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opening extract from

The Boy who climbed into the Moon

written by

David Almond

illustrated by

Polly Dunbar

published by

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Some time ago, there was a rather lonely boy named Paul who lived in a city in the north of England. He lived underground, in a basement flat at the bottom of a great apartment block. Over his head, there was floor after floor after floor, and family after family.

This made the world seem very heavy and the sky seem very far away.

One day, Paul was absent from school. He said he had a headache and a stomach ache. He said he felt as if he was going down with a bug or the flu or a fever. But he knew, and his mum and his dad knew, that there was really not much wrong at all. He simply didn't like school, and school didn't seem to like him. He was pleased that his parents understood this, and that on rare days like today they allowed him to stay at home.

Paul wondered what he should do with his day. He heard his dad getting ready for work. He heard his mum singing in the shower. He stared at the walls of the basement flat. He realized that he had no idea what to do, and he also realized, to his great surprise, that he felt quite bored.

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Oh, dear, he thought. *What on earth shall I do?*

Amazingly, he knew the answer straight away.

"I shall go and touch the sky," he said.

This was very strange, for nobody, least of all Paul himself, had ever thought that he might be adventurous.

He slipped out of the basement flat, went through the door of the apartment block, and started to climb.

The stairs were steep. There was stairway after stairway. There were signs that said:

FLOOR 1
FLOOR 2
FLOOR 3
FLOOR 4
FLOOR 5
FLOOR 6

His footsteps rang out and echoed off the walls as he climbed. He heard chattering from the families in the apartments. He smelt sausages being cooked. He licked his lips. He imagined the lovely taste of sausages on his tongue.

At Floor 9, a young man wearing shorts and trainers and a vest with HARRIER written on it, came leaping down the stairs. He halted and looked at Paul. He pressed a button on the stopwatch on his wrist.

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"Good morning, young man!" said the young man.

Paul looked down. He wasn't very good at speaking to strangers.

"And where might you be off to?" said the young man.



Paul said nothing.

"Come along," said the young man. "I haven't got all day. There's jogging and running and sprinting to do."

"I'm going to the top," murmured Paul.

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"What did you say?" said the young man. He kept jogging on the spot and rocking his shoulders and lifting his knees high.

"I'm going to the top to touch the sky," said Paul, a little louder.

"Excellent!" said the young man. "My name is Harry! And you?"

"I'm Paul," said Paul.

"Excellent! You realize that you could take the lift, of course," said Harry. "Just like everybody else does."

Paul just looked at him. He hadn't thought there might be a lift.

"But you're not like everybody else, are you?" said Harry. "You never take the lift, do you? You're a harrier just like me." He jogged faster and faster and his knees and elbows thrashed the air until they could hardly be seen, and his hair swung wildly around his head. "You like to keep fit. Don't you, Paul?"

Paul looked at Harry. He tried to imagine wearing running shoes and a vest with HARRIER written on it and jogging on the spot until his knees disappeared and wearing a stopwatch on his wrist.

"Yes," said Paul.

"Good for you!" said Harry. "Onwards and upwards, that's what I say!"

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He grinned. He pressed a button on his stopwatch.

"Farewell, young man!" he said. "And give my love to Mabel."

"Who's Mabel?" said Paul, but Harry was off again, bounding down the stairs. Paul listened to his footsteps fading into the distance far below. Then he went through a door that said FLOOR 9 to find the lift, and there it was.

The buttons for the lift were on the wall. Of course the button for the top floor, which was Floor 29, was at the very top. Paul jumped and jumped to try to reach it. He was about to give up and climb the stairs again when a hand reached over his head and pressed the button for him. The hand belonged to a lady wearing a red coat and red spectacles and carrying a white poodle on her arm. The poodle was wearing a red coat. The lady peered through her red spectacles.

"I see you're going to the top," she said.

"Yes," said Paul. "Floor 29. I'm going to touch the sky."

"Excellent!" said the lady. "You must be Mabel's nephew, then."

She put out her hand. Paul looked at it for a moment, then he decided he should shake it.

"Very pleased to meet you," said the lady.

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"My name is Clara. Mabel has often talked to us about you. Hasn't she, Clarence?"

"Yap!" said the dog.

"You're smaller than we thought," said Clara. "Isn't he, Clarence?"

"Yap!" said the dog.

Paul stared at them.

"What's my name?" said Paul.

"Your name?" said Clara. "Let me think. Help me, Clarence."

"Yap!" said the dog.

"No, it wasn't that," said Clara.

"It's Paul," said Paul.

"Of course it is!" said Clara. "How could we forget?"

The lift arrived and the door opened.

"Off you go, then, Paul," said Clara.

Paul stepped inside.

"Give our love to Mabel," said Clara.

"Yap!" said the dog.

The doors closed and the lift began to rise towards the top. As it rose, Paul thought of the sky outside getting emptier and emptier and bluer and bluer. He thought of all the families and apartments below. Then the lift stopped and the doors opened and he stepped out onto Floor 29.

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