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# FREDDY

*the* EAGER  
FUNDRAISER



SWAPNIL MISHRA

“A true story of kindness, responsibility and resilience.”

—Linda Locke, co-author of *Agnes and Her Amazing Orchid*

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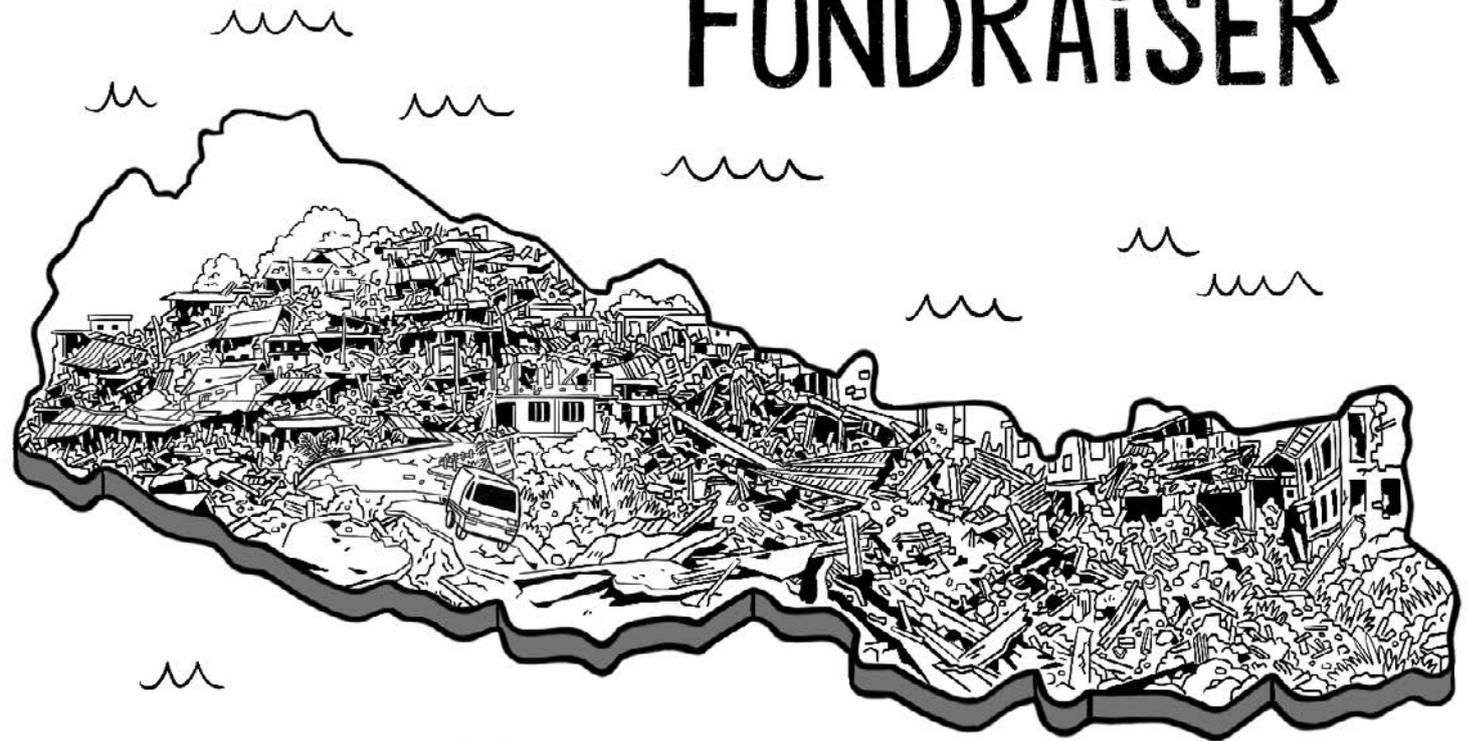
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*To my boys*



# CHAPTER ONE

“FREDDY!”

I am so absorbed in my book that I jump when I hear someone call my name. A few moments later, Mum bustles into my room, wiping her hands on a towel.

“Dinner is ready,” Mum says from the doorway. “Please come and help me lay the table. Ray, you too.” She turns to address my brother, who is sitting on his beanbag, also reading.

“Mum!” I gasp. “You gave me a scare!”

“I’m sorry. Come quickly for dinner, please.”

I make a note in my head: page 96. I like to

challenge myself by memorising the page number instead of using a bookmark. Today, I am following the adventures of Samuel Tan Cher Lock in *Sherlock Sam and the Stolen Script in Balestier*. The book was a birthday gift from six months ago, when I turned ten. Even after reading it a few times, it is still thrilling.

I look over at my little brother, Ray. Should I sneak up and scare him? He is already seven, but he's also a scaredy-cat and may start howling. Then I will get an earful from Mum. I decide not to risk it.

“Ray, are you coming?” I call.

“Yes, Coco,” Ray says without looking up from his book. He is reading his favourite Geronimo Stilton book for what seems like the hundredth time.

Ray calls me “Coco”. We are from India but now live in Singapore. When Ray was very young, we lived next to a Chinese-speaking family. The aunty in the family referred to me as Ray’s “kor kor”, which means older brother in Cantonese. Since then, Ray’s nickname for me has been Coco.

“Freddy, please lay the plates on the table. And call your brother.”

I am placing the plates when Dad comes and starts helping. I refuse to look at him.

“Freddy, did you hear about what happened today?”

“Dad, I’m still upset with you. You went on a trek to Australia and you didn’t take me. I am not talking to you.”

“Come on, Freddy, I’ve already explained this to you,” Dad sighs. “This was a very tough trek—seven full days in the wild, and we each had to carry a backpack weighing 20kg.”

“But Dad, you and I go on a camping trip every year. Last year we went to Malaysia and I climbed all the way to the top of the mountain. We camped for two days! I am ready for a tougher trek,” I insist. Mum emerges from the kitchen with a steaming pot of spaghetti with meatballs.

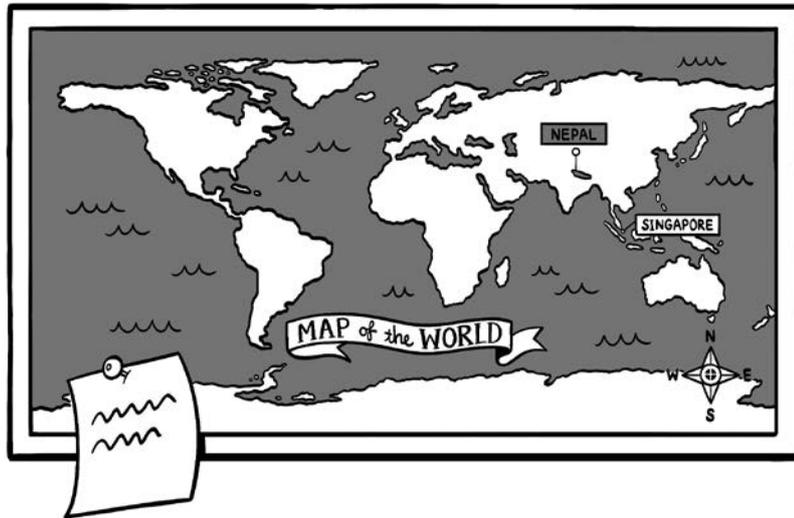
“Come here, Freddy.” Dad pulls me closer and

hugs me. “I know you are strong, but remember, one step at a time.”

“I know, but I still wish I could have gone with you. Next time you want to take me for a *baby* trek, my answer will be NO! I want to go on a REAL trek on a REAL mountain, like Mount Everest.”

After my brief protest, Dad is silent for a moment.

“Freddy, do you know where Nepal is?” he eventually asks.



“Yes, it’s in the map game that I got on my birthday. It’s far away from here; I think it’s above India. But don’t try to change the topic. Can we go to Nepal during the June holidays?” I ask as I heap pasta onto my plate.

“Freddy...something happened this afternoon. There was an earthquake in Nepal.”

“I don’t care what happ—”

“Freddy, you are not listening.” Dad’s voice takes on a sombre tone as he cuts me off. “There was an earthquake in Nepal. I don’t have much more information, but it was very close to the capital city, Kathmandu. It caused a lot of damage.”

*An earthquake in Nepal.*

The words echo in my head and a frightening image appears.

“Freddy?” Dad asks after a while.

“I’m fine,” I lied. “So Nepal is destroyed?”

I am suddenly not very hungry. I push my plate away and look around the room. The lamp, flower

vase, the paintings on the wall—I imagine them shaking as the ground rumbles under our feet. Nothing has changed, but I want to hold on to the table. My throat feels dry.

Mum comes over to me and holds my hand. “It is a terrible thing, but one very far from here. We are safe here in Singapore. A natural disaster like an earthquake can happen anywhere in the world, though, so we have to be brave and helpful.”

I gulp down some water and it brings my voice back to life. My mind is racing. Where had I read about an earthquake?

“I remember Mark recently did a science project in his school. He prepared a diorama of an earthquake.”

“Mark, your friend from the neighbourhood?” Dad asks.

“Yes, Dad, but he is older and gets to work on fancy science projects in Primary 6. He made a diorama with cardboard houses, trees, fences and

some Lego figurines to create a model of a neighbourhood. When he shook the board, the entire structure trembled. The cardboard houses and Lego figurines all fell down.”

Ray scampers over to join us at the table. “Has anyone in your class done a project like that?”

“We haven’t studied earthquakes yet.”

“Oh, I know what a diorama is. It’s an exhibition in a box! I made a cockroach diorama for my school project.”

“Ray, can you stop interrupting please?” I scowl.

“But why, Coco?” asks Ray.

“Because I am asking an important question. Dad, have you ever been in an earthquake?” I let go of the table, but my senses remain alert. I’d grab it quickly if the room starts shaking.

Dad looks at the clock on the wall. It is 8.30pm, and I know what he is thinking. Bedtime is 9pm, and asking questions to delay my dinner and bedtime is a trick I’ve done one time too many. But today is

different. I can't get the images of falling houses out of my head.

"Dad, please, I really want to know," I beg. Dad's eyes flick to the clock again before settling on my pale face. He nods softly.

"Yes, once. I lived in Ahmedabad then. Your Mum and I had not married yet, and I was staying in a small house with a friend."

"What are you talking about? What happened?" Ray asks.

Mum and Dad look at each other.

"Ray, there was an earthquake in a place called Nepal. It is when the earth shakes and the ground rumbles," Mum explains.

"Is it like a boat when it wobbles on water? Can it happen here?"

"We are safe here, Ray. You don't have to worry." Mum pulls him into a hug.

"Oh, I know. Ahmedabad is in India—we visit every year to meet Grandpa and Granny!" I interject

loudly. I can handle imagining an earthquake, but Ray is still a baby...and a scaredy-cat too.

The thing I love most about Ahmedabad are the rickshaws—three-wheeled taxis with no seat belts. They make for a very bumpy ride. If the driver wants to turn left or right, he sticks his leg out in that direction and the rickshaw swerves with it. Once, I was being clever and popped my leg out the side. It was fun until my favourite sandal slipped off my foot.

"Yes, it's the same city, but there's no sign of the earthquake today," Dad says.

"Did you get hurt?"

"No, but I will never forget how I woke up that morning. It was a holiday and I was sleeping in late. I woke up with a jolt and thought my friend was shaking the bed; I was all ready to yell at him. But then I realised my friend was not even in the room. I was still rubbing my eyes when he ran in screaming: 'It's an earthquake, RUN!'"



“What did you do, Dad?” I am at the edge of my chair.

“We ran. We lived on the second floor of the house, and it was like running on a suspension bridge because the floor kept swaying. I felt unsteady and dizzy,” he mutters.

“We made it down the staircases and out in the open area, where a large crowd was gathering. The house had developed some cracks but it stood intact. There were many other buildings that did not withstand the shock and crashed, however. Hundreds were injured.”

The air feels thick around me. There is silence for a minute before Ray asks, “Mum, did people get ouchy?”

Ray takes injuries in both humans and animals very seriously. There have been times when he was rushed to the nurse’s station in school, holding his finger in pain, only to forget where he had been hurt a few minutes later.

“Yes, Ray. Sadly, many people got hurt, but many, many more people also came forward to help others,” says Mum. Dad chimes in, “I remember one volunteer group that had flown all the way from Europe to help the injured people. They were called Medicines sans Frontiers.”

“Did they bring a first-aid kit with them?” Ray asks.

“They brought much more than first-aid kits, actually. They arrived with more than forty tonnes of relief supplies, including tents, medical kits and blankets.”

“How much is forty tonnes?”

“Come on, Ray, you don’t know? It’s a lot. Super heavy.” I am confident on the outside but calculating frantically in my head.

Mum tuts at me before turning to Ray. “That’s the weight of about four double-decker buses.”

“Will they go to Nepal also?”

“I am sure they will, Ray.”

If you have a little brother, you know exactly that they keep interrupting with silly questions.

“But why did the earthquake happen in Nepal?” I ask Mum.

“The base of the Himalayan mountain range is in Nepal. Which famous mountain is there?”

“Mount Everest!” I beam. “You were planning a trek in Nepal with Pilot Uncle, correct?”

“Yes, the tallest peak in the world, Mount Everest. These mountains are on the bucket list for mountain climbers and trekking enthusiasts all over the world. Maybe one day we can all go on a trek to Everest Base Camp.”

I can totally climb any mountain.

She continues, “These mountains were formed when two tectonic plates, the Indian Plate and the Eurasian Plate, collided and pushed the ground up high. Even today, it is an active zone for earthquakes and we still cannot predict them. Unlike some natural disasters, earthquakes are difficult to prepare for.”

“I don’t understand. How can an entire mountain move?”

“I know it is difficult to understand, but it is getting late, so why don’t we continue this tomorrow, Freddy? You need to get enough sleep before school in the morning.”

“But wait, Mum,” I protest. “Can you tell me how the mountain moves?”

“Sorry, Freddy, it is past 8.30 now. We can talk in the morning,” Dad says.

This is annoying. Mum and Dad make us sleep and then they sit and read, or go out to eat ice cream with their friends till late in the night. Now I’ll have to wait till tomorrow to find out how the mountain moves.

I sprint through my routine: brush my teeth, wear my pyjamas and hit the sack. Ray takes his own sweet time, playing with his pet iguana. He finally makes it to the bed. Thankfully the iguana is fake and not a live one, though it is just as creepy.

“Mum, can you turn the fan up please? It’s very hot.” I snuggle with my bolster in bed, only to feel a warm body pressed against my back.

“Ray, please stick to your side of the bed.”

Ray grins and rolls over with his bolster.

“And keep that creepy thing away.”

“Don’t worry. Iggy will sleep in his special box.”

“What do you want for breakfast tomorrow morning?” Mum asks before turning the lights off.

“Cereal,” Ray and I say together.

“Jinx,” we say again at the same time.

“Double jinx,” says Ray.

“Okay, now both of you need to sleep. Goodnight and sleep tight.”

In a few minutes Ray has drifted off, probably dreaming of his Iggy. But I stay awake. The windows are shut, but the curtains are open and I can see the tall white building in the distance. I imagine it shaking, its air-conditioning units slipping off the ledges. Would people fall off the windows and

balconies? I get up to draw the curtains.

It is now pitch dark in the room, but I can sense the faint blur of the fan slicing the air. What if there were an earthquake right now and the fan fell on our bed?

I reach for my bolster in the darkness. Rolling to the side, I shift a little closer to Ray, feeling a tiny bit safer in the warm sheets.

# CHAPTER TWO

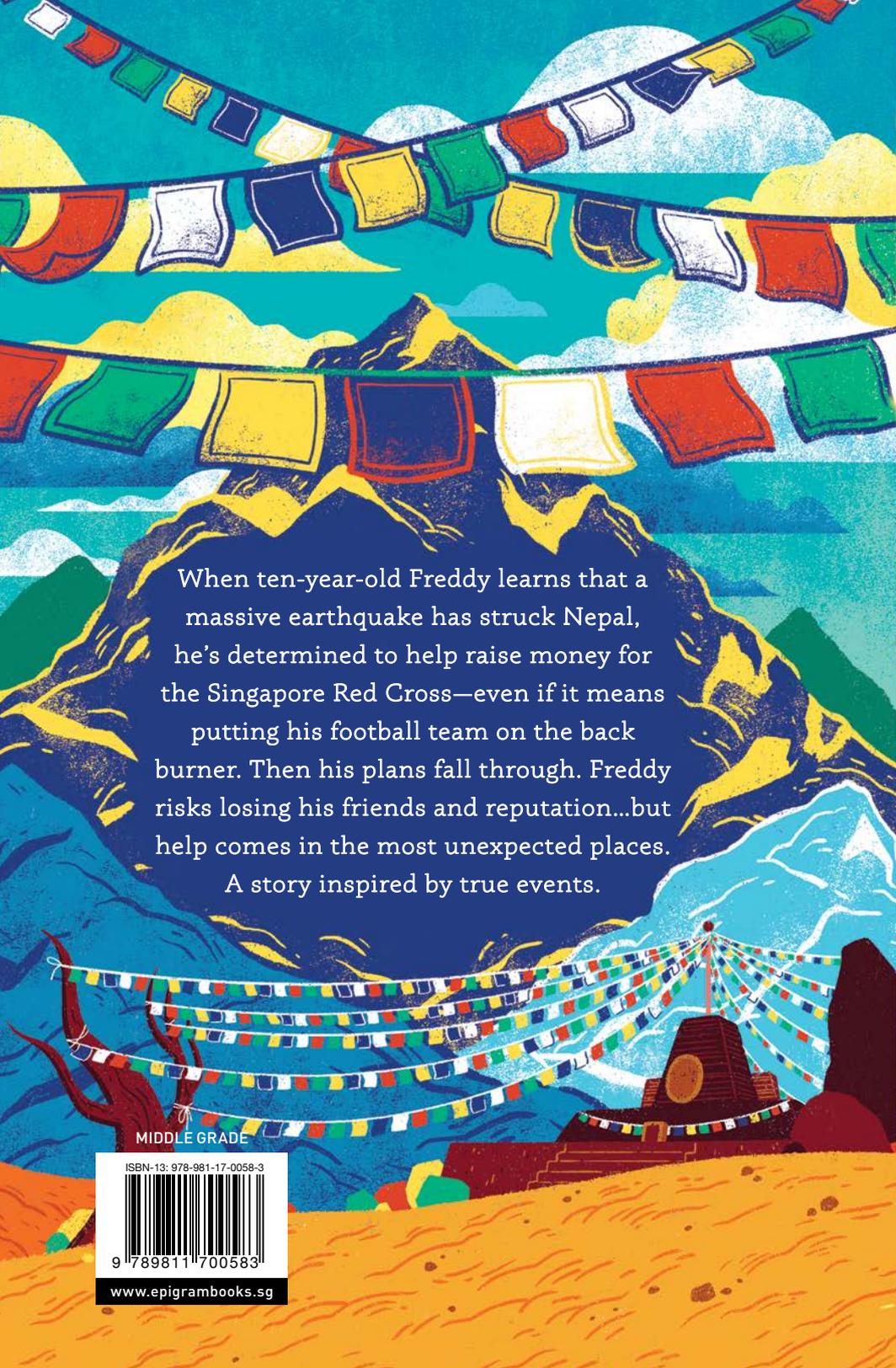
It is 6am.

Each morning, hundreds of kids across the world wake up to go to school. They all have one thing in common: a hatred of the alarm clock and the guy who invented it. Well maybe not all, but most. My trivia book says it's a Mr Levi Hutchins from the United States who inflicted this misery upon the world by inventing the first American alarm clock in 1787.

I don't like the alarm clock, but I love its snooze button. The extra ten minutes of sleep is magical.

6.00am—Alarm goes off. Snooze.

6.10am—Wake up and get ready.



When ten-year-old Freddy learns that a massive earthquake has struck Nepal, he's determined to help raise money for the Singapore Red Cross—even if it means putting his football team on the back burner. Then his plans fall through. Freddy risks losing his friends and reputation...but help comes in the most unexpected places. A story inspired by true events.

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