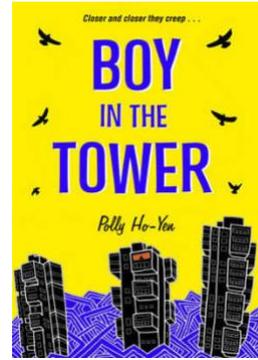


When they first arrived, they came quietly and stealthily as if they tiptoed into the world when we were all looking the other way. Ade loves living at the top of a tower block. From his window, he feels like he can see the whole world stretching out beneath him. His mum doesn't really like looking out-side — but it's going outside that she hates. She's happier sleeping all day in-side their tower, where it's safe. But one day, other tower blocks on the estate start falling down around them and strange, menacing plants begin to appear. Now their tower isn't safe anymore. Ade and his mum are trapped and there's no way out...



### Chapter One

When you wish that a Saturday was actually a Monday, you know there is something seriously wrong.

I look at the ceiling. At the spot of flaky paint and the stain that looks like a wobbly circle, and at the swaying, wispy spider's web, and I think of all those cold, grey Mondays when I had to make myself get up for school. I would have to force my legs off the mattress and I'd dress in a daze, unwilling to believe it was time to be upright again.

I wish I could wake up to another Monday like that.

Those days are gone now that the Bluchers are here.

When they first arrived, they came quietly and stealthily, as if they tiptoed silently into the world when we were all looking the other way.

I guess I was one of the first people to see them. It's not something I'm proud of. When you know the kind of terrible destruction that just one clump of Bluchers can cause, you wouldn't want to have been there first either.

I think the reason I knew about them before most other people was because I used to spend a lot of my time sitting on my windowsill, looking down over the world. I could see everything from there: the miniature-looking roads, the roofs of the buildings, the broccolli-tops of the trees. And then, of course, the Bluchers themselves and the devastation that followed in their path.

The view has changed so much now that sometimes I wonder if I just made up everything that came before. I have to make myself remember what I used to see: the shops and the bustle, the cars and the people, the red-brick walls of my school and the grey patch of the playground.

Some people say you shouldn't live in the past. But I can't stop putting things into two boxes in my head: Before and After. And it's much easier to think about the Before things.

Before, if there was a day when I didn't go into school because I was ill or Mum wasn't well, I used to sit on my windowsill and watch the other children coming out to play. Everyone would rush out of the tiny black door so fast that I wouldn't be able to tell one little coloured ant from another.

I could always recognize Gaia in the crowd, though. She wore this bright pink coat that stood out a mile. I would see her walking along the edge of the playground. Never in the middle, never in a group. Always walking round and round by herself. Walking in circles.

But like I said, this was all before.

I don't see any other children any more.

I don't know where Gaia is.