



CHAPTER 1

In 1952, a ten-year-old girl named Ann Dunham invited a friend to come to her house to play. It was a warm October afternoon in the Texas town where Ann lived, so she and her friend decided to play in the front yard beneath a big maple tree that had just begun to turn gold. The two girls brought one of Ann's favorite books and sat down on a blanket in the cool grass, their heads bent together over the pictures in the book. One of the pictures made both girls laugh out loud, but their laughter died quickly as a sharp voice shouted at Ann from the street.

“Dirty Yankee!”

Ann and her friend looked up to see a small group of children from Ann's school gathered just outside the fence. The children were glaring at the two girls in disgust and pointing at Ann's friend, who was black. None of the children had ever seen a black child playing in their neighborhood before.

As all the children began shouting, Ann and her friend crouched low to the ground,

trembling in fear. One of the older boys began throwing rocks at the two girls while the rest of the group hurled insults. At that moment, Ann's mother, Madelyn, came walking down the sidewalk toward the house. When she approached, the group of children quickly disappeared. Madelyn Dunham shook her head, sighed, and walked over to her daughter and her daughter's black friend and rested her hand on both of the girls' heads.

"If you two are going to play, then for goodness sake, go on inside. Come on. Both of you."

Ann stood up to follow her mother, but Ann's friend, still shaking, took off without a word, running down the street as fast as she could. She never even looked back.

That evening, Ann's father, Stanley, became furious when he learned that a group of children had shouted racist remarks and thrown rocks at his daughter and her friend. Neither Madelyn nor Stanley had been raised to judge others based on skin color, and they weren't about to let their daughter get picked on just because her friend was black. It was not uncommon in 1952, particularly in Southern states, for black people to be treated like second-class citizens. They were often forced to use separate bathrooms, drink from separate water fountains, and sit in a separate section in the back of a

bus. Quite often, blacks were prohibited from even entering certain restaurants, theaters, or stores. But Stanley and Madelyn knew this was wrong, and they had always taught Ann that it was wrong too.

The next morning, Stanley Dunham called the parents of the schoolmates who had been taunting Ann and her friend. Surely, the adults would see that this kind of behavior was wrong and that their children should be punished. In call after call, however, Stanley got the same responses.

“You best talk to your *own* daughter, Mr. Dunham. White girls don’t play with coloreds in this town.”



Half a world away, in the country of Kenya on the continent of Africa, a sixteen-year-old boy tended his father’s goats in the late afternoon. The boy and his father, named Onyango, belonged to the Luo tribe. They lived in thatched mud huts not far from the shores of Lake Victoria, and they often wore no more than a broad piece of leather tied around their waists as they walked behind their herds of sheep and goats. The boy’s father had three wives, something that was common in many African countries.

The boy attended a local school that had been set up by the British, the people who ruled

over Kenya. Quite often the British treated the native Kenyans unfairly, in much the same way that Americans mistreated black people. However, some British people tried to help the Kenyans by setting up schools so that the young people could obtain the education they'd need to create better lives than their ancestors had experienced.

"Knowledge is the source of the white man's power," Onyango would often tell his son. Again and again, Onyango told his young son that he needed education if he wanted to succeed.

The boy knew his father was right, and even though the boy made excellent grades, he found it hard to stay out of trouble. Again and again, he was sent home for cutting up in class and rebelling against the school rules. Perhaps the boy sensed that all his studying and good grades wouldn't really make any difference. How would his hard work ever change anything? After all, the world around him made it painfully clear that a black man would never achieve greatness. That sort of thing was reserved for white men. Or perhaps the boy was bored. He often complained to his father that he already knew more than his instructors.

In time, the boy was expelled from his school. Onyango was so angry that he told his

son that he was going to send him far away to work as a clerk for an Arab merchant. Onyango felt that his son had ruined his chances to be any more than just another black man working for someone else, and now he would punish his son by showing him what life was like in the real world.

The boy stood out on the wide savannah watching the sun set and listening to the tinkle of the bells around the goats' necks. On the horizon, a herd of zebra moved cautiously through the tall grass, wary of the hunting lions. Closer to the boy, high up in a huge baobab tree, a stork protected its young from a circling eagle. Every animal had its place, the boy thought. Perhaps that's just the way it was for him, too. Maybe it was wrong to want more.

But as the boy made his way back to the mud hut in his tribe's village, he knew in his heart that he had the power to make his life different and better—to become the change he wanted to see. And though he would leave tomorrow for a life he didn't want, he made a promise to himself that one day he would become a great man.



Eight years passed. Eighteen-year-old Ann Dunham had moved with her parents to Hawaii, an exotic place that had just become part of the United States. Ann's parents preferred the

more open-minded and laid-back attitudes in Honolulu. Unlike many of the states in the United States in 1959, Hawaii did not tend to discriminate against minorities as much; there was more of a “live and let live” attitude.

As for Ann, she had hoped to attend the University of Chicago, but her parents told her that Chicago was too far away (4300 miles!) from home for an eighteen-year-old. As a result, Ann settled into her freshman year of college just down the street at the University of Hawaii.

At the same time, the boy from Kenya, who was now a twenty-four-year-old man, had kept his promise to himself. He had worked very hard to get back on track with his studies, and he had finally graduated from high school with excellent grades. His next dream was to attend college. As the son of a tribesman in a remote part of Kenya, the young man had no money and no connections to universities. But he had heard that some universities in the United States offered scholarships to foreign students, so he sent out letter after letter explaining his situation and asking politely for help. Soon the copies he kept of these letters filled an entire box.

Months went by, and no universities responded. Then, one spring afternoon in 1959, a letter reached the young Kenyan. A university in the United States was willing to

pay his full tuition and expenses! In fact, the school explained that it would be proud to welcome him as their first-ever African student. Overjoyed, the young man rushed to get ready, and in only two weeks, he was aboard a jet for the first time in his life—a very long flight to Honolulu and the University of Hawaii.



Ann Dunham had noticed the student from Kenya in her Russian language class right away. He was tall and handsome and always at ease. Certainly he must have felt awkward at times in such a different culture, but he never showed it. He was also brilliant and funny, his jokes and sharp sense of humor making him many friends, including Ann. However, before long, Ann and the Kenyan became more than just friends. They fell in love and, rather quickly, decided to get married.

In 1960, it was still illegal in many parts of the United States for a black man and a white woman to marry. In some places, black men were threatened and even beaten merely for flirting with white women. Luckily, attitudes were not so strict in Hawaii. No one seemed too concerned about the young couple as they walked along the wide beaches, hand in hand. And when Ann told her parents that she wanted to marry her Kenyan classmate, they were happy for her.

In Kenya, however, Onyango was not at all happy with his son's decision. He worried that Ann would never move to Kenya and live the life of a Luo tribeswoman. He was concerned that Ann would not allow her husband to have multiple wives, something that was both a tradition and an expectation within the Luo tribe. Most of all, Onyango was angry that his son was deciding for himself whom he would marry. For generations and generations, Luo parents had arranged their children's marriages. A son deciding for himself was unheard of.

Nonetheless, Ann and the young man from Kenya would break with both United States and Kenyan traditions and get married in 1960. Then, in 1961, Ann gave birth to a baby boy. The child had his mother's eyebrows and sparkling eyes, but he had his father's broad smile. And he had his father's name: Barack Hussein Obama.



When Barack was very young, his father decided to attend graduate school in Boston, Massachusetts. Ann was not happy with her husband's decision. After only two years of marriage, Barack Sr. would be leaving Ann and their young son for a school thousands of miles away. He had done so well at the University of Hawaii that he had been offered two scholarships: one to a school in New York City,

which would pay his entire family's expenses, and another to Harvard University in Boston, which would pay only his own expenses.

Again and again, Barack Sr. explained to Ann that it was very important to him to show his relatives in Kenya that he had received the very best education possible in the United States. Everyone had heard of Harvard. Going to this famous university would be his way of proving to his family that he had done his best.

And so, in the fall of 1963, Ann and two-year-old Barack waved farewell to Barack Sr. Perhaps Ann knew in her heart that their separation was the beginning of the end. Or perhaps it was Ann's mother, gently warning her daughter about the many violent uprisings in Kenya and how dangerous life there might be, that led Ann to question her marriage. Whatever the reasons, Ann and Barack Sr. divorced before the end of the year. Before young Barack was even old enough to have any memories of his father, his father was gone.



“Absolutely not,” Madelyn Dunham, Ann's mother, said with a smile she was trying to hide. “I am *much* too young to be called ‘Grandma.’ You had better think of something else for Barry to call me. ‘Grandma’ is out of the question.”

“Well, he’s already calling me ‘Gramps,’” Stanley Dunham shouted from the kitchen. “I’d vote for ‘Granny’ for you.”

Madelyn Dunham looked at Ann and Barack, who had been nicknamed ‘Barry’ by his mother, and shook her head and rolled her eyes.

“I know,” Ann finally said. “How about ‘Tutu?’”

Tutu was the Hawaiian word for “grandparent,” and Madelyn thought it was perfect. Young Barry, however, found it easier to simply say “Toot.” It was a name that would stick, and for the rest of Madelyn and Stanley’s lives, Barry would call them Gramps and Toot.

Because Ann was both working and attending college, Barry spent a great deal of time with his grandparents. Gramps would let Barry tag along when he went to a local park to play checkers or to the corner fish market to buy fresh tuna and salmon for the sushi they would often have for dinner. Once, before the sun had even come up, Gramps woke Barry and took him down to the docks near the beaches of Waikiki to go out on a fishing boat. In the pre-dawn gloom, Barry watched divers disappear into the black water and then reappear with huge rainbow-colored fish on the ends of their spears. Gramps told Barry that the Hawaiian name of the fish was *humu-humu-nuku-apuaa*, a name

that, of course, sounded hysterically funny to five-year-old Barry. For the entire drive back home, Barry and Gramps repeated the name of the fish to each other, laughing until tears rolled down their faces.

For all the lighthearted fun Gramps had with his grandson, he knew that life would not always be so easy for a child who was half black and half white. In 1966, when Barry was five, the civil rights movement was in full swing. In Alabama, hundreds of black people marching for the right to vote had been injured by angry white police officers. The officers had used tear gas, fire hoses, clubs, and even whips in an attempt to break up what had been a peaceful march. And across the country, in Los Angeles, bloody and even deadly rioting erupted when the black community reached the end of its patience with white police officers' mistreatment of black people. After enduring more than three hundred years of injustice and cruelty, black people were fighting for their rights. The time for change had come, but many white people stubbornly and angrily swore that they would never allow it.

Hawaiians, in general, were neither racist nor bothered by the idea of black people having the same rights that white people had. Gramps's friends loved Barry and never thought less of him because of his racially mixed background.

But tourists to Hawaii were, quite often, not so kind. Gramps would notice white tourists glaring at the young black boy playing in the sand on some of Honolulu's fanciest beaches. *What is he doing here?* their expressions seemed to say. *He shouldn't be allowed!*

At times like these, Gramps loved to wander over to the tourists and, in a low voice, tell them that the boy they were watching was the great-grandson of King Kamehameha, the first ruler of Hawaii. Instantly, the tourists would scramble for their cameras, taking picture after picture of Barry as Gramps covered his grin with his hand.

"I'm sure that your picture's in a thousand scrapbooks, Barry," Gramps would often tell his grandson with a booming laugh. "All the way from Idaho to Maine!"

Barry giggled at the idea of being in strangers' scrapbooks, and Gramps smiled back. However, Gramps knew the day would come when he would no longer be able to shield his grandson from racism.