

## CHAPTER V

### VESUVIUS RAMPANT

It was Saturday night, the seventh day of April, nineteen hundred and six--a night never to be forgotten by those aboard the ship; a night which has its place in history.

At dinner the captain announced that he had dropped anchor at the Immacolatella Nuova, but at a safe distance from the shore, and that no passengers would be landed under any circumstances until the fall of ashes ceased and he could put his people ashore in a proper manner.

A spirit of unrest fell upon them all. Big Tom Horton whispered to Beth that he did not intend to leave her side until all danger was over. The deck was deserted, all the passengers crowding into the smoking room and saloons to escape the lava dust.

Few kept their rooms or ventured to sleep. At intervals a loud detonation from the volcano shook the air, and the mystery and awe of the enveloping gloom were so palpable as almost to be felt.

Toward midnight the wind changed, driving the cloud of ashes to the southward and sufficiently clearing the atmosphere to allow the angry glow of the crater to be distinctly seen. Now it shot a pillar of fire

thousands of feet straight into the heavens; then it would darken and roll skyward great clouds that were illumined by the showers of sparks accompanying them.

The windows of every cabin facing the volcano were filled with eager faces, and in the smoking room Uncle John clasped Beth around the waist with one arm and Patsy with the other and watched the wonderful exhibition through the window with a grave and anxious face. Tom Horton had taken a position at one side of them and the dark Italian at the other. The latter assured Patsy they were in no danger whatever. Tom secretly hoped they were, and laid brave plans for rescuing Beth or perishing at her side. Louise chose to lie in her berth and await events with calm resignation. If they escaped she would not look haggard and hollow-eyed when morning came. If a catastrophe was pending she would have no power to prevent it.

It was four o'clock on Sunday morning when Vesuvius finally reached the climax of her travail. With a deep groan of anguish the mountain burst asunder, and from its side rolled a great stream of molten lava that slowly spread down the slope, consuming trees, vineyards and dwellings in its path and overwhelming the fated city of Bosco-Trecase.

Our friends marked the course of destruction by watching the thread of fire slowly wander down the mountain slope. They did not know of the desolation it was causing, but the sight was terrible enough to inspire awe in every breast.

The volcano was easier after that final outburst, but the black clouds formed thicker than ever, and soon obscured the sky again.