

street, then joined her. St Bride's Church was ahead of them – its strange tiered steeple was unmistakable, though it was hard not to imagine a spy keeping watch in every one of those high arches.

Marisee sniffed. "Can you smell burning, Robert?"

He sniffed the air too. "I think so," he said. Yes, he definitely could. Perhaps someone had started a small fire in an alleyway to stay warm. Or an uncleaned chimney might have caught fire. It would be hard to see the billowing smoke in the winter darkness.

"Robert?" Marisee said, pointing at the sky.

Like embers from a bonfire, tiny orange sparks streamed towards them, dotted with gold.

Marisee squinted up. "Is it ... a Dragon?"

Why ... why would a Dragon be seeking them out? He peered harder at the ribbon of sparks. Suddenly, Robert knew exactly which Dragon it was. Only the Mary-le-Bow Dragon was threaded with gold. Why would she leave her post to come here? He wished that Marisee hadn't seen it. He was desperate to continue on towards the church.

The sparks clustered together, then clicked into place as if they were scales. First came a long head, then a heavy, strong jaw and small eyes set beneath a ridged brow. A shimmering band of gold spilled eastwards across

the sky towards Mary-le-Bow, tethering the Dragon to her church's steeple.

The Dragon's mouth opened. Robert and Marisee felt a flash of heat, but only words followed. No flames.

"Children are being stolen!" the Dragon said. "You must help them!"

"Stolen?" Robert echoed. "You've come for my help now?"

He hadn't meant to sound impatient, but he of all people knew that children were being stolen. *He* was here in London because *his* family had been stolen. But St Bride's was so close! Couldn't he meet Elijah first and find out about his mother and sisters?

Marisee touched his shoulder. "Robert, it must be important for the Dragon to come and find us."

"But ... but ... if we go to the meeting first..." His voice trailed away.

In his heart, Robert knew that Marisee was right. The Elemental spirits trusted Marisee and Robert to fight the enemies that threatened the city. He mustn't let them down. But... He glanced at the church one last time. Elijah must already be there.

"Can't we come afterwards?" he pleaded.

"What if that's too late, Robert?" Marisee said. "Imagine how many more poor people would have

withered away in their sleep if we'd taken longer to find the Shepherdess. Most of London would have been in rubble if we hadn't stopped the Chaos Monster when we did. We have to help *now*."

Robert's head almost felt too heavy to nod, but he just managed it.

"I'll come," he said, so quietly that perhaps only the Dragon heard him.