

The Storm

Gavin looked up from his book; they were reading “Meditations,” by Marcus Aurelius. “What was that?”

“What was what, Grandpère?” asked Athena.

“I thought there was a flash of lightning. Shh. Listen.” After about 10 seconds came a faint rumble. “Ha! I was right! A thunderstorm approaches!” Another flash came through the door to the office, which was open. There were no windows in the library, but there were in the office. Another distant rumble, ever so slightly louder.

Gavin laid down his book on the table beside his chair, sprang to his feet, and rushed out into the hall to the foyer. Athena and Minerva glanced at each other; what on earth was Gavin doing? In a few minutes, Gavin returned to the room, but he did not stop; he kept going into the office, his arms were full of some kind of coat, and he was putting on a strange floppy hat with a drawstring under his chin. Athena and Minerva rose and followed him. By the time they reached the office, they saw the far door closing. That door only led two places: a file room and the door to the stairwell of Tower #1. More flashes came through the windows, brighter now. The rumble of thunder came closer on the heels of the flashes; the storm was getting nearer.

Instead of following Gavin, the women scurried to find their coats and then headed for Tower #2. What was Gavin about to do? They climbed the stairs inside the tower rapidly, they were in good shape; they should reach the roof as soon as Gavin, if not before. As they climbed, the rock transmitted the boom of thunder outside. Although there was a trapdoor leading to the top of the turret, they did not go to it, instead they planned to exit onto the roof. They should be able to see Gavin, but he should not be able to see them in the dark.

Minerva opened the door to the roof and was almost knocked down, the wind was blowing so strongly. She and Athena had to lean forward as they climbed out onto the roof; they struggled to shut the door behind them. The wind was already blowing at a steady 30 mph, and there were gusts approaching 45. The rain was already coming almost sideways, it stung as it lashed their faces. The lightning was increasing in brightness and frequency; to the northwest, jagged bolts

crossed the gap between cloud and earth, sharp CRACKS came immediately on their heels. The women struggled to keep their footing, trying to see Gavin.

“Can you see anything?” shouted Athena.

“No! Wait, there! In the turret!” Minerva shouted back. The women could see a dark figure atop Tower #1, arms raised, cloak billowing. The wind rose steadily, the rain was heavier, the bolts of lightning were drawing ever closer to the open ground around the house; the thunder rumbled and crashed, their ears rang, the stones of the tower against which they braced themselves thrummed in response.

“What is he doing?” shouted Athena. “Has he lost his mind?” She cupped her hands around her mouth and shouted, “Grandpère! What are you doing? Come down from there!” Her efforts were futile; the wind now had reached 60 mph; it snatched the words from her lips and flung them out and away; Minerva barely heard anything.

The rain was now coming completely horizontally, and it was laced with tiny particles of ice. It felt like a sandblaster was spraying their faces; they huddled against the tower and gained a little shelter. Minerva pointed toward Gavin; she shouted in Athena’s ear, “Look! He is conducting!”

Indeed, Gavin was waving his arms madly about; as a bolt of lightning shot from above, he thrust his fist skyward and then flung it down toward the ground. He did appear to be conducting the orchestra of the wind, lightning, and thunder. The wind rose yet again; it howled; it shrieked like a demented demon. The bolts of lightning were almost continuous and were striking all around: thunder was a solid mass; the house shook under their feet. Suddenly an explosion rent the air; a large tree was struck directly by a bolt and disintegrated. The two women were frightened, and in unspoken agreement headed for the door, which was snatched from their hands as they opened it. They stumbled into the safety of the tower and together managed to close the door. They both collapsed to the stone landing, panting from the exertion and the fear.

“He has gone completely bonkers!” shouted Athena; the thunder was still omnipresent. “Any minute now, he will disappear in a fog of blood and tissue, or he will be blown to Oz!”

Minerva shook her head in frustration. “I don’t think we could even get the trapdoor open from the inside and if we tried to go up the outside steps, WE would be the ones in Oz! What the frack is he thinking?”

After a few minutes, they both recovered and started down the steps of the tower; they proceeded carefully, they were soaked to the bone, and water puddled under their feet—the stone could be slick. They stopped at their floor and headed to their rooms. The storm was not abating, indeed, it was even more wild. They stumbled into their room, shivering from cold and fear. They jumped and held each other as a bolt of lightning struck less than 100 meters away, and the windows rattled from the immediate thunderclap.

They undressed and were drying off when Sarah burst into their dressing room. “Oh my stars! There you are!” She shrieked when she saw their faces. “What has happened to you? Where have you been? And where is His Grace? Everyone is searching high and low!”

Athena and Minerva looked in the mirror and grimaced; their faces had dozens of tiny cuts from the ice crystals that had blasted them. Minerva turned to Sarah and sighed heavily. “We were out on the roof ...”

“WHAT?! Ha’ ye gone daft?!”

Minerva held up her hands. “No need to shout; I can hear you. I think the maelstrom is subsiding outside. We went out on the roof to see what His Grace was doing. He is up in the turret of Tower #1, conducting the storm as if it was an orchestra, and he was Zeus himself, flinging lightning hither and yon. He has gone completely and utterly mad. I’ll not be surprised if no trace of him is ever seen again.”

Sarah was so shocked she sat in a chair, which she had *never* done. She buried her face in her hands and sobbed bitterly. “No! It can’t be! What’s to become of us?”

Athena and Minerva had put on their robes, then they went to Sarah to comfort her. “There, there, Sarah,” Athena said. “The storm was very angry, but when we last saw him, His Grace was still in one piece.” That did not help; Sarah wailed even louder. Both girls grimaced. “You sit here,” continued Athena. “We will go see if His Grace is back inside.” She and Minerva found their slippers and hurried out into the hall. As they turned the corner, headed for Gavin’s quarters, they heard the crashing sound of music, wild music, at top volume.

“What is that?” wondered Athena.

Minerva scrunched her face. “That, I believe, is ‘The Tempest,’ by Tchaikovsky. If nothing else, that tells us Grandpère has made it safely back inside, he was not blasted to atoms nor is he off visiting Glenda.”

“Should we go in and check on him?” asked Athena.

“What? And have him start complaining we are worrying over him like Elizabeth or Melanie? You know very well what he thinks about *that*.”

“True. Then let’s go back and tell Sarah he’s in his quarters; maybe she will cease that pitiful wailing.”

The next day dawned bright and clear; one could forget that a powerful storm had occurred, except for the wrack left in its wake. The women had to detour around quite a number of downed trees on their morning run. As they entered the kitchenette for breakfast, they heard the muted song of chainsaws in the distance. Gavin was in his seat; he looked up with a huge grin on his face. “Good morning, you two! Isn’t it a glorious day? And was that not the most incredible storm last night?” He stopped and looked at them closely. “What on earth is wrong with you both? You look as if you’ve got chickenpox or the measles!”

The girls looked at each other; it was true, their faces were marked with tiny red spots where the ice crystals had lacerated their skin. They looked at Gavin; he looked worse. “The rain had ice mixed in,” said Athena.

“What?! You don’t mean to say you went out in that? Did your brains turn to taffy last night? What were you thinking?”

The women got coffee and sat glumly. “What were we thinking?” said Minerva crossly. “I can’t imagine. If only we had someone older and wiser to be a role model.”

The women stared at Gavin; he stared back. “Oh,” he said.

Just then Gray entered the room. “The damage report you requested, sir. Oh, good morning your ladyships.”

“Perfect timing Gray, as always. Now, tell me what’s what.”

Gavin and Gray went on as if nothing unusual had occurred. Abbie, however, rolled her eyes almost to the back of her head when she caught the girls’ eye. They giggled. Gavin glared at them.

The night of “The Mad Storm” was never spoken of by Gavin or the girls, at least to each other.