

CHAPTER ONE



I squeezed through the door of The Wig and Pen, and elbowed a load of bread as somebody jostled me into the shelves. Up ahead, the landlady of the pub-shop climbed on to her bar, tripped over the lemonade tap and landed on Farmer McAndrew's head. The crowd made a collective "whoa!" noise and righted her again.

"What's the town meeting about this time?" I whispered to Kai, my best friend. Nobody had told us yet, but I figured he'd know, seeing as he lived in the flat above our heads.

"Dunno. I've been out on Uncle Doug's boat all morning, setting the lobster traps," he replied with a shrug.

Fabien, my little brother, surveyed the shelf behind me with a sigh. "I've only sold *one* knitted swimming costume! Can you believe it?"

Margot and I looked at each other guiltily, because we were his secret customers, hoping to make him feel better about selling something. We'd given the costume to Farmer McAndrew, who said we were very good big sisters, and then used it to insulate his carrots.

"I'm not sure there's much call for knitted swimming garments in July," I told him.

He shook his head. "I just can't understand it."

"I wish they'd hurry up," said Margot, changing the subject. "I've got a flying lesson at two o'clock."

"And I've got to get back to my goats," said Fabien. "They'll be wanting their cake soon."

Kai stared at him. "You've baked a cake for your pet goats?"

"Yes, because it's been a whole year since we won our island and I became the proud owner of my beautiful herd," said Fabien.

I stared at him, surprised. Had it really been a year since we'd won our island from Mr Billionaire? It only felt like yesterday I'd read about the competition in the newspaper, after we'd found out we were being evicted from our flat in London. I'd only just got used to floating to school on our boat, *Lady Agatha*, rather than being jostled around on the tube.

Everyone chatted loudly as Heidi, the landlady, tried to climb back on to the bar. I looked around and was sure the whole town was here now. It was even busier than last winter's Black Friday, when Heidi (who was also Kai's mum) had given out a free packet of chewing gum with every cucumber

bought. She'd run out halfway through the day, resulting in a riot next to the pork scratchings.

Heidi clapped her hands for silence, and Mayor Oddway pole-vaulted on to the bar next to her with a stale French stick. He waved it in the air to get people's attention, and the crowd quietened down, until all that could be heard was the sound of his chains jingling round his neck.

"Are we all here?" he asked.

"Yes!" replied the crowd.

"Excellent. I therefore call this meeting to order," he said. "Now, as you know, planning permission has been applied for by a corporate developer called Gold Rush Properties who want to turn our lovely town of Wishnook into what they are calling 'The Las Vegas of Scotland'! This would mean expanding Windy Nook Airport to accommodate more planes and building a new, faster road between here and the harbour to cope with all the extra traffic. Unfortunately, despite our objections, full planning permission has been granted for this first stage of development. Today I obtained further details about their plans."

I glanced worriedly at Kai, Margot and Fabien,

not knowing what any of this meant. Mum had told me about the development, but I hadn't actually thought it would happen. Why would anyone want to build over the town? It seemed ridiculous.

The mayor unfurled a banner that he'd stashed behind the bar. It looked a bit like one of the collages Fabien liked to do when he got knitter's elbow. I shuffled forward to get a better look, and ended up under Doctor Ted's surprisingly unhygienic-smelling armpit. I wiggled my nose away from the pong and angled myself downwind in the stream of Margot's sweet perfume.

Jumping above the crowd's heads, I saw the banner had CGI drawings of lots of glossy buildings. There was a cloud-grazing hotel, a massive shopping complex and a casino in the shape of an octopus. It was Wishnook Vegas on a roll of partially ripped vinyl.

"Gold Rush Properties are currently looking at sites for a shopping mall, casino and even a theme park," said Mayor Oddway. "Most of you know we have launched a legal appeal against the plans and this will be going to court soon. But we still need to be prepared for the worst. If

this goes through, our little town will never be the same again."

Daisy Gifford, the town's one and only journalist, forced her way to the front of the crowd. "Have you thought this might be a *good* thing?" she said.

"Hear, hear!" shouted someone.

"Rubbish!" called someone else.

"These developments bring tourists, and we all know there's been a lack of them lately," continued Daisy. "Our businesses can't survive on thin air. We need to attract holidaymakers and Wishnook's Gold Rush Resort, Spa and Hunting Lodge will do just that. It'll save us all!"

"It'll ruin my business!" said Heidi. "Who's going to want to sup their ale next to a shelf full of toilet cleaner – even if it is the lemon-scented kind – when they can go to a posh wine bar instead?"

There was silence, and then somebody said, "We'll still come here to buy our bread."

"Actually the hotel will include an artisan bakery," said Daisy. "Just think about all the fresh croissants!"

"The extra trade will definitely be good for my orangutans," said Edna, who ran the charity shop.

Margot and I both raised our eyebrows.

"Orangutans?" I said slowly, wondering if Edna had actually lost the plot. Maybe the stress had got to her.

"Yes, I send them the profits from my shop," she said.

Everyone looked away from her and back to Daisy and the mayor, who were stood on opposite sides of the bar looking annoyed with each other.

"Think of the extra tourists that Wishnook Vegas will bring in, though," said Dad. "There'll be more people to buy my seagulls!"

Dad had taken up whittling a few months ago. He said it was something to do with mindfulness, and had built an entire shed in which to work on his new hobby. So far he mostly stuck to whittling seagulls that he kept forcing on people as presents. Kai was the only person who'd escaped being given one, at least for now. His surprise gull weighed heavily in my pocket as I thought about it.

"Nobody will come to my island yoga retreats if there's a fancy hotel for them to stay in instead," said Mum.

"I'm sure people will still come," said Dad soothingly.

Mum scowled at him. "You don't know that. My website will look terrible next to theirs."

"Oi!" said Kai, who'd made it for her. "You've got animated graphics and everything."

Deciding I'd had enough of all the drama, I nodded at Kai to follow me through the hot, sticky crowd outside to the fresh air. Margot and Fabien came tumbling through the door after us, and we raced down to the harbour and dangled our feet in the water to cool down. I watched a seabird bob on the waves and felt like my head was swimming around with it.

Mum had tried not to worry us about the development, but without her yoga retreats we'd all go hungry again unless we learned how to fish.

"We must find a way to stop this happening," I said.

"We could start a petition?" suggested Kai.

"No, we need to do something bigger than that," I said.

"Can't you ask Mr Billionaire? I mean, he wouldn't want to see this happen to Wishnook, would he?" said Kai.

"He's travelling," I replied.

It had been six months since Mr Billionaire had last visited us. He'd gone on a year-long expedition to Antarctica with a pack of huskies and a boatful of scientists. I wasn't quite sure what he was doing there. The last time we'd seen him, he'd just mentioned something about liking snow and igloos. I hoped he'd taken a good coat with him.

"Maybe Daisy's right, and this resort won't be such a bad thing," said Margot. "I could get a job there and put money towards my flying lessons. Plus, they're going to invest in the airport!"

"You're fourteen," I reminded her.

"But I'll be sixteen by the time it's finished," she said.

"What about Mum's yoga retreats? What if she goes out of business?" I asked.

"We'll grow cabbages," said Margot.

I wasn't convinced. If Mum went out of business, that would mean no more food, no oil for the generator that made our light bulbs work, no peat for the fire and no fuel for our boat, *Lady Agatha*. It would mean no more living on our island, unless Dad could sell a million whittled

seagulls or Fabien could start a trend for knitted underwear. Both seemed quite unlikely.

Worse, it would mean I'd have to close my donkey sanctuary.

I'd opened my donkey sanctuary at the end of last summer and now had three rescue donkeys. The last one, Sunshine, had been given up when her owner had moved country. She was the littlest donkey but the boldest too – unless she had to go near a beach, which was a bit of a problem as her new home was an island.

I couldn't close my sanctuary! I'd promised Monty, Moon and Sunshine that they'd finally found their forever homes. I couldn't go back on my word. They needed me.

I turned to Fabien. "You're on our side, aren't you?"

"Well ... it *would* be nice to expand my knitting business," he replied. "Besides, paintballing looks really fun."

Now I was confused. "What do you mean?"

"Something on Mayor Oddway's poster said *shooting range*," he said.

Kai shook his head. "That's not paintballing. That means *goose shooting*."

The colour drained from Fabien's usually bright face. "You mean ... shooting *real* geese? With *real* guns? Not firing paint at people's bottoms?"

"Yes," I said.

He gripped the harbour wall. "That's *horrible*."

"Actually," began Kai, "the geese around here are kind of pests. They're constantly trying to eat all the farm crops, and they swallowed one of Uncle Doug's best socks once when he was drying them outside his boat shack."

The colour returned to Fabien's face, but this time he turned so red that he resembled a beetroot. "You wouldn't shoot me if I ate your Uncle Doug's socks, would you?"

Kai considered this. "It depends why you'd eaten it. I mean, if you were a sock-eating zombie, then, yeah, probably. But if you got confused and thought it was a smoked kipper, then obviously not. They do smell kind of similar."

"Can we stop talking about socks and get back to the point?" I asked.

"What was the point again?" said Kai, looking a bit lost.

"That we have to save the town!" I replied. "Who's with me?"

I held out my hand, and Kai and Fabien piled theirs on top. "We are!" they both chirped.

Margot sat on her hands and looked pointedly up at the clouds. I took out the whittled seagull from my pocket and pecked her on the hand with it. She made an *ouch* sound, then shuffled away. I huffed. She'd change her mind when she'd thought about it more.

We needed Margot on our side. After all, she could fly real aeroplanes and explain what a subordinate conjunction was, *and* name all the planets without doing the rhyme in her head first. All I could do was worm a donkey.

Footsteps whacked on the pavement behind us, and I turned to find Mum panting and doubled over.

"What's wrong, Mrs Butterworth?" asked Kai.

"Are the developers here already?" I said. "Should we lie down in front of the diggers?"

"That sounds dangerous..." replied Fabien, his face scrunched with worry.

Mum shook her head. "It's the yoga guests," she wheezed. "I've just remembered I was supposed to pick them up at lunchtime, but with all the

commotion about today's meeting I completely forgot!"

"So where are they now?" asked Margot.

Mum shrugged desperately.

Oh no! We'd lost the yoga guests!