

14 *To his friend Mauricus*

1 You invite me to your place at Formiae.* I shall come, provided that you do not put yourself to any inconvenience. Such an agreement allows me in turn to safeguard my own interests. For it is not the sea and shore that I am after, but yourself, leisure, and freedom;
2 otherwise it would be better for me to stay in Rome. All things must be ordered to suit someone else's convenience, or one's own. My natural inclination is to go all out for nothing but the whole hog. Farewell.

15 *To his friend Romanus*

1 You were not present at a marvellous episode, and nor was I, but the story reached me the other day. Paulus,* a distinguished Roman knight of exceptional learning, writes elegiacs. This is a family trait, for he is a fellow townsman of Propertius, and indeed he numbers
2 him among his forebears. He was giving a recital, and he began with the words: 'Priscus, you command me . . .'. At this, Javolenus Priscus,* who was there as a close friend of Paulus, broke in: 'But I do not command you.' Imagine the general laughter and the joking!
3 Priscus is indeed an odd fellow, yet he meets his obligations, is called upon as adviser, and is also a community-adviser on the civil law. This was what made the comment more comic and also more
4 remarkable. Meanwhile the eccentric behaviour of another brought Paulus a lukewarm reception. So people intending to offer a recital should carefully ensure not only that they themselves are sound in mind, but also that the audience they invite are, too! Farewell.

16 *To his friend Tacitus*

1 You ask me to describe for you the death of my uncle, to enable you to transmit a more truthful account* for the benefit of posterity. I am grateful to you, because I realize that perennial glory is in store for
2 the manner of his death if it is extolled by you. It is true that he died in a disaster which overtook the most beautiful of regions, and in a calamity shared by communities and cities, so that his renown will seemingly live for ever, and it is true also that he wrote numerous works* which will also survive. But none the less, the undying quality

of your writings will greatly enhance his immortality. I myself
3 account as blessed those who by the gods' gift have been granted the ability either to perform deeds worth chronicling or to compose accounts which deserve to be read,* but I regard as most blessed those who achieve both. My uncle will be numbered among these through his books and through yours, and for this reason I more gladly undertake and even demand the task you lay on me.

My uncle was at Misenum, where he held command of the fleet* in
4 person. Just after midday on 24 August my mother pointed out to him the appearance of a cloud of unusual size and appearance. He
5 had relaxed in the sun, had then taken a cold dip, had lunched lying down, and was at his books. He asked for his sandals, and mounted to the place from which that remarkable phenomenon could best be observed. A cloud was issuing up from some mountain which spectators from a distance could not identify; it was later established to have been Vesuvius. The pine tree,* rather than any other, best describes its appearance and shape, for it rose high up into the sky on
6 what one can describe as a very long trunk, and it then spread out into what looked like branches. I believe that this was because the cloud was borne upward while the pressure of wind was still fresh, and then when this died down it was left unsupported, or was overcome by its own weight and so thinned out and became widespread. Its appearance varied between white on the one hand, and grimy and spotted on the other, according as it had thrust up earth or ashes. My uncle, most learned man that he was, realized that this was
7 important, and should be investigated at closer quarters. He ordered a fast-sailing ship to be made ready, and gave me the option of accompanying him if I so wished. I replied that I preferred to work at my books,* and it chanced that he had given me an exercise to write.

As he was leaving the house, he received a letter from Rectina, 8 wife of Tascius.* She was panicking at the danger looming over her, for her house lay below Vesuvius, and the only way of escape was by ship. She begged him to rescue her from that great hazard. He
9 changed his plan, and the journey which had begun in a spirit of research he now undertook with the greatest urgency. He launched some quadriremes, and embarked in order to lend aid personally, not merely to Rectina, but to many, for the attractiveness of the coast had made it thickly populated. He headed swiftly into the area from 10

which others were fleeing, and maintained a straight course, steering straight towards the danger. He was so fearless that he dictated and had notes taken of all the movements and shapes of that evil phenomenon as he observed them.

11 By now ashes were falling on the ships, whiter and thicker the nearer they approached. Then pumice stones also descended, and stones which were black, charred, and split by the fires. Suddenly they were in shallow water and the shore-line barred their way with debris from the mountain. My uncle hesitated momentarily, wondering whether to turn back, but then, as the steersman advised that course, he said to him: 'Fortune favours the brave. Head for the villa
12 of Pomponianus.' This was at Stabiae, separated from the ships by the middle of the bay (for the shore gradually winds in a curve round the sea as it pours in). Though the danger had not yet drawn near, it was clearly visible, and would come very close as it spread. So Pomponianus had stowed his baggage into boats, having determined on flight if the opposing wind dropped. My uncle was then carried in by the wind, which was wholly in his favour. He embraced, consoled, and encouraged Pomponianus, who was panicking. Then in order to relieve his host's fear by a show of unconcern, he gave orders to be conveyed to the bath. After bathing, he reclined and dined in cheerful mood, or apparently cheerful, which was just as impressive.

13 Meanwhile from Mount Vesuvius widespread flames and fires rising high blazed forth in several places, their gleaming brightness accentuated by the darkness of the night. To calm people's apprehensions, my uncle kept saying that these were fires abandoned by peasants in their fear, and houses ablaze because they had been left untenanted. Then he retired to rest, and in fact he relaxed in sleep that was wholly genuine, for his snoring, somewhat deep and loud because of his broad physique, was audible to those patrolling the threshold. But by this time the courtyard which gave access to
14 his suite of rooms had become so full of ash intermingled with pumice stones that it was piled high. Thus if he had lingered longer in the bedroom the way out would have been barred. So he was wakened, and he emerged to join Pomponianus and the rest, who
15 had stayed awake. Together they debated whether to stay indoors or to roam in the open, for the buildings were shaking with frequent large-scale tremors; as though dislodged from their foundations, they seemed to shift now one way and now another, and then back

again. On the other hand, in the open they feared falling pumice stones, however light and hollow. But comparison of the dangers made them opt for the open. For my uncle, this was one rational choice prevailing over the other, but for the rest, fear prevailing over fear. They used strips of cloth to fasten pillows on their heads as a protection against falling stones.

By now it was daylight elsewhere, but there it was night, blacker and denser than any night, though many torches and lights of various kinds relieved it. They decided to go out onto the shore, and to investigate from close at hand whether the sea now allowed any departure, but it still remained mountainous and hostile. My uncle lay down there on a discarded sail, and repeatedly drank cold water, which he had requested. Then flames and the smell of sulphur heralding the flames impelled the rest to flight and roused him. Leaning on two of his confidential slaves, he stood up and at once collapsed.* I infer that his breathing was choked by the greater density of smoke, and this blocked his gullet, which was often frail and narrow, and often unsettled. When daylight was restored, two days after his eyes had closed in death, his body was found intact and unharmed. It was covered over, still in the clothes he had worn. It was more like someone sleeping than a corpse.

Meanwhile my mother and I at Misenum*—but this is irrelevant to a historical account, and you wanted to ascertain nothing other than details of my uncle's death, so I shall end here, but with a single addition. I have detailed everything at which I was present, and which I had heard at the very time when the facts were most truthfully recorded. You must select what you particularly want, for it is one thing to write a letter, and another to compose a history; one thing to write for a friend, another to write for the world. Farewell.

17 *To his friend Restitutus*

I cannot refrain from pouring into your ear by letter, since I cannot do it face to face, the slight irritation which I felt in the audience of a certain friend of mine. A work was being recited which was exquisitely polished. Two or three of those present, eloquent men in their own eyes and and in those of a few, listened as though they were deaf and dumb. They did not part their lips, stir their hands, or even rise to their feet because they were tired of sitting down. Why such high

seriousness, such superior wisdom, or rather such indolence, hauteur, ill-breeding, or rather mindlessness, to spend an entire day in causing offence, leaving behind as an enemy one to whom you came as a close friend? So are you yourself more eloquent? All the more reason, then, not to be grudging, for he who is grudging is the lesser man.

In short, whether your abilities are greater, or less, or identical, offer praise to him who falls below you, or rises above you, or who is your equal: to the one who is above you, because if he is not worthy of praise, you yourself cannot obtain it; to the one who falls below you, or is equal to you, because your own esteem depends on the person whom you excel or equal being regarded as outstanding. For my own part, I regularly go so far as to revere and admire all who achieve something in the intellectual life, for it is a difficult, demanding, and exacting pursuit, which, when despised by people, despises them in turn. But perhaps you think differently. Yet who is more respectful and appreciative as a judge of literature than you? For this reason I have revealed my annoyance to you particularly, for I could associate you with me more than anyone in this matter. Farewell.

18 To his friend Sabinus

You ask me to undertake proceedings on behalf of the community of Firmum.* Though I am overstretched, with numerous tasks on hand, I shall try to do it, for I am keen to put under an obligation both that distinguished colony by taking on the duties of advocate, and yourself by undertaking this service so very pleasing to you. You often proclaim to the world that you have gained my friendship for your protection and prestige, so there is nothing which I should deny to you, especially as you seek this on behalf of your native city; for what pleas are more honourable than those which demonstrate patriotism, or more effective than those of a dear friend? So you can pledge my loyalty to your citizens of Firmum, whom I can now call mine instead. That they deserve my hard work and eager support is guaranteed both by their own distinction and above all by the likelihood of their excellence, since your worthy self has emerged from among them. Farewell.

19 To his friend Nepos

106-7

Are you aware that the price of land has risen, especially around Rome? The reasons for this sudden increase have been the subject of much discussion. At the last elections, the Senate issued the worthiest instructions that candidates should not host dinner-parties, dispense gifts, or deposit money.* The first two of these practices were carried on both openly and without restraint, and the third though covert was known to be taking place.

Our friend Homullus* then alertly exploited this unanimity of the Senate as a proposal to demand that the Senate should inform the emperor of this general desire, and should beg him with his forethought to confront this abuse as he had confronted others. He has done so, for he has invoked the law against bribery to restrict the disgraceful and notorious expenses incurred by candidates. He has ordered them to invest a third of their inherited wealth in real estate, for he considered it a disgrace, as indeed it was, that candidates for office were regarding Rome and Italy not as their fatherland but as a lodging house and a stable, as if they were travellers from abroad.

So candidates are rushing around, trying to buy whatever they hear is for sale, and ensuring that more properties are available for purchase. If you are unhappy with your Italian estates, therefore, this is the time, heaven knows, for selling them and buying in the provinces,* while those same candidates are selling there to buy here. Farewell.

20 To his friend Tacitus

You say that your interest has been whetted by the letter which I wrote to you at your request about the death of my uncle, and that you are keen to know, when I was left behind at Misenum (I had embarked on this topic but then broke off), not only what fears but also what misfortunes I endured. So 'though aghast in mind at recalling them, I shall begin'.*

Once my uncle had departed, I devoted the rest of my day to my studies, for that was the reason why I stayed behind. I then took a bath, had dinner, and then a disturbed and short-lived sleep. There had been earth-tremors for many days previously, though they were less terrifying because they were frequent in Campania.* But that

night they became so strong that everything around us seemed to be
 4 not merely shifting but turning upside down. My mother broke into
 my bedroom. I in my turn was already rising, intending to rouse her
 if she was sleeping. We retired to the courtyard of the house, which
 5 extended a short distance between the sea and the buildings. I am
 uncertain whether I should call it resolve or foolishness (I was then
 in my eighteenth year, you see), but I asked for a book of Titus Livy
 and read it, and I also copied out passages (as I had begun earlier), as
 though in relaxation. Suddenly a friend of my uncle appeared; he
 had recently come from Spain* to join him. When he saw my mother
 and myself sitting there, and me even reading a book, he rebuked
 her for her forbearance, and me for my untroubled attitude. But I
 concentrated on the book just as eagerly.

6 By now the first hour of daylight had arrived, but it was still
 uncertain and listless. The buildings all round were shaking, and
 though we were in the open, it was a confined space, and our fear of
 7 falling buildings became great and definite. We then finally decided
 to quit the town, followed by a stupefied mob. In what passes for
 prudence at a time of panic, they preferred the decision of others to
 their own, and in an extended column they pressed close to us and
 8 drove us on as we departed. Once we were away from the buildings,
 we halted. There we experienced many remarkable and many fearful
 things, for the carriages which we had ordered to be brought out
 were moved in opposite directions though on wholly level ground,
 and did not remain stationary in the same tracks even though
 9 wedged with stones. Moreover, we watched the sea being sucked
 back and virtually repelled by an earth-tremor; at any rate the shore-
 line had advanced, and left many sea-creatures stranded on the dry
 sand. On the landward side there was a black and menacing cloud,
 split by twisted and quivering flashes of fiery breath; it opened out
 into extended shapes of flames, like lightning flashes, but greater.

10 Then that same friend from Spain spoke more urgently and press-
 ingly: 'If your brother, if your uncle* is still alive, he desires your
 safety. If he is dead, he wanted you to survive him. So why do you
 postpone your escape?' Our answer was that we would not take
 11 thought for our own safety while we were not sure of his. He did not
 delay further, but burst out, and removed himself from the danger
 with all speed.

Not long afterwards that cloud descended to ground level and

covered the sea. It had encircled Capri and hidden it from sight, and
 made the promontory of Misenum invisible. My mother then
 12 begged and encouraged and bade me flee in any way I could. She
 said that this was possible for a young person, but that she herself,
 being weighed down with years and a frail physique, would be happy
 to die if she were not responsible for my death. My riposte was that
 I would not seek safety without her. I then grasped her hand, and
 forced her to move faster. She reluctantly obeyed, reproaching
 herself for delaying me.

Ash was now descending, though slight in quantity. I looked back.
 13 Dense blackness loomed over us, pursuing us as it spread over the
 earth like a flood. 'Let us turn aside,' I said, 'while we can see.
 Otherwise, if we stay on the road, we may be brought down and
 flattened in the darkness by the crowd accompanying us.' We had
 14 scarcely sat down when darkness descended. It was not like a moon-
 less or cloudy night, but like being in an enclosed place where the
 light has been doused. You could hear women moaning, children
 howling, and men shouting; they were crying out, some seeking
 parents, others children, and others wives, or recognizing them by
 the sound of their voices. Some were lamenting their own mis-
 fortune, others that of their families. A few in their fear of death
 were praying for death. Many were raising their hands to implore
 15 the gods, but more took the view that no gods now existed anywhere,
 and that this was an eternal and final darkness hanging over the
 world. There were some who magnified the actual dangers with
 invented and lying fears. Some persons present reported that one
 part of Misenum was in ruins, and that another was on fire; it was
 untrue, but their listeners believed it.

A vestige of light returned, but to us it seemed to be not daylight
 16 but an indication of advancing fire. In fact, the fire halted some
 distance away. But the darkness returned, and so did the ash, now
 abundant and heavy. We repeatedly stood up and shook it off, for
 otherwise we would have been buried and even crushed beneath its
 weight. I could boast that though encompassed by these great dan-
 17 gers I uttered no groan or pusillanimous word, but what deters me is
 that I believed that I was perishing together with the whole world,
 and the whole world was perishing with me—a wretched consolation
 for my mortal lot, yet a powerful one.

At last the darkness thinned out and vanished into smoke or 18

cloud. True daylight came, and the sun also shone, but pallidly, as occurs at an eclipse. Our eyes, still trembling, were confronted with a scene of universal change, for everything was buried by deep ash
 19 as though by snow. We returned to Misenum, tended our bodies as best we could, and in mingled hope and fear spent the night on tenterhooks and in uncertainty. The fear was stronger, for the earth-tremors continued, and many frenzied individuals made a mockery
 20 of their own misfortunes and those of others with terrifying proph-ecies. Even then, however, we ourselves did not plan to leave, in spite of our experience and expectation of the dangers, until the message came about my uncle.

These details are in no way worthy of your history. You will read them with no intention of recording them. If they seem to you unworthy even of a letter, you will doubtless blame yourself for requesting them. Farewell.

21 To his friend Caninius

1 I am of the company of admirers of the ancients, but am not one to despise the talents of our own day, as some do. Nature is not so weary*
 2 and exhausted that it produces nothing praiseworthy. Indeed, I recently listened to Vergilius Romanus* reading to a small group a work modelled on the Old Comedy. It was so good that it can at some time serve as a model for others.

3 I am not sure if you know him, but you ought to. He is the epitome of honest manners, refined talent, and literary versatility.
 4 He has written graceful, sharp, and charming iambic mimes, and is supremely eloquent in this genre (for there is no category of writing which when perfected cannot be pronounced supremely eloquent). He has written comedies rivalling Menander and others of that age; you can regard these as on a par with those of Plautus and Terence.
 5 Now for the first time he has made his appearance with Old Comedy, but he does not appear to be a beginner. He does not lack intensity, grandeur, subtlety, pungency, sweetness, or charm. He has paid honour to virtues, and attacked vices; he has deployed fictitious names
 6 fittingly, and real names appropriately. Only with regard to myself has he exceeded the limit in generosity of judgement, but poets are permitted to transgress with regard to truth.

7 In short, I shall extract the book from him, and send it to you to

read or rather to memorize, for I have no doubt that you will not put it down once you have taken it up. Farewell.

22 To his friend Tiro

106-7

A case of great importance has been conducted which concerns all
 1 who are to be governors of provinces; it is important too for all who naively entrust themselves to friends. Lustricius Bruttianus caught
 2 his colleague Montanius Atticinus* red-handed in much criminal activity, and reported it by letter to Caesar. Atticinus then added insult to injury by laying an accusation against Bruttianus, whom he had deceived. At the hearing which took place I was an assessor.*
 Each of the two spoke on his own behalf, and both handled the issues separately and *sommairement*, the kind of presentation which at once
 3 divulges the truth. Bruttianus produced his will, written as he said by the hand of Atticinus, for this was the means of demonstrating
 4 both their intimate friendship and his need to complain about the man for whom he had entertained such affection. He recounted clear
 5 evidence of foul crimes.* Atticinus was unable to rebut them; he retaliated in such a way that in his disgusting defence and his accus-
 6 ation he showed himself to be a scoundrel. For he had bribed a slave of Bruttianus' scribe, had intercepted documents and tampered with them, and, most sacrilegiously of all, he had exploited the charge
 7 against himself by diverting it against his friend.

Caesar acted in the best possible way. He indicted,* not Bruttianus,
 8 but Atticinus there and then. He was condemned, and banished to an island.* Bruttianus was awarded a thoroughly deserved attestation of honourable conduct, and indeed fame, since his resolution has pursued him. For, having defended himself with the greatest dis-
 9 patch, he launched a vigorous accusation, so that he has emerged as incisive as he was virtuous and honest.

I have written to you about this to give you prior warning now that
 10 you have obtained your province. You must rely on yourself totally, and not trust anyone very much. Secondly, you must realize that if any person does practise deception on you (I pray that this does not
 11 happen), retaliation is at hand. But repeatedly ensure that there is no
 12 need for this, for the pleasure of exacting reparation is not so great as the humiliation of being deceived. Farewell.