

Projekttitel: eManual Alte Geschichte  
Modul [optional]:  
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**Plin.epist. 6,20.**

**Text Übersetzung:**  
(J.B. Firth)

You say that the letter which I wrote to you at your request, describing the death of my uncle, \* has made you anxious to know not only the terrors, but also the distress I suffered while I remained behind at Misenum. I had indeed started to tell you of these, but then broke off. Well, "though my mind shudders at the recollection, I will essay the task". \*\*

After my uncle had set out I employed the remainder of the time with my studies, for I had stayed behind for that very purpose. Afterwards I had a bath, dined, and then took a brief and restless sleep. For many days previous there had been slight shocks of earthquake, which were not particularly alarming, because they are common enough in Campania. But on that night the shocks were so intense that everything round us seemed not only to be disturbed, but to be tottering to its fall. My mother rushed into my bedchamber, just as I myself was getting up in order to arouse her if she was still sleeping. We sat down in the courtyard of the house, which was of smallish size and lay between the sea and the buildings. I don't know whether my behaviour should be called courageous or rash - for I was only in my eighteenth year - but I called for a volume of Titus Livius, and read it, as though I were perfectly at my ease, and went on making my usual extracts. Then a friend of my uncle's, who had but a little time before come to join him from Spain, on seeing my mother and myself sitting there and me reading, upbraided her for her patience and me for my indifference, but I paid no heed, and pored over my book.

It was now the first hour of the day, but the light was still faint and weak. The buildings all round us were beginning to totter, and, though we were in the open, the courtyard was so narrow that we were greatly afraid, and indeed sure of being overwhelmed by their fall. So that decided us to leave the town. We were followed by a distracted crowd, which, when in a panic, always prefers someone else's judgment to its own as the most prudent course to adopt, and when we set out these people came crowding in masses upon us, and pressed and urged us forward. We came to a halt when we had passed beyond the buildings, and underwent there many wonderful experiences and terrors. For although the ground was perfectly level, the vehicles which we had ordered to be brought with us began to sway to and fro, and though they were wedged with stones, we could not keep them still in their places. Moreover, we saw the sea drawn back upon

itself, and, as it were, repelled by the quaking of the earth. The shore certainly was greatly widened, and many marine creatures were stranded on the dry sands. On the other side, the black, fearsome cloud of fiery vapour burst into long, twisting, zigzag flames and gaped asunder, the flames resembling lightning flashes, only they were of greater size. Then indeed my uncle's Spanish friend exclaimed sharply, and with an air of command, to my mother and me, "If your brother and your uncle is still alive, he will be anxious for you to save yourselves; if he is dead, I am sure he wished you to survive him. Come, why do you hesitate to quit this place?" We replied that we could not think of looking after our own safety while we were uncertain of his. He then waited no longer, but tore away as fast as he could and got clear of danger.

Soon afterwards the cloud descended upon the earth, and covered the whole bay; it encircled Capri and hid it from sight, and we could no longer see the promontory of Misenum. Then my mother prayed, entreated, and commanded me to fly as best I could, saying that I was young and could escape, while she was old and infirm, and would not fear to die, if only she knew that she had not been the cause of my death. I replied that I would not save myself unless I could save her too, and so, after taking tight hold of her hand, I forced her to quicken her steps. She reluctantly obeyed, accusing herself for retarding my flight. Then the ashes began to fall, but not thickly: I looked back, and a dense blackness was rolling up behind us, which spread itself over the ground and followed like a torrent. "Let us turn aside," I said, "while we can still see, lest we be thrown down in the road and trampled on in the darkness by the thronging crowd." We were considering what to do, when the blackness of night overtook us, not that of a moonless or cloudy night, but the blackness of pent-up places which never see the light. You could hear the wailing of women, the screams of little children, and the shouts of men ; some were trying to find their parents, others their children, others their wives, by calling for them and recognising them by their voices alone. Some were commiserating their own lot, others that of their relatives, while some again prayed for death in sheer terror of dying. Many were lifting up their hands to the gods, but more were declaring that now there were no more gods, and that this night would last for ever, and the end of all the world. Nor were there wanting those who added to the real perils by inventing new and false terrors, for some said that part of Misenum was in ruins and the rest in flames, and though the tale was untrue, it found ready believers.

A gleam of light now appeared, which seemed to us not so much daylight as a token of the approaching fire. The latter remained at a distance, but the darkness came on again, and the ashes once more fell thickly and heavily. We had to keep rising and shaking the latter off us, or we should have been buried by them and crushed by their weight. I might boast that not one groan or cowardly exclamation escaped my lips, despite these perils, had I not believed that I

and the world were perishing together - a miserable consolation, indeed, yet one which a mortal creature finds very soothing. At length the blackness became less dense, and dissipated as it were into smoke and cloud ; then came the real light of day, and the sun shone out, but as blood-red as it appears at its setting. Our still trembling eyes saw that everything had been transformed, and covered with a deep layer of ashes, like snow. Making our way back to Misenum, we refreshed our bodies as best we could, and passed an anxious, troubled night, hovering between hope and fear. But our fears were uppermost, for the shocks of earthquake still continued, and several persons, driven frantic by dreadful prophecies, made sport of their own calamities and those of others. For our own part, though we had already passed through perils, and expected still more to come, we had no idea even then of leaving the town until we got news of my uncle.

You will not read these details, which are not up to the dignity of history, as though you were about to incorporate them in your writings, and if they seem to you to be hardly worth being made the subject of a letter, you must take the blame yourself, inasmuch as you insisted on having them. Farewell!