

Chapter One – Game Over!

Cobble Street should have been named Topple Street, Christopher Cogan cursed as his boot-clad toe caught the edge of a pothole that almost sent him straight down on his face. “When I’m mayor this’ll be the first street I fix,” he muttered as he raced down the long road that cut straight to the center plaza of Steamkettle Bay.

He saw the plaza fountain up ahead, and quickly tried to decide his next move. The twelve-year-old boy was ahead of the game, though he could hear his street pals close by. Any moment now they would burst into Cobble Street, and there he’d be standing—looking confused and a rather deep shade of blue from the knees down.

That last hiding spot had been original, but honestly, what boy in their right mind would think to leap into a vat of wine-grapes during a game of hide and seek? At first, Christopher had commended himself for his cleverness. But, after climbing out of the vat and retrieving his boots from behind a box, his clever smile had faded. His ankle-high boots definitely wouldn’t cover the grape stains that reached his knees. Well, perhaps I shall start a new fashion, he thought, as he tucked his soggy, sticky pant legs tightly into his boot-tops.

At the very center of Steamkettle Bay, Cobble Street took a sharp curve as it wound past the working class trade shops and Bay Public School. But now the road aimed directly at the statue of Nikolas Bartlby Darngerad, the city’s first tycoon, which rose above the fountain at city center. Cobble Street wrapped around the fountain, and emerged on the other side transformed into Center Street. Smoother, and with nary a pebble out of place, it rolled regally on, bordered by expensive shops, homes, banks, the library and the museum. Street games were frowned upon on Center Street, and all the kids knew it. Police patrolled the High Side streets regularly and didn’t have much of a sense of humor.

Christopher had noticed that old tycoon Darngerad was positioned exactly on his pedestal to allow him to smile kindly up Center Street, while sticking his slightly rounded tush out at all who gazed upon him from Cobble Street. Christopher’s parents had stifled their laughter at that sight and pretended not to notice. His mum had told him a long and rather boring story about Darngerad’s early days of growing up on the Low Side, and how his daughter had married a historian and raised two children who became bankers. “So you see?” she’d said, “he started on Low Side, but always looked towards High Side. That’s why he seems like he’s walking towards Center Street.”

Christopher thought about tycoon Darngerad’s backside for about two seconds as his purple-booted legs hurtled him around to the front of the fountain. He glanced up and saw Darngerad glaring down at him. “Well good afternoon to ye, Darn ol’ Darngerad, ya old coot. While you’re stuck up there, I’m down here winnin’ this game! Your fancy folk aren’t around so who’ll be the wiser if I borrow your fancy street for a few minutes?” He tried to sound important, but there was still a nervous quaver in his voice.

Behind the statue, Christopher saw his friends approaching at top speed, then suddenly screech to a halt just before reaching the fountain. As they stared gape jawed at him, he congratulated himself on his bravery and courage. His scaredy cat friends stuck to their side of

the fountain, never thinking to venture beyond Low Side. It was right about then that Christopher realized they weren't staring at him, exactly, but over his shoulder towards something looming behind him. And the look on their faces was not admiration.

Christopher really didn't want to turn around, but he did. With a resigned sigh, he mumbled, "Afternoon, Officer."