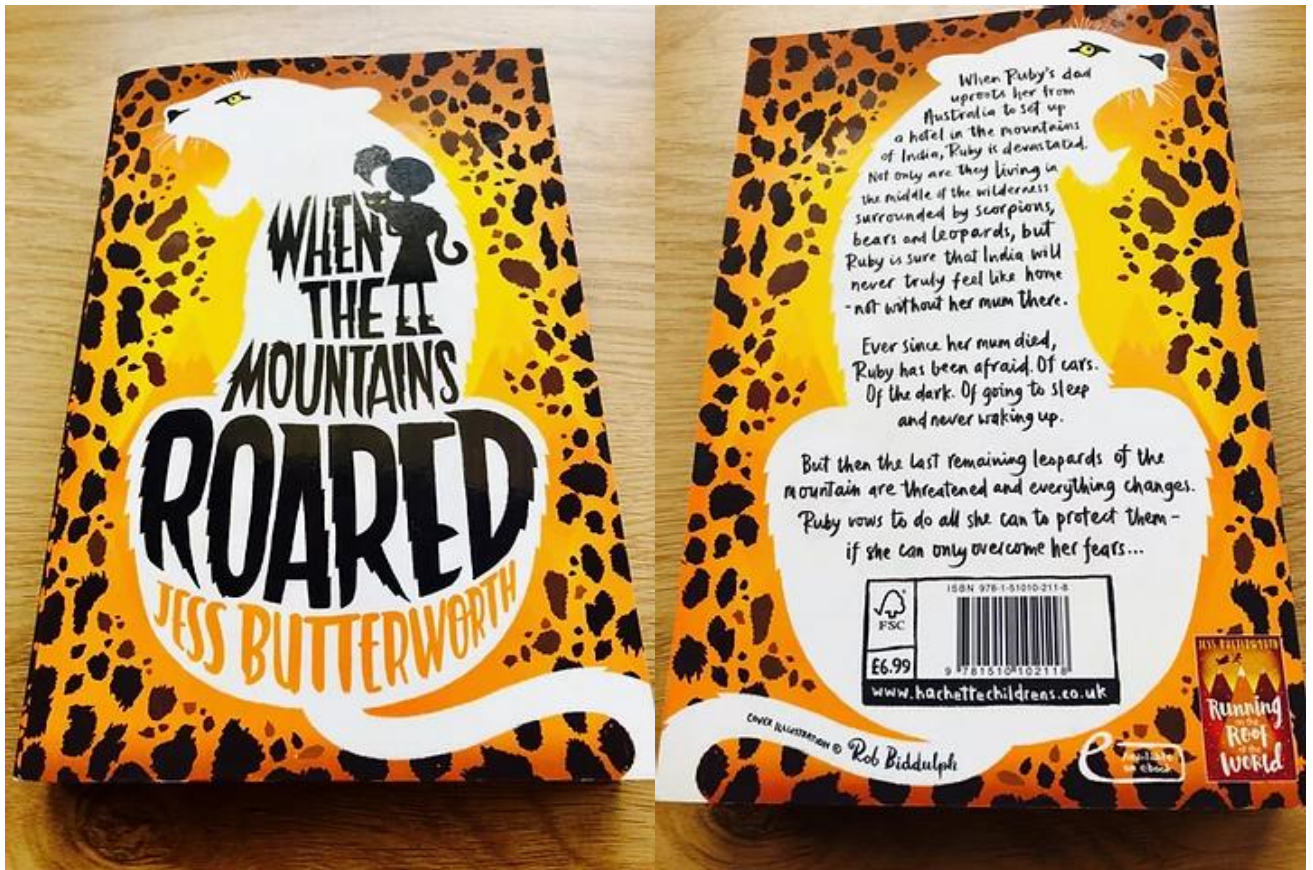


When the Mountains Roared

by Jess Butterworth




Look at the front cover and the blurb.

What is your opinion of the text?

What impressions do you get?

Do you think it will be a good book to read?

WHEN THE MOUNTAINS ROARED

The title 'WHEN THE MOUNTAINS ROARED' is rendered in a bold, jagged, black font. The word 'WHEN' is at the top, followed by 'THE', 'MOUNTAINS', and 'ROARED' in descending order of size. A black silhouette of a girl with a ponytail and a cat is integrated into the design, positioned behind the words 'WHEN' and 'THE'.

JESS BUTTERWORTH

Orion

www.hachettechildrens.co.uk

WHEN THE MOUNTAINS ROARED

I duck low to the ground and creep forwards, following the two men and the boy ahead. The trees rustle and dappled light flickers around me. I step as silently as I can, avoiding twigs and crisp leaves. The group stops, and I dart behind a tree. I can't be seen. They have guns.

I flatten myself against the trunk and peer around it. They're gathered by a thick tree, examining the base.

I know what they're looking for: some trace of the leopard. But leopards are elusive. Their spotted coats and padded feet allow them to hide in shadows. There are only five ways to find a leopard: you can track their paw prints; follow their scratches and scrapes; look for their scat; discover their scent markings; and listen for other animals' alarm calls.

'Over there,' says the boy, pointing ahead. He raises his finger to his lips.

They move on, quieter and quicker.

I wait until they're out of sight then dash to the trunk they were inspecting.

A line of ants runs down it. Next to them, etched into the bark, are claw marks. I touch the scratches. They're fresh. A leopard was here recently. I sniff. I don't detect a spray odour. It's a good sign that the claw marks are a few days old. I turn back in the direction of the men and hope with all my might that the leopard is far away by now.

I sneak after the group again and soon catch glimpses of them through the trees. The forest throbs with the buzz of cicadas and chirp of birds. As I step over a fern, I slip on a rock and scrape my palms breaking my fall. I freeze on the ground.

Did they hear me?

Between the fern leaves ahead I spot their legs. They've stopped in the path. My heart pounds. I imagine what I'll say if I'm caught. Or worse, I realise they could think I'm a leopard and shoot me.

Maybe I should shout now.

But I stay silent and through the parted fern, I watch. They're not turning to look at me; they're staring at something on the ground.

I sink lower and wait.

The men peer into the undergrowth around them, before heading off to the left, in a new direction.

I dart to the place where they'd stopped. There are paw prints in the dirt, pointing in the direction the men went. They're about eight centimetres long. The main pad has three lobes on the back of it. Four toe prints with no claws sit above the pad. They're lightly imprinted in the earth. It definitely belongs to a leopard; they tread gently. The back paw print shines. I bend and touch it. It's sticky and I pull my hand back.

My fingers come away deep red.

My breath catches.

Blood.

WHEN THE MOUNTAINS ROARED

I wipe my shaky hands on my trousers. There's a leopard out there, injured. And I have to find it before they do.

WHEN THE MOUNTAINS ROARED



CHAPTER ONE
Australia: Two Months Earlier

I know something's wrong as soon as I step through the front door.

Everything we own is scattered across the living room floor in a sea of clothes, books and household objects. The living room rug is rolled up, the shelves are empty, and even the plates from the kitchen dresser are stacked up on the carpet next to it.

For a split second I think we've been burgled. But then Dad comes clomping down the stairs in his boots, with an armful of coats, and Grandma enters from the kitchen. Polly, our border collie, leaps up at me, rests her front paws on my chest and licks my face.

'What happened?' I ask, pushing Polly down and stroking her. I let my school backpack thud to the floor.

'We're moving,' says Dad. His mouth is hard.

'Moving?' I tilt my head to the side. 'Why?'

When no one says anything, I ask, 'Where?'

'India,' says Grandma. She rests her hand on my shoulder and squeezes it. 'Where your dad and I were born.'

I stare at them both, open-mouthed. 'We can't.'

'I've got a new job at a hotel there,' says Dad.

My heart races. 'What about this job?' I ask. 'This hotel?'

'It's a great opportunity, Ruby,' Dad says, speaking to the coat he's folding into a box, rather than to me. 'I've been headhunted to be the manager of a new hotel opening soon.'

I look at Grandma.

'Think how much fun it will be to explore and photograph a new place,' she says to me. 'Besides, we want to show you what India is like. It will be an adventure.'

I can tell there's more they're not saying. It's the way Grandma's voice falters, the suddenness of the packing, and how Dad can't keep his eyes on mine.

Anger shoots through my body.

'What if I don't want to go?' I ask, my voice rising. 'Can I stay here?'

'It's not up for discussion, Ruby.' His voice is low and grim. Dad never shouts when he's cross or worried. 'We're leaving in the morning.'

There's a silence that follows.

I repeat his words over and over in my mind.

Something's wrong. I know it.

Hurt prickles down the back of my throat that they didn't talk to me first, that I don't have any say in it or even a choice.

'I'm not coming!' I yell to hide how upset I am, and storm into the kitchen.

The table is buried under glass cases filled with the snakes' skins that Mum studied, next to books about snake habitat and behaviour. Mum was an ophiologist. I slide my hand across the case with Caspar inside, a taxidermy emerald tree python. My fingers leave a line in the dust.

My camera is on the side of the table. I grab it and stride through to the garden. I sit on the edge of the porch, hugging my knees. Gazing out over the red desert, I spot dingoes on the mounds in the distance. Polly pads out of the house and lies down next to me, panting in the heat.

I won't go. There's nothing they can do to make me. Emily and I are doing a joint art project for school next week. It's her birthday next month and we had plans to go camping together over summer. I can't miss all that.

Grandma joins me and pulls up a rocking chair. 'Here,' she says, leaning in and passing me a slice of watermelon. My favourite fruit. Grandma's turquoise bangle gleams in the sun against her brown skin. Her breath smells of barbeque sauce.

'I'm not hungry.' I turn my back to her.

A flock of galahs fly past in a flash of pink. They land and rest on the closest eucalyptus tree. I lift the camera from around my neck and snap a picture of them.

We moved houses often when I was younger. Mum's snake research took her to different universities and Dad managed hotels up and down the country. But when they found this hotel, miles from anything in the outback, they fell in love with it and stayed. I thought we'd live here for ever.

But then I thought Mum would be here for ever too.

'Why does Dad really want to leave?' I ask, lowering the camera. I turn to face Grandma and meet her deep eyes. 'You can tell me.'

Grandma looks at me and wrinkles gather in the centre of her forehead. 'There are too many memories here for him, perhaps.'

I shake my head. 'That's not it.' I know Dad. Every week he shows me the roses Mum planted, before we sit on the bench she used to watch the sunset from, and eat strawberry ice cream. It was her favourite flavour. He *loves* those memories.

'I think you'll enjoy it in India,' says Grandma.

I sigh.

'It takes courage to start something new. And you, Ruby, are the most courageous little girl I know.'

'I'm actually twelve now,' I reply, digging a hole in the dirt with my big toe. I'd never let anyone but Grandma call me little. I turn to her. 'You can't make me want to go.'

'I know,' she says.

WHEN THE MOUNTAINS ROARED

It doesn't loosen the growing knot in my stomach. I clutch the small stone threaded on a string around my neck. It isn't a precious stone or anything, but I found it out walking with Mum, and that makes it priceless.

When the Mountains Roared
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1. The novel begins with an extract of Ruby's life in the present time, before switching to the past in Chapter 1 – 'Australia: Two Months Earlier'. What is the effect of this switch? How does it draw the reader in?
2. In Chapter 1, Ruby is angry with her Dad and Grandma for moving her from Australia to India. Can you find evidence of her anger? Is Ruby right to feel this way? Does she adapt and change during the course of the book, and if so, how?
3. In Chapter 1, we are told that Ruby's mother has recently passed away. How has this impacted Ruby? Do you believe that Ruby's mother is a main character in the story, even though she is never physically present? How?