





Tranio and his best friend Livia often used to walk through the busy streets of the Roman city of Pompeii.



They would pass the Theatre where Tyrano's father acted in the pantomimes with masked actors and leaping acrobats. When they walked past the bakery they could smell the delicious aroma of the loaves that Livia's family were cooking in their oven as it wafted down the street.



The harbour at the mouth of the River Sarmus was their favourite place to sit, watching the ships being loaded with pots of wine, oil and spices or the fishermen unloading all the fish they had caught.



Beyond the massive city walls, they could see Pompeii's greatest protector in the distance. They called it Vesuvius, the Gentle Mountain. Could anyone feel safer than here, Tranio used to wonder, was there anywhere more beautiful than Pompeii?



Sometimes Tranio and Livia would go to the forum to listen to the poets sing, while they sat by the fountain and played knucklebones. Their favourite song was:

“Rumble down, tumble down,
great city walls,

Feel the ground grumble,
the citizens stumble

When the earth shakes, and
rumble down, tumble down.”

Everyone would join in laughing and singing as they remembered the earthquake tremors that had happened just before Tranio and Livia were born. Some parts of the city were still being rebuilt after the big earthquake, but nobody took the tremors seriously anymore.



One day Tranio's father took him to the Theatre to watch and told him that very soon Tranio would be able to have a small part in the pantomime they were rehearsing.



Tranio watched the actors rehearse with growing excitement when suddenly, the stone steps he was sitting on began to creak, the theatre flaps began to rattle and the stone pillars quivered. Everyone fell silent, but then they began to laugh and sing.



As he ran to Livia's house, Tranio could hear people's voices chanting the song "Rumble down, tumble down...", but soon the sound of people shouting, arguing and screaming began to drown out the song.

It became harder and harder to get through the narrow streets as people started to carry their belongings outside to safety, away from falling bricks and wood.



“Livia,” he called when he got to the bakery, “Liv, where are you?” The bakery kitchen was empty, loaves were scattered all over the floor and the little donkey who turned the corn mill was braying and jumping about nervously. Livia appeared, leaping down the stairs, “Oh! Tranio,” she giggled, “Father’s chasing our goat through the market. The poor thing bolted when the ground began to grumble. You’d have died laughing. Come on!” Flushed and excited the two children ran off hand in hand into the dusty streets.



But as they ran the sky began to darken and a thick cloud began to appear over the city. “Tranio!” exclaimed Livia in alarm, “why are the seagulls flying towards the woods? They’re going the wrong way.” It became difficult to breathe; the air began to fill with ash that got into their mouths and eyes. “Quick, the harbour! Run! Just Run!” shouted Tranio urgently. No one noticed them climb up the narrow plank of a small Greek ship and hide underneath a pile of coloured rags. Dusty and tired, the children fell asleep.



When they woke up and looked out from under the rags they were horrified. Pompeii was getting further and further away. The ship's captain had set sail to get away from the ash and the churning sea around Pompeii.



The children could hear dogs barking and people's muffled screams as they ran, gasping for air and falling over as the ground trembled under their feet.



Then in one terrible endless moment, the top of Mount Vesuvius exploded and flames ripped upwards. A massive cloud of silver ash rose into the heavens twisting and bubbling in every direction. Streams of molten lava flowed down the mountain slopes and engulfed nearby towns. Pompeii disappeared beneath a blanket of ash and stones. Tranio and Livia clung on to each other desperately as the steaming lava reached the sea and the water around the ship began to boil as it sailed slowly out of danger.



Many years later an old man and an old woman stood in the shade of an orange tree on the slopes of the mountain and laid a flower there. The mountain slopes were green and beautiful again but somewhere deep underneath where they stood was the bakery, the theatre and the forum where the people of Pompeii used to sing:

“Rumble down, tumble down,
great city walls,
Feel the ground grumble,
the citizens stumble
When the earth shakes, and
rumble down, tumble down.”

Story told as a youtube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K7aYNcv9uDI>

Includes a short history