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### **Night of the Volcano**

"It wasn't supposed to be like this," Jenna said to herself as she ran from room to room gathering the things she needed. In the living room she grabbed the bottle, still half full of formula. In the kitchen, she threw three little jars of baby food and a plastic spoon into the bag slung over her shoulder. Under the bathroom sink was five diapers. She grabbed those as well.

As she ran back to the bedroom, the power went out. She heard the air conditioner shut down with a soft sigh and the smoke alarm beep sadly one last time. The lights flickered off but she could still see. Everything was bathed in bright orange light that was streaming in the front window of the living room.

With the power off it was easier to hear the world outside. She could hear the sirens of the police cars and fire engines. She could hear the angry and scared shouts of people up and down the street as they hurriedly threw as much of their life into a car as they could. Behind all of that, there was the sound of trees catching fire, sometimes getting so hot that the sap inside of them expanded, getting bigger and bigger until the tree popped like a balloon.

Tyler started screaming. Jenna shook her head and snapped herself out of the daydream. She ran into the baby's room and scooped him up into her arm. He was not heavy, but she already had a bulky diaper bag over one shoulder and she was still half asleep. She had been dreaming of Christmas when the sirens to evacuate had started blaring. The TV show she had fallen asleep to had been replaced by news people telling everyone to get out now. The barriers holding back the lava had failed and the red, fiery goo was heading straight into town.

The volcano had always been part of her life. But before the past year it had just been a big, brooding mountain slumbering in the distance. She had dreamed of climbing to its snowy peak someday. Now it was the subject of most of her nightmares.

The first eruption had been quick and sudden and unexpected. The Monday after the eruption, many of the chairs in her classroom were empty. Some of them still were.

After that, the hits just kept on coming. The magma kept pushing up from some fault deep under the ground, creating deadly rivers of molten rock that streamed off the mountain day and night. The town had put up barriers. The police had told them that they were safe. The mayor had told them that they would get through this just fine.

They were wrong.

The shriek of Tyler wailing in her ear, the orange light from the burning trees, the screams of her neighbors, all hammered into Jenna's head. She was just twelve years old. How could she

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possibly get herself and the baby out of the house and across a burning town? The situation was hopeless.

Then she looked into Tyler's deep blue eyes and for a moment, he stopped screaming. For a moment, she wasn't afraid. She couldn't be afraid. She had to be brave for him.

She kicked open the front door and was hit with a blast of heat and ash, but she could still see a way through. If she could get across the yard, she would reach Mike's house where his parents were loading the car. Mike's family could help her and her baby brother get to someplace safe.

Off in the distance she could see the volcano, its fiery red crown both beautiful and terrifying at the same time. Grey puffs of ash drifted down from the sky like dirty snowflakes. A large plume of fire shot up from its peak as if daring her to try and escape.

She took a deep breath and said "I can do this. I'm a girl. I can do *anything*," and then she started to run. Her bare feet left grey footprints in the ash as she bolted across her front yard. The earth began to shake beneath her feet and for a moment she almost lost balance, almost fell forward, almost dropped the baby. But at the last minute the years of gymnastics practices that her mother had made her go to paid off. She twisted and regained her footing and was soon on the run again.

Tyler was being so brave. Ever since she had opened the door he had not made a sound. But a quick glance showed that he was still scared. Jenna could see the volcano's reflection in her baby brother's wide-open eyes.

The grass beneath her feet disappeared and now she was running across the street. The asphalt was burning hot beneath her soles. Mike's dad looked up and saw her coming and began running toward her. Mike and his mom burst out of their front door and were running toward the car, each of them carrying a garbage bag full of whatever they had been able to grab in time.

"Come on!" Mike's dad shouted. "You can go with us!"

On the other side of Mike's house Jenna could see the trees in his backyard begin to burst into flame one by one. Time was quickly running out. As Mike's dad reached her and took Tyler from her arms Jenna felt guilty. What if the few seconds that they were using to save her cost them their lives?

Mike took the diaper bag and his mom opened the door to their car so Jenna could climb in. She realized there was no car seat for Tyler but it was much too late to worry about that now. The air around her was getting hotter by the second and her eyes and nose were burning from the ever-growing cloud of smoke that blanketed her neighborhood.

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The car backed quickly out of the driveway. Mike's mom let out a terrifying shriek as a burning tree crashed to the ground where, just two seconds before, the car had been. It took every bit of Jenna's willpower to not shriek just as loudly herself.

The car sped quickly but carefully down the road, away from the volcano and away from the burning trees and houses. The air was full of black smoke and sparks blew everywhere in the wind like angry red snowflakes.

"Are we going to make it?" Mike asked.

"I think so," His dad replied without taking his eyes off the road. "But I don't think our house will."

Jenna was surprised that Mike's dad didn't sound more upset. She thought that maybe he was still in shock from it all, that it had not had time to set in just yet. She also realized that if Mike's house was going to burn then hers was going to burn as well. She looked down and saw that Tyler was already drifting off to sleep in her arms. It didn't matter if the house was gone. She had saved the most important thing in it.

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In the sentence below, what did the author mean when saying the people “threw as much of their life into a car as they could.”?

***She could hear the sirens of the police cars and fire engines and the angry and scared shouts of people up and down the street as they hurriedly threw as much of their life into a car as they could.***

- a) The people were tossing random junk into their car.
- b) The people were trying to save as much important stuff as they could.
- c) The people were willing to die to save their cars.
- d) The people were afraid their cars would burn up.

The passage never mentions where Jenna’s parents are. Which one of these explanations is *not* reasonable?

- a) They went out for the night, leaving Jenna to babysit.
- b) They are on a short business trip and will be back tomorrow.
- c) They are at work.
- d) They are sleeping in another room and are ignoring the volcano.

Based on information from the fourth paragraph, what does the word evacuate mean?

- a) To leave a place that is in danger.
- b) To camp out near fun volcanoes.
- c) To stay inside with the lights off until danger passes.
- d) That everything is going to be okay.

In paragraph six, the author says that some of the chairs in Jenna’s classroom were still empty. Why do you think some of the students never returned?

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In paragraph nine, what does “the situation was hopeless,” mean?

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Based on the information in paragraph 13, how does Jenna feel about being a girl?

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In the space below, write a paragraph that could go on to the end of the story that explains where Jenna’s parents are and how she is going to meet back up with them.

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