

Maie and the Mighty Volcano



Once upon a time, there was a brave little girl named Maie. She was only five years old, with strawberry blond hair in two pigtails that bounced when she laughed and bright, curious green eyes that missed nothing. While other children her age dreamed of becoming astronauts or princesses, Maie had set her heart on something different—she wanted to become a volcanologist, a scientist who studies volcanoes.

"Why volcanoes?" her classmates would ask, their noses scrunched up in confusion.

Maie would smile, her eyes lighting up. "Because they're like sleeping giants that wake up to tell Earth's stories!"

Her fascination had begun during a family trip to Pompeii, where she stood wide-eyed before the plaster casts of ancient Romans caught in time by Mount Vesuvius's fury. Instead of being frightened, Maie was filled with wonder.

"Mamma, Papa," she whispered that night, clutching her stuffed toy fox, Felix. "Volcanoes aren't just scary—they're powerful, mysterious, and beautiful too."

From that day on, Maie's bedroom transformed into a volcano museum. Posters of famous volcanoes covered her walls. Books with colorful diagrams piled up on her tiny desk. She even made a papier-mâché volcano that actually erupted with baking soda and vinegar, much to her parents' amusement (and their carpet's dismay).

One evening, while they were having dinner, Maie put down her fork and looked at her parents with determination.

"I want to see a real volcano up close," she announced. "Not just in pictures."

Her father raised an eyebrow. "That's quite a big adventure for someone so small."

But Maie's mother saw the spark in her daughter's eyes—the same spark she'd had as a child when dreaming of becoming a photographer. "Where would you like to go?" she asked.

"Mount Etna!" Maie exclaimed without hesitation. "It's on the island of Sicily, and it's one of the most active volcanoes in the world!"

Her parents exchanged glances. They couldn't resist their daughter's passion. After careful planning and making sure it would be safe (even though Etna had been erupting in recent months), they agreed to her wish.

In the weeks before their trip, Maie prepared like a true scientist. She read every book she could find about Mount Etna, memorizing its eruption history and understanding its

patterns. She practiced walking in her new hiking boots until blisters formed and healed on her tiny feet. She even learned a few Italian words: "vulcano," "lava," and "gelato" (the last one, she insisted, was for scientific purposes).

The day finally arrived. As their plane descended toward Sicily, Maie pressed her nose against the window, hoping to catch a glimpse of Etna in the distance. There it was—a magnificent mountain with a plume of smoke drifting from its peak.

"It's breathing!" she gasped.

The next morning, equipped with their guide Paolo, special jackets, helmets, and Maie's precious notebook, they began their journey up the volcano's slopes. The path started easily enough, winding through forests and old lava fields where stubborn plants had found ways to grow.

But as they climbed higher, the weather changed its mind. The skies darkened, and winds began to whip around them like invisible whips. Volcanic sand stung their faces like tiny beads of rain.

"Perhaps we should turn back," Paolo suggested, looking concerned as he watched Maie's small form battling against the elements.

Maie's father nodded in agreement, reaching for her hand. "We can try again tomorrow, sweetheart."

But Maie stood her ground, her small boots planted firmly in the volcanic soil. She pulled her red scarf tighter around her

neck—the one Grandma had knitted "for courage"—and looked up at the adults with determination.

"We've come so far," she said, her voice steady despite the howling wind. "I've been preparing for weeks. Volcanologists don't give up when things get tough!"

Her mother knelt down to meet Maie's eyes. "Are you sure, little one? It's okay to be scared."

"I am scared," Maie admitted, surprising everyone with her honesty. "But Felix is more scared than me." She patted the small toy fox peeking out from her backpack. "So I have to be brave for both of us."

Her parents were taken aback by Maie's wisdom and determination. After confirming with Paolo that it was still safe to proceed, they continued their climb, this time with Maie leading the way, her red scarf fluttering behind her like a flag.

When they finally reached a safe observation point, the volcano rewarded their perseverance. Through special protective glasses, they watched as magma bubbled in a distant crater, glowing orange against the darkening sky. The earth beneath them hummed with ancient power.

"It's dancing," Maie whispered, her face illuminated by both the volcano's glow and her own joy. She quickly opened her notebook, sketching what she saw with colored pencils, her tongue sticking out in concentration.

On their way back down, Maie walked with new confidence.

When she stumbled on loose rocks, she picked herself up before anyone could help her.

That evening, as they enjoyed Sicilian pizza in a cozy restaurant, a local volcanologist happened to be dining nearby. Hearing about the brave little girl who had climbed Etna in challenging conditions, she came to their table.

"I hear we have a future colleague here," she said, smiling at Maie.

Maie's eyes widened. "You study volcanoes? For real?"

The woman nodded and showed Maie some pictures on her tablet—close-ups of lava samples and thermal imaging of Etna's craters.

"Would you like to see my notebook?" Maie asked shyly, pulling out her drawings.

The volcanologist examined them with genuine interest. "You've captured the colors perfectly," she said. "Those are excellent observations." She handed Maie her card. "When you're older, come and visit our research station. We always need curious minds."

That night, tucked into bed with Felix the fox, Maie couldn't stop smiling. She'd not only seen a volcano but had also met someone who studied them every day.

"You know what I learned today, Felix?" she whispered to her toy. "Being brave doesn't mean you never get scared. It means you keep going even when you are scared. And

sometimes, the best things happen just after the scariest parts."

As she drifted off to sleep, Maie dreamed of bubbling lava and scientific expeditions. And though she was small, her dreams and her courage were as vast as the volcanic landscapes she loved.

In the years that followed, Maie's bedroom walls would fill with more volcano pictures—but now, many of them were photographs she had taken herself. And her bookshelf held a special treasure: a journal labeled "My First Volcano Expedition," with colorful drawings of Mount Etna and a business card from a real volcanologist who was waiting for Maie to grow up and join her team.

Because brave little Maie had discovered that the most important eruption of all was the courage that had been inside her all along.

Can you answer these questions?

Why did Maie want to become a volcanologist?

How did Maie's fascination with volcanoes begin?

What preparations did Maie do for her trip to Mount Etna?

How did Maie show courage during her climb up the volcano?

What lesson did Maie learn about being brave?

Answer sheet

Why did Maie want to become a volcanologist?

Maie wanted to become a volcanologist because she was fascinated by volcanoes, seeing them as sleeping giants that wake up to tell Earth's stories.

How did Maie's fascination with volcanoes begin?

Maie's interest in volcanoes began during a family trip to Pompeii, where she was filled with wonder instead of fear upon seeing the remains of Mount Vesuvius's eruption.

What preparations did Maie do for her trip to Mount Etna?

Maie prepared for her trip by reading books about Mount Etna, memorizing its eruption history, practicing walking in her new hiking boots, and learning some Italian words.

How did Maie show courage during her climb up the volcano?

Maie showed courage by insisting on continuing the climb despite the challenging weather conditions. She also bravely admitted she was scared but wanted to be strong for her toy fox, Felix.

What lesson did Maie learn about being brave?

Maie learned that being brave doesn't mean you never get scared; it means you keep going even when you are scared, and sometimes the best things happen after the scariest parts.