

# ESCAPE FROM JAVA

— BY RUSKIN BOND

In the quiet town of Shillong, life moved at a slow and peaceful pace for a family consisting of Grandfather, Grandmother, and their three grandchildren Rakesh, Mukesh, and Dolly. The children spent their days playing, exploring, and enjoying simple joys. Rakesh loved cycling around town, Mukesh wrestled with friends in the dust, and Dolly built a tiny dollhouse under a suitcase. But one morning, as Grandfather was taking a bath, an unusual silence filled the air. Grandmother, busy trimming her rose bushes, noticed that the birds had suddenly stopped chirping. It was a sign something was wrong. The family had seen small tremors before, but a big earthquake hadn't struck in years. Curious, Rakesh asked what to do in an earthquake. Grandfather explained that most people just ran outside, while Grandmother suggested standing in a doorway for safety. Despite the occasional tremor, they loved their home and wouldn't trade it for anything.



There was a lake and a colourful bazaar, and Grandmother's garden was full of butterflies, birds and exotic orchids, as well as fruit trees and trees that were fun to climb. Rakesh liked roaming around the town on his bicycle. Mukesh enjoyed the sweet shops in the bazaar—when he wasn't wrestling in the dust with Mumtaz's two boys. Dolly kept herself busy building her own doll's house under the suitcase.

Life moved at a gentle pace in Shillong. Apart from the elephant in the garden, nothing very exciting had happened recently to the family. The highlight of the year had been Rakesh's winning the high jump in his school sports, for which he had won a small cup—so small, that he had given it to Dolly to add to her doll's house.

Then one morning, while Grandfather was having his bath, the town seemed suddenly very still and very quiet . . .

## The First Tremors

Grandfather didn't notice anything because he was splashing about and singing; but Grandmother, who was in the garden trimming her rose bushes, paused in her work and looked up. Why were the birds silent

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## Escape from Java

and Other Tales of Danger



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chickens and the dog (which was half a dachshund and half a spaniel and was called Pickle) and a goat that Grandfather insisted would provide them with milk some day—only so far it hadn't.

The children's mother had died when Dolly was born; and their father, Mr Burman, worked on a tea estate a few hundred miles away, where there were no schools. So the children stayed with Mr Burman's parents, who wouldn't have parted with them for anything in the world.

Every year there were earth tremors in this part of India, but there hadn't been a really big earthquake for thirty years.

'What do you do when there's an earthquake?' asked Rakesh, who had heard all about the last one.

'There isn't time to do much,' said Grandfather. 'Everyone just rushes out of doors.'

'I'll stay in my bed until it's over,' said Rakesh.

'I'll get *under* my bed,' said Mukesh. 'It can't find me there!'

'It's best to stand in a doorway,' said Grandmother. 'If you look at earthquake pictures, you'll notice that the door frames are always left standing!'

Although Shillong was in a region where earthquakes sometimes happened, the family liked living there.