Chapter 1

It was summertime in Earthampton.

The radiant sun slowly climbed over the hills, showing its glowing face in the east. It spread its warmth across the town, lighting up the roads and playgrounds. But the sun was in for a disappointment. Most of the children were enjoying their summer vacations and had no intention of getting up early to play outside.

Children whose parents worked during the day were usually signed up for summer camps and other activities. That had been Aaron's routine for many summers.

This year, however, was going to be different.

Aaron's uncle and his family were visiting from England. For an entire month, Aaron would have his uncle, aunt, and two cousins, Alistair and Anne, staying with him.

“Mom, when are they coming?” Aaron asked the moment he got out of bed.

He had been counting the days until his cousins arrived. It would be their first visit to Earthampton—and, in fact, their first trip outside England. Aaron couldn't wait to introduce them to baseball and basketball.

“Who, sweetie?” Sharon asked.

“My cousins.”

“Do you mean my brother and his family?” she teased.

“No, Mom. My cousins and their parents from England.”

Sharon laughed. Aaron was clearly in a playful mood.

“Are you excited, sweetie?”

“Excited? You bet!”

“Did you tell Buckaroo? He seems even more excited than you.”

“Yep!”

Sharon glanced at the clock on the wall. It was still early. According to the latest text message from her brother, the family was expected to arrive around noon.

They had plenty of time.

“Mom, do you think Alistair and Anne will play baseball with me? They don't have baseball in England, do they?”

The moment Aaron mentioned baseball, Buckaroo dashed upstairs. A few seconds later, he returned with his own soft baseball in his mouth.

He dropped it at Aaron's feet and barked, demanding a game.

Sharon burst out laughing.

“Look at that, Aaron! Buckaroo wants to play baseball with you. I think he'll turn your English cousins into Americans before the month is over.”

Just then, Sharon heard someone moving around in the living room.

There was only one other person in the house, and she knew exactly who it was.

“Nathan, are you sleepwalking?”

Something scraped across the floor.

“Dad, are you cleaning?” Aaron called.

“My wonderful husband,” Sharon added, “what brought this on all of a sudden?”

Buckaroo contributed a few questioning barks.

Aaron, Sharon, and Buckaroo walked into the living room.

There stood Nathan, busy with some serious housecleaning. He was so absorbed in his work that he didn't notice the three pairs of eyes watching him.

“Dad…”

“Honey…”

“Bow! Bow!”

Nathan dusted the television, straightened the photographs on the wall, and cleared unnecessary things from the coffee table.

Sharon looked at Aaron.

Aaron shrugged.

Finally, Nathan turned toward them.

“Lady Sharon, could you entertain me with a cup of tea, please?” he asked in an exaggerated English accent. “I'm absolutely gobsmacked to find you Yankees staring at me!”

Aaron's eyes widened.

He had never heard his father speak with an English accent before. His mother sometimes tried different accents when she read bedtime stories, but Nathan's performance sounded surprisingly convincing.

“My dear boy,” Nathan continued, “would you fancy a lolly? I do hope everything is hunky-dory!”

Buckaroo tilted his head, thoroughly confused.

“Dad, your accent is amazing!” Aaron exclaimed. “It's much better than Mom's fake accents during story time.”

“Why wouldn't it be?” Nathan replied. “Before I met your mother and moved to this teeny-weeny town of Earthamptonshire, I was a baron in Derbyshire. People respectfully called me Baron Brown!”

Sharon loved the silly, imaginative side of her husband. She decided to join the performance.

“Gawd blimey! You're awesome!”

“Bob's your uncle!” Nathan declared with a wink.

Sharon laughed.

Aaron looked at Buckaroo. Buckaroo looked back at Aaron.

“Hello!” Aaron interrupted, making a time-out gesture with his hands. “Can we please speak real English?”

“Aaron,” Sharon said, still laughing, “your uncle hasn't even arrived, and his visit has already driven this entire household crazy!”

Her phone beeped.

A new message from Fred appeared on the screen.

Getting delayed. Caught in road construction.

“Where are they?” Nathan asked. “Are they close?”

Sharon typed a quick reply.

“Mom, are they here? Are they here?” Aaron asked impatiently.

Buckaroo began jumping up and down as though he understood every word.

“Not yet, sweetie. They're stuck in traffic.”

“Oh, man!” Aaron groaned. “I can't wait any longer. I want to play with my cousins!”

Nathan returned to his cleaning while Sharon asked Aaron to tidy his room and prepare a place for his visitors.

“Mom, I want both Alistair and Anne to sleep in my room.”

“That should be fine. But let's ask Anne first. She might not want to share a room with two boys.”

“Girls,” Aaron muttered. “They don't like having fun.”

“Don't say that,” Sharon replied with a smile. “Isn't Sarah fun?”

“Sarah's different. She's cool. Not like the other girls.”

“Your mom is a girl too,” Nathan pointed out. “What about her?”

“Mom is…”

Aaron hesitated.

“Sharon!” Nathan called. “Your son seems to be having trouble finding the right words. Look at him!”

“Mom is…” Aaron tried again.

“Mom is what?” Sharon asked, pretending to sound threatening.

“Mom is super-duper cool!” Aaron shouted. “Always the coolest!”

He jumped into the air.

Buckaroo wagged his tail and bounced beside him.

Another beep came from Sharon's phone.

She opened the message.

Before she could read it aloud, a voice rang out from the doorway.

“WE'RE HERE!”

Everyone turned.

There stood Alistair and Anne, with their parents right behind them.

— End of Chapter 1 —