the early morning darkness, I lick the small girl’s grazed knuckles and, in that moment, I realise how much I have learned about kindness, loyalty and the strength of the pack.

**THE END**

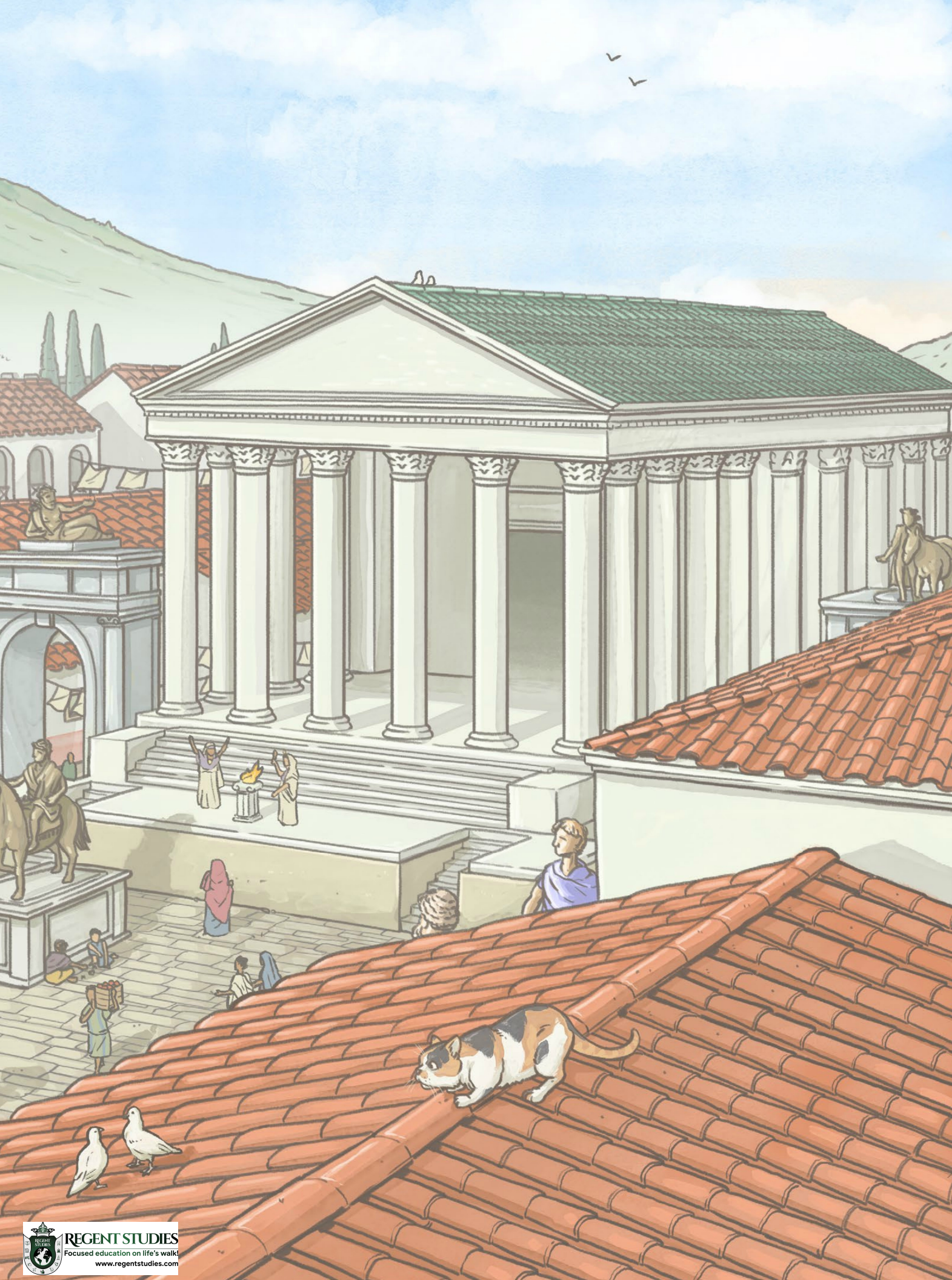


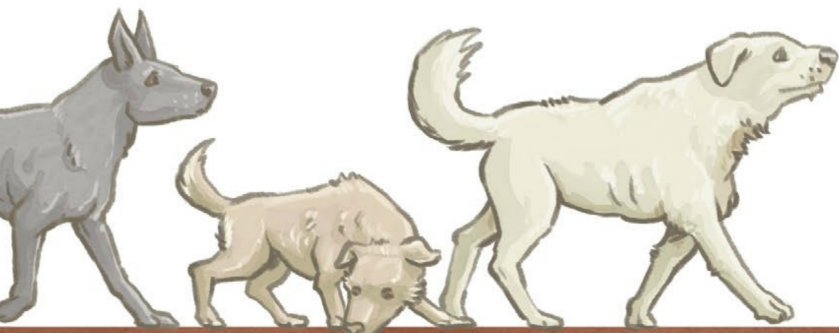












The Gentle Mountain is no longer a mountain. Its top has gone and, in its place, there is a huge cloud of flying rock and darkness, reaching up and claiming the sun, creating instant nightfall.

It's 79 AD. Of all the dogs who work on the slopes of Mount Vesuvius, Livia is the strongest and the bravest. Every day, she guides her pack as they herd goats on the hills overlooking Pompeii but today, something is wrong.

When the ground shakes and the sky begins to fall, Livia is forced to make new and difficult choices. Can she guide her pack to safety before the town is destroyed? Will she live up to the greatness of Delta, the famous hero dog that her pack tell stories about?

Livia and her pack are about to discover what it really means to be a hero...

**'The Pack of Pompeii'** is a work of fiction based on the historical events of the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 AD. This story is part of the Twinkl Originals 'Extreme Earth' collection.

