

Luca Garcia-Kytola

It's beautiful, really. It's broad and sweeping and has no shade anywhere at all, but it's beautiful. It's Pompeii. The cobblestone streets wind around the shattered city, and I wind down them in turn. The cracks in the walls are filled with ash made solid by age, and the cracks in the ash are filled with shadows. I pause outside the crumbled wall of what used to be a family home. I know people died here. But they lived here first. How many people lived here? Were they a family? Were there kids? Did people come over for dinner and lunch, did they pop over with an extra cask of wine and a strong intent to discuss the play they saw last week? Did they live just like me? They couldn't have known that their days in this city were going to be cut so short.

I go, Mum says it's time to look at something else.

At the beginning of the day, we were told not to touch anything, wouldn't want to destroy the destroyed. I couldn't touch anything anyway, I'm hoisted up on my sister's back, high up off the ground. I rest my head on her shoulder and think about tugging my hat further over my eyes to fight off the beating sun. My sister hitches me up when I begin to slip, and I let my eyes flutter closed. Exhaustion tugs at my bones, it's been a long, hot day. I can't help but wonder if this is how we would have fled, had we been in Pompeii on that day. It's noon right now, which I know is when the volcano erupted. I read it on a pamphlet outside the city. Perhaps if we had been here two thousand years ago, after my midday nap, too tired to run, my sister would have picked me up like she has now. We wouldn't have made it out, but maybe in the future there would have been a little plaque next to a photo in a museum detailing the plight of a teenager desperately trying to carry her kid sister to safety. Maybe another big sister, holding her little sister's hand through the exhibits, would have read that plaque and thought "Hm, sisters are still sisters". I think that thought myself, as I do indeed pull my hat over my eyes like I'd been wanting to. The houses in Pompeii are still houses and cities are still cities and people are still people and they always will be, I think.