For Lettie, whose eyes are as large and round as puddles – A.E.

Thanks to Jane, Helen and all the S&S team – F.W.

SIMON & SCHUSTER
First published in Great Britain in 2019 by Simon & Schuster UK Ltd 1st Floor, 222 Gray's Inn Road, London WC1X 8HB • A CBS Company
Text copyright © 2016, 2019 Abi Elphinstone • Illustrations copyright © 2019 Fiona Woodcock • The right of Abi Elphinstone and Fiona Woodcock to be identified as the author and illustrator of this work has been asserted by them in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988 All rights reserved, including the right of reproduction in whole or in part in any form • A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library upon request • ISBN: 978-1-4711-7247-2 (HB) ISBN: 978-1-4711-7246-5 (PB) • ISBN: 978-1-4711-7248-9 (eBook) Printed in China • 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

The Snow Dragon

Abi Elphinstone & Fiona Woodcock

SIMON & SCHUSTER
London New York Sydney Toronto New Delhi

It was Christmas Eve and Phoebe could see that the little town of Whistlethrop was covered in a thick layer of snow. It was the first snow of winter and it had come silently in the night, the way magic often does. To Phoebe, the snow felt like a promise, a pledge that today might be different and that, just possibly, there might be even more magic waiting for her.

Phoebe lived in Griselda Bone's Home for Strays, where the strays were children and the home was, in fact, an orphanage. Once you were in, you were very firmly in.

Until Miracle Day that was . . .

Once a month Griselda opened the gates to parents hoping to adopt a child. If you were picked by one of the families, the day you left – that marvellous day – became your Miracle Day.

Only it never seemed to happen to Phoebe.

The pile of books Phoebe was balancing on in the attic, where she often hid away and looked out at the world, swayed and there was a scratching sound followed by a yap.

A chestnut brown sausage dog clambered up the dusty tower. "Snow, Herb. Isn't it brilliant?" Phoebe exclaimed. But Herbert was only really interested in two things: cuddles from Phoebe and dancing.

Phoebe sighed. Today was a bittersweet day. It was her friend Jack's Miracle Day.

Phoebe was happy that he was going to live with a real family, but not even Herbert's pirouettes could distract her enough to forget that with Jack gone, she would be the only child left in the orphanage.

"It's just you and me now, Herb." she said.

And then, even though she knew it was against the rules, Phoebe whispered, "Come on, if we're quick, we'll have time to wave Jack off and hurry back here before Griselda finds us."

Phoebe scooped up Herbert, clambered out of the window and slid down the roof towards the fire-escape. They hurried down the ladder and raced to the front of the orphanage, just in time to see a car pulling away. Jack looked over his shoulder and as Phoebe waved through the gates, her friend's eyes lit up. "I'll miss you!" Jack shouted.

Phoebe stood before the tall dark gates. Then there was a low and very loud growl. With a sinking heart, she turned around.

A black pit bull terrier stood on the gravel.

Then came another growl. "Slobber! Where have you got to?"

A woman appeared: short and stocky, with shoulders that gobbled up her neck.