

Chapter Ten

The next day, another two buildings had fallen down.

The first was an upholsterer's workshop and the second was actually somebody's house. It was one of those quite small ones which joins onto the houses next to it, in a little row.

We had to walk past it to get to school. It looked a bit like someone had just cut the house out, like how you would take a slice of cake.

I asked Michael's mum who had lived there but she shushed me. She didn't want to talk about it.

'Did you hear about the buildings that have fallen down?' I asked Gaia.

Gaia looked at me as if she was saying, *What do you take me for?*

'Of course I have, Adeola. Everyone's talking about it.'

'Sorry. I know,' I said. 'It's just that Mum hasn't said much about it to me so I wasn't sure . . .' My voice trailed off. What I was going to say was, 'I wasn't sure how big a deal it was.' I know that might sound a bit stupid, but sometimes it's hard until you've spoken to someone else about something to know how serious it is.

Gaia looked at me, softly.

'It's quite bad, Ade. They don't know what's causing it. People are getting scared.'

I looked away from her gaze.

'We just need to wake up tomorrow and hear that nowhere else has fallen down,' she said. 'Then I think everyone will calm down. Did you hear about that little house that fell?'

I shook my head.

'There was an old woman living there. They found her body underneath some bricks.'

We both went quiet for a moment.

'But this is the weird thing,' Gaia continued. 'There weren't nearly enough bricks left where the house fell. There should have been loads and loads more. The same thing happened with the pub and the warehouse and the other place.'

'The workshop,' I said.

'What?'

'The other place was the upholsterer's workshop.'

'Right, the workshop. So I think someone is taking the bricks.'

'So you think a person is doing this?' I asked. 'To steal bricks?'

'I don't know,' Gaia said. 'But I can't think why else it's happening. Why do you think they are falling?'

'I dunno. I guess I thought there was just something wrong with those buildings.'

'But why those ones? And why is it happening all of a sudden? All at the same time?' Gaia said.

'But why would anyone want to steal bricks like that?'

'I don't know,' Gaia said. 'How about . . . how about . . . because there's a monster . . . who only likes the taste of bricks from Camberwell?'

'Yes!' I said, warming to the idea. 'And he hates the taste of bricks from anywhere else.'

'Yeah, he tried the ones in Elephant and Castle and spat them all out!'

'And don't get him started on the bricks in Peckham, they're far too salty.'

'He only comes out at night because he's very shy about people seeing him eat.'

We laughed at each other.

'He doesn't mean anyone any harm,' I continued. 'He's quite a nice monster, really. He's really sorry about the lady who died.'

Quickly, our grins fell from our faces. It wasn't a joke, a story we had made up. Someone had gone to bed one night thinking everything was OK, but the next morning they wouldn't ever wake up, lying buried under the rubble of their own home.

'I wonder what's really going on,' said Gaia. 'And when is it going to end?'

I didn't say, but there was a question in my mind too: I wondered if more people would get hurt along the way.

It turned out I was right to worry.