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Required Readings – Pliny

Letter 6.4

GAIUS PLINY SENDS GREETINGS TO HIS CALPURNIA.

1 Never have I complained more about my business obligations, which have not allowed me either to accompany you as you were setting out into Campania for the sake of your health or to follow right away after you departed. 2 In fact now I particularly wish to be together so that I might believe with my own eyes what strength and what plumpness you are adding, and finally whether it is true that you are letting the pleasures of retreat and the wealth of the region pass you by unharmed.

3 Indeed I would long for you not without worry even if you were strong; for it is a worrying and uncertain thing sometimes to know nothing about someone whom you love most passionately. 4 Now truly the thought both of your absence and your poor health terrifies me with uncertain and varying anxiety. I dread everything, I imagine everything and, what is the nature of those who are afraid, I invent for myself most of all the things that I pray most of all not to occur. 5 So I ask more endlessly that you take care of my fear every day with one or even a pair of letters. For I will be freer from care while I read, and I will immediately be afraid, after I am done reading. Farewell.

Letter 6.7

GAIUS PLINY SENDS GREETINGS TO HIS CALPURNIA.

1 You write that you are exceedingly affected by my absence and that you have one comfort: that you hold my little books in place of me, and often you even position them where I sit. 2 It is pleasing that you search for me, pleasing that you find comfort in these remedies; in turn I read your letters over and over and I take them into my hands again and again as if they were new. 3 But so much the more am I stirred to longing for you: for your letters have as much charm as there is sweetness in your manner of speaking. But write as frequently as possible, even if this pleases me in such a way that it tortures me. Farewell.

Letter 6.16

GAIUS PLINY SENDS GREETINGS TO HIS TACITUS.

1 You ask that I write to you an account of my uncle's death, with which you can hand it down more accurately to posterity. Thank you; for I see that undying fame is offered for his death if it is made famous by you. 2 For

even though he died in a disaster for such beautiful lands, like the peoples and like the cities in a memorable calamity, he died as if he was going to live forever; although he wrote very many works that will remain, yet the immortality of your writings will add much to his perpetuity. 3 Indeed I consider fortunate those to whom is given by a gift of the gods either to do things that should be written about or to write things that should be read, and most blessed of all are those to whom both have been given. In the number of the latter will be my uncle both because of his own books and because of yours. All the more willingly do I undertake, even demand what you impose.

4 He was at Misenum, and in person he was commanding the fleet with supreme power. On the ninth day before the Kalends of September (August 24) at almost the seventh hour (about 12:30 p.m.), my mother pointed out to him that a cloud of unusual size and appearance was coming into sight. 5 Having enjoyed the sun and soon a cold plunge, reclining, he had had a bite to eat and was studying; he demanded his sandals, and he climbed to a place from which that amazing sight could be most visible. A cloud—it was uncertain for those looking upon it from a distance from which mountain; afterward it was understood to have been Vesuvius—was rising up, whose resemblance and shape portrayed no tree more than a pine. 6 For just as raised on high by a very long trunk, (the cloud) was spread out with a certain type of branches, I believe because, having been carried up by a recent blast of air, then abandoned by that (blast) which was losing strength, or even overcome by its own weight, it faded away horizontally, white sometimes, sometimes discolored and blotchy according to whether it had taken up earth or ash.

7 It seemed to so learned a man to be a great thing and something to be become acquainted with more closely. He ordered a fast ship to be made ready; he provided the means for me, should I wish to come along together (with him); I replied that I preferred to study, and by chance he himself had furnished what I was writing. 8 He was setting out from the house; he received writing tablets of Rectina Tasci, thoroughly terrified by the imminent danger—for her villa lay at the foot (of the mountain), and there was no other escape except by ships: she was pleading that he take her away from such a dangerous situation. 9 He changed his plan and what he had begun with a scholarly mind, he took on with the bravest one. He launched quadriremes; he himself boarded, about to bring aid not only to Rectina but to many—for the beautiful seashore was crowded. 10 He hastened to that place from which others fled; he held a straight

course, straight rudders, freed from fear to such an extent that he noted and dictated all the movements of that evil, all the shapes, as he had detected them with his eyes.

11 Ash was already falling on the ships, wherever they approached nearer, hotter and thicker; now pumice, and even rocks, black, scorched, and broken by fire; now there were sudden shallows and the shores standing in the way because of the collapse of the mountain. Having hesitated a little whether to turn back, soon he said to the helmsman, who was advising that he do so, "Fortune helps the brave: make for Pomponianus." 12 He was at Stabiae, cut off by the middle of the bay—for with curved shores gradually bending around, the sea pours in; there, although danger was not yet approaching, nevertheless visible and, since it was growing, very near, he had brought together his belongings onto ships, certain of escape, if the opposing wind had settled down. My uncle, having been carried in at that time by that (wind), a most favorable one, embraced the terrified man, comforted him, encouraged him, and so that he might calm his fear with his own freedom from anxiety, he ordered himself to be carried down into the baths; having washed, he reclined, he dined, either cheerful or—what is equally great—like he was cheerful.

13 Meanwhile from Mt. Vesuvius in many places shone forth extremely wide flames and tall fires, whose brightness and clarity was intensified by the shadows of the night. He kept saying as a means of counteracting fear that fires left behind because of the peasants' panic and deserted villas burned through their abandonment. Then he handed himself over to rest and he rested with the truest sleep indeed, for the movement of his breath, which was deeper and louder for him because of the size of his body, was heard by those who were hovering at the threshold. 14 But the courtyard from which the annex was approached, already filled with ash and mixed pumice, had risen to such an extent that if there was a longer delay in the bedroom, a way out would be denied. Having been woken, he came forth and rejoined Pomponianus and the others who had stayed awake.

15 Together they deliberated whether they should stay within the buildings or wander in the open. For the buildings were swaying with frequent and immense tremors, and as if shifted from their foundations, they seemed to go away and be carried back, now here now there. 16 Under the open sky again the falling of pumice, although light and porous, was feared; yet the comparison of dangers chose this option. And with him indeed reason overcame reason; with the others fear overcame fear. They tied pillows placed on their heads with pieces of cloth; this was protection against falling objects.