

TWENTY-TWO



FIRE!

Minutes later we were out in the street, blinking at the smoke and flames pouring out of Thomas Farriner's bakeshop a few doors down from Uncle Bird's. People tumbled out of adjoining houses, shouting and coughing, strange dark shapes in the flickering orange light.

'Lizzie!' I looked up to see Mary's head poking out of a window above me. 'Take this!' A bundle came flying out of the window and thudded onto the cobbles.

Uncle Bird grabbed it and stuffed it into a handcart.

'Quick, Elizabeth,' he said, turning to Mother, 'take Margery and fill the other cart with whatever you can take from the bakehouse – the loaves from yesterday, that new

FIRE!

bag of flour, my utensils. Don't forget some jars of ale. You and Mary take both carts to the top of the lane and wait outside the Green Dragon alehouse on Eastcheap. We'll come and find you. Ralph, Lizzie, come with me!

We ran over to where a double line of people were passing buckets of water from a pierced water pipe under the street up to the burning building. Soon my hands were flying backwards and forwards, passing the empty buckets down the row to be refilled. The men at the top of the line hurled water onto the fire, but it didn't seem to be doing any good because flames were leaping out of the top floor of the bakery and spreading at roof height. Smoke and sparks swirled through the air and I paused to tie my handkerchief over my nose and mouth to stop myself choking.

'Curse this wind!' exclaimed Uncle Bird. 'The fire's got too much to feed on. We need to start pulling down these houses. Where's the Lord Mayor?' He disappeared to talk to a knot of men with long firehooks further up the lane. I could hear the muffled bells of St Magnus's ringing out over the roar and crackle of the flames, and my face began to sting with the heat.

Other men started to step out of the line to help neighbours pull furniture from their houses, cramming tables and chests onto carts and heaving chairs onto their backs. The fire was pushing us back – it had already consumed the houses on either side of Farriner's bakery.

Uncle Bird appeared beside us again, his face red, sweating and streaked with soot.

'Did you talk to the Lord Mayor?' asked Ralph.