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opening extract from

B.A.S.E. Camp

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Chapter One
Roommates

The green, vintage Bentley purred along the avenue of oak trees and scrunched to a halt in the wet gravel of the courtyard.

'Here we are, m'boy,' Gramps said, peering through the rain-spattered windscreen. 'Hard to believe my old boarding school is going to be *your* home for the next fortnight.'

Gareth stared at the ancient building. The skyline was dominated by its towers and tall chimneys, which pointed up into the dark clouds like bony fingers.

'Bet you never thought you'd see this place again, eh, Gramps?'

'Aye, you're right there, m'boy,' Gramps said, nodding. 'The Old Manor hasn't changed a bit though, by the look of it, in the past 50 years.'

'The name has,' Gareth reminded him. 'It's now known as B.A.S.E. Camp – the British Academy of Sporting Excellence.'

'Aye, well,' Gramps sighed. 'It'll always be the Old Manor to me – the haunted house!'

Gareth laughed. 'Most of the tales about your schooldays are ghost stories.'

They climbed out of the car, and Gareth collected his bags from the boot. 'Sure you won't stay for a while, Gramps?' he asked, suddenly feeling nervous. 'Y'know, have a little look round, like.'

'No, that can wait till the weekend when I come with your mother for the Open Day,' said Gramps. 'You're about to meet a whole new bunch of pals, so I won't hang around and get in your way.'

'OK then. Thanks for bringing me. I'll look forward to telling you everything on Sunday.'

Gramps slipped his grandson a wink. 'Aye, well, perhaps not *everything*, eh?' he chuckled. 'Best to keep mum, as they say, about any of them ghosts you might meet!'

When Gramps left to drive home through the afternoon traffic, Gareth was shown into one of the small dormitories on the second floor. Only the top bed of one of the two bunks had not already been claimed.

'Good job I don't mind heights,' he said, grinning. 'I'm a high jumper.'

A drawled response came from the opposite top bunk.

'Yeah? Well don't go jumpin' out of bed and makin' a noise in the middle of the night, man. I'm a light sleeper.'

A long, black leg trailed over the side of the bunk, dangling down in front of the face of the boy below, who was perched on the edge of the bed. He pushed it away and went on tightening the spikes in his running shoes. 'You've got smelly feet,' he complained.

'Not my feet, man – just my socks.'

'Same thing.'



'I'm Gareth, by the way,' said Gareth, interrupting his roommates. 'What events do you two do?'

The lad in the top bunk sat up and pulled on a pair of trainers. 'Adam – long jump and sprints,' he said and then pointed downwards. 'That's Wonder Boy, who says he's a runner.'

'Wonder Boy?'

'Yeah. Ever since he got here, he's not stopped *wonderin*' about stuff.'

'Most people call me Eddie,' the boy on the bottom bunk put in. 'I only said "I wonder who's sharing this room with us".'

'And wonder what we're doin' later. And what's for tea. And…'

'OK, OK,' Eddie sighed. 'Sorry – guess I'm just a bit nervous.'

'We all are,' Gareth said in support. 'What *are* we doing, anyway, this afternoon?'

'Whatever they say, man,' grunted Adam.

'Who's *they*?'

'The coaches.'

'Adam was here at Easter, too,' Eddie explained, pulling a face. 'Been boasting how not many people get invited back for extra coaching in the summer.'

'Perhaps he needs it,' Gareth grinned.

'We *all* need it, man. These guys are the best coaches around,' said Adam, and then added, 'Well, at least that's what they say.'

Gareth smiled and hoisted one of his bags onto the bunk. 'So who's got the bed below me?' he asked, looking at the bulging leather case that had been left there to claim it.

'Dunno,' said Adam. 'But if he can lug that great thing around with him, I reckon he must be a thrower. Y'know, big solid kid – strong in the arm and thick in the head!' He began to climb down from his bunk and trod on Eddie's coat, which lay across the pillow. There was the distinct sound of something snapping.

'Oops! What was that?'

Eddie put a hand in one of the pockets and pulled out a broken pair of sunglasses. 'Just as well I'm not going to need them in this weather,' he murmured.

At that moment, another boy appeared in the doorway, almost filling the space.

'See the gang's all here at last,' he said, strolling into the room. 'Name's Tom.'

'Where've you been hidin', man?' Adam asked him.

'Nowhere, *man*,' Tom responded in kind. 'Just having a bit of a snoop around. Then I met some bloke with white hair on the top floor, who told me it was private.'

'Who was that?' demanded Adam, suddenly serious.

Tom shrugged. 'No idea. He obviously wasn't one of the coaches.'

'Why not?'

'Too old and scruffy.'

'Look who's asking all the questions now,' said Eddie, surprised that Adam seemed so interested. 'He's probably just the caretaker.'

Tom grinned. 'Ought to start taking more care of himself, then. He needed a shave and was wearing some tatty cardigan with holes in it.'

'So what did you do?' asked Gareth.

'I cleared off before he could report me,' Tom said, opening his case. 'And when I glanced back, he'd gone.'

Gareth laughed. 'Sounds like he could be one of my grandad's ghosts.'

'What?'

'Long story. I'll explain later.'

Adam grabbed his sports bag off the bunk and made for the door. 'C'mon, you guys, time to go. Last one out the changin' room has to clean it up.'

'First I've heard about that,' Eddie complained, gathering up his own kit.

'Tons of things they don't tell yer here, Wonder Boy. You have to learn to look after number one at B.A.S.E. Camp.'