

School 16  
Vito D. Age 12

## Cassius

My name is Cassius Cornelius Quintus; I am 14 years old and live in Rome under Emperor Titus Flavius Vespasian. It is the year 81 A.D. My father, Flavius, is an artisan, and he owns a shop right under our apartment. He makes mosaics for wealthy Romans (the Patricians). Sometimes I assist him in the shop, or help him with his equipment while he makes his mosaics. I have two twin brothers, Decius and Titus. They're both 16, and have their own jobs in the city. Titus works as a baker, not too far from my father's shop, and Decius is a potter. He has been saving his money for years, and has finally made enough to pay for a private tutor. Decius wants to become more than just a potter. As for me, I am little Cassius, the smallest child in the family. Our apartment building is small, but satisfactory. It's pleasant and sanitary, but we only use running water on occasions, because we don't have a lot of it. Decius and Titus bring fresh water from the public facilities when we need to take a bath. My brothers and I share a room, while my father, Flavius, has his own room.

I know I haven't mentioned my mother at all, but that's because she died two years ago. As I think of her now, I remember how my family came to Rome. I will tell you my story. I will take you back to 79 A.D, to the city of Pompeii.

I was 12 years old when I lived in Pompeii. My mother was alive, my father worked as a mosaic artisan, and Decius and Titus were 14. My father hired a Greek freedman to work with him. He and the Greek became friends almost immediately, and their mix of cultures created beautiful mosaics. My father and I were in the shop when a tall, muscular man came inside. He was curious, as he looked around the shop, and then walked over to my father. He asked him: "Are you Flavius." My father answered, "Yes, I am Flavius." The man said, "I am Davus, the slave overseer of the Quintilian family. I have been sent by my master to offer you a commission. He is well aware of your skills. He has seen your art in other houses, and at many dinner parties. He was wondering if you could make a mosaic in the atrium of his Villa. My master offers a generous amount of money for your services." My father thought for a moment; and then answered, " I agree to your request. I will start first thing tomorrow." The slave named Davus thanked my father and then left the shop. The Quintilian family was a very wealthy family, so I was eager to see this house. I asked my father: "Can I come too?" My father seemed undecided; he didn't want anyone to bother him while he worked, or be humiliated if anything were to happen as a result of my curiosity. Finally, he answered. "You may come, Cassius, but just as long as you help me with the mosaic, and don't touch anything!" "I will help you, I won't touch anything!" I swore, jumping with joy.

In the early morning my father woke me up, telling me that I had to hurry. I jumped out of bed. Breakfast was simple for a family like mine: Dry bread, raisins and water. My father and I walked to the shop to get our equipment and rouse Euclid. We walked through the streets of Pompeii until we reached the house of the Fauns. It was a huge brick building, with a red tile roof. We knocked on the large wooden door, a sign that represented the importance of this family. A voice rang from inside the house; "Who is it?" My father answered, "I am Flavius, the artist hired to make the mosaic. I am here

with my helpers: Euclid and Cassius.” The door opened. It was Davus, the slave overseer. “Come in,” he urged, “my master is waiting for you.” We entered. The house was arranged around a rather large courtyard. Many windows and balconies faced this courtyard, not the street, to keep the home safe from burglars. Inside, there was a large atrium, with a square hole in the ceiling to allow water to collect in the catch basin next to us. Davus led us on through the halls, with many doors that lead into the bedrooms of the family, the large kitchen, the dining room, the temple, the private bath, the garden, and finally, the office. There was a man inside. He was of large stature and great dignity. He welcomed us warmly; “You have decided to come, Flavius and Euclid. Come now, you won’t regret your decision.” He took us back through the entire house to the atrium. He showed us where he wanted the mosaic, and described to us the marine scene that he wished for. Slowly and carefully, I tiptoed away from the small party, into the kitchen. There, I heard a loud bark. I turned around and saw a fairly large black dog in the corner of the kitchen, and then heard a shout: “CASSIUS,” it said. “I’m coming father,” I groaned. I was sure to see the dog again. I was fairly busy that morning, handing my father and Euclid the supplies they needed, until we took a small break. The Quintilian family was having a late breakfast, and I found Davus talking to my father, and I approached them. When I arrived, I asked Davus, “Excuse me, but do you know the name of that dog in the kitchen?” Davus answered, “Oh... him. That’s Mica; he’s been with the Fauns for a long time.” “Mica?” I answered skeptically. “What an unusual name for such a large dog.” Davus just shrugged.

At about 11 o’clock, the Quintilians ate their Lunch. It was made up of bread, salad, olives, fruit, nuts, and cold meat left over from the night before. After that, Davus thanked us and told us the Fauns were having their midday rest. Our working would disturb them, so we left the house and headed home: tired, but relieved that the first half of the day was over.

My mother was the only one home, and she greeted us happily. “Back so soon?” She asked. My father just grinned. Then, there came a knock on the door. “It’s us!” Shouted the familiar voices of Decius and Titus. My father opened the door and told us all to sit down. It was time for our lunch: leftover meat with bread, salad and cheese. When lunch was over, Decius and Titus went back to work, and we went to the shop for the rest of the day, to prepare the little colored stones for the next day.

We spent a rather uneventful rest of the day in the shop, until we headed home. Decius and Titus were already there, with two large barrels of water for baths. Our dinner was like any other dinner in our house: Decius fought with Titus over the larger piece of fish or meat, while I served myself some olives and vegetable porridge. We all drank wine, but I drank water with a bit of wine (I couldn’t drink, but a little wine was needed to sanitize the water). After dinner, my mother and father rose from the table and walked to their bedroom. As soon as they left, Decius and Titus jumped from the table and ran towards the bedroom, pushing and shoving each other. I sighed, as I rose from the table and walked over to the bedroom. Decius and Titus were spread over the bed by the time I came. “Sorry,” said Decius. “Maybe next time.” I sighed. I had to sleep on the floor; AGAIN.

The next morning, I woke up by myself. I went down to the shop, where I met up with Euclid and my father. We went outside and began the walk to the house of the Quintilians. When we arrived, Davus greeted us and took us inside. My father began to

talk with Euclid on what the sea creatures in the mosaic should look like. Again, I slipped into the kitchen. I saw the dog named Mica sitting in the corner. This time Mica didn't bark. He walked up to me and sniffed me. I slowly patted his soft head. The dog jumped up and wagged his tail. I could see from the way he acted that this dog was neglected, and seldom had company. I slipped back into the atrium, before my father could notice that I was gone. I spent the rest of the afternoon helping my father piece the little bits of colored stones on wet mortar. When I came home, I ate a simple dinner and slept peacefully in the bed, since Titus and Decius were working late.

Every day for about a month, I woke up early, ate breakfast, and helped my father and Euclid make a mosaic on the large atrium floor of the Quintilian family. During my free time, I played with Mica. He was a friendly, energetic dog. He loved to play with me, because he had no one else to play with. His family didn't care for him anymore. I developed a special relationship with Mica, one that I never had before. I loved him, and he loved me. Sometimes I brought him with me to help find pieces my father needed to work.

After a long, hard process, my father Flavius, his partner Euclid and I finished the mosaic. It was beautiful. On the last day, when we cleaned up the atrium of any spare pieces, and put up the finishing touches, the dignified man who welcomed us into his home entered the atrium, careful not to look at the mosaic. "Is it finished?" he asked curiously, trying not to peek. "It is finished," said Euclid. The head of the Quintilian family gasped. He was taken aback by the luscious, sophisticated appearance of the mosaic, and every animal was perfect. There were fishes of all kinds. Small ones, large ones, long ones and striped ones. There were two lobsters. One on the top and one in the center left. There was a squid on the center right, and in the middle a huge white octopus. They looked so real I could almost feel the ocean when I looked at them. "I love it!" said the man. "In fact, I love it so much that I will hold a dinner party in honor of it!" he exclaimed. My father was pleased. I had never seen him so joyous. When he returned home, he told my mother Vesta of the news. She was overjoyed. I was just going to the Quintilian house to take Mica outside. They wanted no animals involved with their party guests, so they decided to leave Mica with me.

On the night of the party, Titus and Decius were working. Inside the atrium, many wealthy citizens marveled at the work of art that my father and Euclid created. I headed straight for the kitchen. Unfortunately, there were many slaves inside, preparing a perfect meal. I snuck around the fragrant smelling garden and in through the back... And sure enough, Mica was in the corner of the room. He looked very strange. He was whimpering and cowering in fear, hiding from everyone in the room. When I tried to pet him, he jumped back and barked. I didn't know what was wrong with Mica. I told him to quiet down. We both went outside. It was a beautiful night. We were a short distance from the house. I watched the sky, marveling at its beauty, while Mica ran around barking and whining, then jumping up at me. He looked ridiculous, but I had a feeling that he was trying to tell me something. Suddenly, I saw something strange. It was an unusual cloud, protruding from the mountain that resembled a pine tree, Mount Vesuvius. Parts of this cloud were bright, and others were dark. Then, a huge explosion came from the top of the mountain, and large stones and ashes began to fly out of it. One of the rather large boulders landed right in the middle of the Quintilians' villa. There were thousands of them, flying in all directions, burning homes and smashing buildings, while the ashes fell

upon the city. The air smelled strongly of sulfur emitted by the mountain. At the Quintilian family's dinner party, there were screams and shouts as people ran from the burning home. I was overcome with fear. Hoping I would find my parents alive and well, I called Mica and made a dash for my house. When I arrived to the small apartment, I slammed the door down. There was no one. I ran to Titus's shop but it, too, was abandoned. I was scared. I couldn't find my family. Suddenly, a brave group of men began to run in the opposite direction, urging the astonished citizens to follow them. I stopped one of the men and asked him, "Who are you?" The man answered, "I am Marcus. We have been sent by our leader, Plinius the Elder, to save as many people as we can. Come with us." I answered: "But what will become of my family?" The man was touched, but ordered me to make a run for the fleet of ships on the shore. I decided that at that point, there was nothing I could do for my family. I called Mica, and together, we ran for the ships. Meanwhile, the fury of the eruption continued its wrath upon Pompeii. There were many people inside the ship when we reached the shore. I was hoisted into the ship by two strong sailors, and instantly, began a search for my family. After a long time, I was able to spot two teenagers and an adult sleeping in a corner of the rescue ship. "Titus, Decius, Father?" I asked. The man squinted his eyes, and then smiled happily. "Cassius! You're alive!" He walked over to me and embraced me. I could feel he was happy. I asked my father: "Where is mother?" my father sat down and began to weep. Titus and Decius instantly began to comfort him. I realized that my mother had not survived the eruption. A strong sailor came over and asked: "Excuse me, is this your dog?" I looked at my father, and he answered: "Why, yes. I believe it is." I couldn't believe it. "Father! We can keep Mica?" I asked hopefully. "I guess so," my father said. The sailor replied: "Do not worry about your future. I am sure Emperor Vespasian will financially support all the victims of this disaster."

It has been two years that Emperor Vespasian has supported our new family. We moved to Rome. My father opened up a new art shop, Titus and Decius got new jobs, I still help my father with his mosaics, and Mica has become part of the family. As I finish this story, Mica is walking into this room. I know now that the night of the eruption Mica was trying to tell me something was wrong. Now he has become old and tired and has lost his sharp senses, but I love him just as much as I did when I first met him two years ago in Pompeii.