

I catch my first glimpse of the Himalayas the next day as we turn a corner in the taxi. After an overnight train journey and a bus ride, we're leaving the plains of the Punjab and climbing into the winding pine-covered foothills of Himachal Pradesh. The mountains span across the horizon, jagged and snow tipped. I can't take my eyes off them.

We get higher and higher, driving around hairpin bends until the driver stops in a small town. Buildings, several stories high, line the main road. Red monkeys chase each other along balcony rails and people sip chai in the cafés.

'This is as far as I can go,' says the taxi driver, stopping in front of a fruit shop overflowing with hanging bananas and baskets of papayas and limes.

The building comes into view and my stomach drops. I wasn't expecting this. The hotel is an abandoned two-story building with boarded up windows and a rusty blue tin roof. It's surrounded by a chest-high wall covered in overgrown climbers and weeds.

A boy in a long coat sits on the wall wearing a rigid woollen hat with a flat top and vertical stripes across the front of it in earthy colours.

Dad pushes the stiff gate open.

I hop on to the wall, pausing at the top and sighing. We really are in the middle of nowhere. Thick jungle and tall pine trees surround us on all sides and beyond it rise mountains and snowy peaks.

Grandma leads in the donkeys with our luggage and Joey.

We walk through the neglected garden, overgrown with giant daisies, purple orchids and orange lilies.

Praveen pauses by the gate. 'The spring is over there,' Praveen says, pointing to the path on my right. 'And beyond it is the lower path to my village.' He points again, this time to the path on my left. 'Down there is bear rock. It's a giant boulder that sticks out from the slope. Don't ever go there,' he says seriously. 'It's where the bears live.'

A loud rumbling echoes off the peaks in the distance. I watch as a cascade of rocks slides down a tall mountain. Only a few trees dot its rocky terrain. A cloud floats in front.

Praveen follows my gaze. 'And up there is snow leopard territory,' he adds.

I look up at the jagged peak and feel a shiver of excitement.

Task: Extracts from the book to read. Underline the words that describe Ruby's new home. These will help you to draw your picture.