

## Shaking the Ground

By Joy T.

Motus. The most earthquake concentrated place in the world. The small town is hit with dozens upon dozens of deep tremors per month. This is where I live. My brother, father and me. Rarely anyone comes by these days, because it's so hard to get in and out. We've come to get used to everyday life here. Vincenzo and I are only 9 and 11, but we know more about how to survive than most adults in Europe. Father and Mother both came from poor countries and hoped for a better future for us. But instead they stumbled upon Motus, the crumbling city, and couldn't escape. Yet we'll never forget how Mother escaped by being swallowed by the earth.

The ground was shaking, trembling with might, and my mother desperately clawed at any stable hold while the ground caved in, bringing everything with it. My mother's screams of horror were heard through heaven, all the way to God. There's a sudden silence. Not even a body to bury.

A loud gasp slips from my body as I burst upright and hit my head on the low ceiling. Everyday I wake up haunted and it happens so often that a dent has appeared in the wall. I silently whisper, "*Find the steady road one day, even if the unstable one leads the way*". This was what mother told me every morning. I jump up from the stale bed and chase away the cockroaches nested by me. Right away, I feel the vibration of the ground beneath my feet. Rushing for stabilization, I control myself and take a deep breath. I call out to Vincenzo, and scramble out of the house. As he comes out a few seconds later, I notice Father is nowhere to be found. "Father! Father! Where are you?" I yell. There's no sign of him from where I stand. Vincenzo shrieks and I realize that the rumbling has gotten so strong that there's now a colossal crack between the house and us. The crack expands, pushing each side apart. Suddenly, it dawns to me that this is my chance. My chance to escape everything.

One day, I hope to break free from this town. To bring us to the most stable place on earth. We won't have to live in fear, we'll roam free without having to pause to listen to the earth's rumbles. We could do what we've only dared to dream of.

The first time I told Father my destiny, he laughed softly, "Sabina, this place is all we've got, it's all we know. Out there, the world doesn't care. All those pictures of big buildings and large crowds, that's beyond our reach. I'm sorry, but this is just the way it is." But I know that he used to believe. He used to go everyday with mother's packed food and see how far he could venture out into the world. But everyday he would come back after an earthquake had thrown him back to where he started. He never really lost hope though. It was only the day when he came back to find mother sinking into a hole that he gave up.

Vincenzo and I dash into the forest of wavy trees. The strange conditions here have caused the trees to grow like snakes rising to the sun. In the distance, we spot Father gripping a tree. “Father! Father! This is a bad one, quick we’ve got to go before the aftershocks come!” Father slowly turns his head and stares at us with wide, haunted eyes. Cocking my head I say, “Father? What’s wrong?” Father opens his mouth only to stutter out, “T-This happened before. We can’t escape. *Lola already tried.*” Father’s eyes roll back and he collapses next to my feet.

“Lola? You mean Mother? She didn’t try to escape, she sunk in a hole!” Vincenzo hollers. “Vincenzo, we have to drag him out quickly. Time is ticking.” I grab a hold of Father, still lying unconscious. “This isn’t like anything we’ve ever experienced. Much more deathly.” Vincenzo replies, “Do you think that this is the kind of earthquake that sent Mother and Father here?” I stare at him hopelessly, “If it is, then let’s pick up the pace.”

Frantically running out of the forest, Vincenzo and I hold Father while our feet work around the roots we know so well. My heart beats out of the rib cage kept to confine it. This is the day I’m going to be free of my own cage. I feel a rush of adrenaline and push harder, forcing Vincenzo to catch up.

Without warning, the ground shoots up directly beneath us and cracks the dried, packed dirt, making a gaping hole directly in front of us. We stumble back, unable to believe the trap the earth had set for us. We look behind us and see the deteriorating home we once had. Vincenzo and I look at each other and simultaneously nod, knowing the big decision we have to make. Together, we lower Father gently onto the ground and he lets out a small groan, making me flinch. We turn and sprint to the edge of the hole. With a grand leap, Vincenzo and I soar over the black hole, and onto the ground.

I gasp and look back. There, laying still was Father. I felt my eyes water, the tears threatening to pour out. Vincenzo turns and says, “Sabina, this is what he would’ve wanted. We couldn’t have made the jump with him. *Find the steady road one day, even if the unstable one leads the way.*” That got me. I blink away the tears and take a breath. As I turned, I realized that the clouds were slowly revealing a majestic mountain. The fresh snow capped on the mountain called out to me. I glanced at Vincenzo, knowing the next feat we’d have to cross. With our dreams ahead, we both marched into our futures.