

TULLIA OF POMPEII

RONA ELIZABETH WORKMAN

"UNCLE Jack, tell me a story," begged Mary Elizabeth.

Uncle Jack had just come from a distant city on a visit to Mary Elizabeth's father and mother. He had traveled all over the world and knew all kinds of wonderful things about far distant places, so Mary Elizabeth was sure he would be able to tell her many interesting stories.

"Mother says you can tell stories about boys and girls who lived hundreds of years ago; is that true?" asked Mary Elizabeth.

"Possibly," said Uncle Jack. "Maybe I could tell you something along that line."

"How do you do it?" questioned Mary Elizabeth. "How do you find out about boys and girls who lived so long ago?"

"Did you ever hear of the Memory of Nature?" asked her uncle. "There is such a thing, and it is from the Memory of Nature that I obtain the material for some of my stories; that is, I read in the Memory of Nature."

"Isn't that wonderful," said Mary Elizabeth. "How do you do it?"

"Well, it's like looking at moving pictures, in a way. It's a sort of second sight which I possess. I concentrate in a certain manner, and then I see pictures in the Memory of Nature as though they were on a film, moving before my eyes."

“It sounds awfully interesting,” said Mary Elizabeth. “Won’t you tell me a story about some of the boys and girls who lived hundreds of years ago?”

“All right,” was the reply, “here goes.”

* * * * *

The long, chariot-rutted street of Pompeii was filled with life. The clear call of street vendors and flower-sellers was to be heard, and from near at hand came the music and chanting of priests paying their devotions to some ancient god or goddess in the temple. From a distance arose the sound of excited voices and the clang of chariot wheels upon the stone pavement.

The white stone of the houses gleamed in the sunlight, although there seemed to be an odd reddish glow over everything, but that perhaps was caused by the dark, hovering cloud spreading out from the top of a mountain which lifted its head high above the city. The mountain was Vesuvius, and its peak was wrapped in snow.

It was a warm, rich, glowing city. Lovely homes opened from the street, great temples lifted their shining columns high in the sunshine, and in the distance could be glimpsed the laughing blue of the sea.

Crowds of people and chariots were passing across the far end of the street, all evidently hurrying to some game in the distant amphitheatre. A slave stepped into the street from the wide doorway of a palace. He was shading his eyes with his hand and gazing upward at the dark smoke cloud hovering

over the mountain. Finally with an anxious shake of his head he reentered the doorway.

It was a large atrium or living room into which he had stepped. It was cool in there after the hot glare of the street. Here were vases of fresh flowers placed in niches within the walls, and at the far end could be seen the flowers and trees in the peristyle or inner court. The old slave closed the street door, stepping carefully over the picture of a fiercely barking dog inlaid with bright-colored stones in the floor before the door and bearing the warning words "Cave Canem" below it, which meant, "Beware of the dog." Then moving slowly, with his head bowed in deep thought, he entered the peristyle, a part of which was occupied by a small but lovely flower-filled garden.

Green trees here threw their cool shade over white marble seats cushioned with rugs of bright colors; gleaming white statues peeped from their bowers of flowers and ferns, and the cool splash of water from the jar held by a white marble faun fed the fountain where brilliant goldfish flashed. Near the fountain and under the shade of a small fig tree was a low couch piled with soft pillows. Propped among them lay a frail, slender little girl, playing with a tiny white monkey.

Slowly the slave approached the couch and sat down upon the marble pavement.

"What makes you so restless today, Nelos?" the soft childish voice asked, as the little girl reached out a slender hand and touched the slave's dark cheek.

“Did you want to go to the games with the other slaves?”

“**Nay, not so, little mistress.** You know I do not like the sight of men and beasts fighting with each other. Besides your father asked me to take care of you until his return.”

The child laughed. “Then do not look so anxious. You are almost as restless as my little Nito here. Do you think it is this sultry heat which makes him act so?”

Nelos looked at the little white monkey, which was moving about, its little black eyes glancing first this way and then that as if unable to decide which place he thought best or safest.

“He fears something, little Tullia. The gods have given animals a keener sense of danger than they gave to us.”

The child’s face grew grave and she half raised herself among her pillows. “Maybe that is why the beasts in the circus pits have been roaring so loudly. Do you think they too fear something?”

Old Nelos, with a quick glance at the child, smiled and answered. “Now, little mistress, you must not fear. Doubtless it is only the heat which is making them all restless, and then the earthquake we had a few nights ago has frightened them.”

Tullia laughed and patted his hand. “Of course I do not fear with you and Adrian to care for me, but I wish this dreadful heat and glare would cease.”

The old slave raised his eyes to those of a tall youth who had moved quietly to the foot of the couch and stood listening, and an understanding look passed

between them. Together they moved away to a corner of the court.

“What do you think, my father?” asked the younger of the slaves in a low voice. “Do you think it best to take the little mistress and make haste to leave the city?”

The old man passed a shaking hand over his eyes as he answered, “I would the gods would tell me what to do. The master bade us stay until his return from Rome, but he could not guess the danger which I feel is near us. Too often have I seen mountains hide their heads in flame-streaked clouds, and I cannot help but fear. I like not the feel of the air and the roaring of the lions — Onesimus tells me that since yesterday they have refused all food, seeking only to escape from their dens.”

For a moment longer he stood in thought then spoke quickly: “Go thou, my son, and gather food and robes together while I prepare the little Tullia for the journey. Are you sure the boat is ready?”

“I made all ready this morning, Father, even as you commanded,” answered Adrian as he moved quickly away.

Nelos returned to the child’s side, replacing his worried look with a quiet smile as if to keep her from being frightened.

“Would you like to sail upon the sea this afternoon? Maybe it will be cooler upon the water.”

Tullia laughed and clapped her hands gleefully. “Truly I would, Nelos, and perhaps we may meet my father and mother. You know it is almost time for their coming.”

With quick, gentle movements Nelos lifted the slender little form in his arms, wrapping a silken shawl about her.

“Some day, Nelos, I shall walk like other children. Do you not think so?” queried the child. She leaned back to peer anxiously into his face as she spoke.

He smiled as he tucked the shawl about her tiny pink feet. “Truly you will be able to walk soon, my little mistress, yes, even to run like any little street slave if you wish. Did not the great doctors tell your father so, and do not your father and mother daily offer prayers and gifts in the temples that the gods may heal you?”

Comforted, Tullia laughed gaily and snuggled down into his arms.

“Are you ready, Father?” called Adrian from the doorway, and carrying Tullia carefully, Nelos followed his son into the street.

Coming into the open street they were frightened by the rapid change in the light. It was more sultry red in color, and the black cloud had mushroomed out until it hung sullenly over the entire city.

Nelos gave one quick upward glance then said softly to his son, “Let us make haste, I fear even now we are too late.”

Suddenly Tullia cried out and gripped Nelos' arm. “Nelos, you have forgotten Nito. I cannot leave my little monkey. Please, Adrian, bring him with us.”

For a moment Adrian hesitated, then quickly dropping his burden of food and soft blankets he ran hastily into the house. It seemed a long time before he returned. The hovering cloud had grown darker

and heavier and flashes of lightning slashed it across with sheets of flame, causing little Tullia to hide her eyes against Nelos' shoulder, before Adrian came running back holding the little monkey.

"He was too frightened to know my voice and had hidden himself," he muttered to his father, as snatching up his bundle he strode rapidly down the street.

Blacker and blacker grew the cloud, and now dull and thunderous rumblings came from the earth beneath their feet, while a light shower of ashes floated



gently down, dusting over their garments with a soft coating of grey.

The street leading to the sea was still almost empty, but from other streets and the crowded shops and temples came cries of fear as those within awakened at last to their danger.

Swiftly, with frightened upward glances at that dark cloud, the two slaves hurried toward the sea with their precious burden. At last they reached the shore. Nelos laid Tullia carefully upon the heap of blankets in the boat, where she lay clasping the tiny Nito in her arms while Nelos helped Adrian push their little craft into the deeper water. This was only the work of a moment, and soon they were row-

ing swiftly away from the doomed city.

Blackness quickly blotted out the scene, only occasionally gleams of light showed many other little boats bearing away those who had been fortunate enough to reach the seashore.

After what seemed a long time the darkness lightened, and the small boat made steadily for a cave carved by the waves in a high cliff. Here Adrian beached the boat, and gathering his mistress into his arms he carried her into its shelter and laid her gently down.

“See, Father, she is sleeping. Poor little weary one. Truly this has been a terrible night for one so frail as she, but here she will be safe.”

“Tomorrow we will take her to her kinsman’s house where we can send word to our master. It will be glad tidings for him to know she is safe, for truly she is the jewel of his heart.”

Gently Nelos tucked another shawl about the sleeping Tullia, and the little monkey snuggled quietly into his mistress’ arms, for he too was very weary.

* * * * *

“Oh, I am so glad they escaped,” whispered Mary Elizabeth. “Just think of being able to read such wonderful stories in the Memory of Nature. I wonder if the little Tullia ever grew well and strong.”

Uncle Jack kissed the anxious little face and smiled. “I know that she did, my dear, because I followed her story to the end of that life.”

Mary Elizabeth laughed happily. “I’m so glad. That makes it even more wonderful.”