

CHAPTER 2

Indonesia

'I want to be president.'



Hawaii was a beautiful place for a boy to live. Young Barack loved to play in the blue sea, with the green hills behind and colourful birds in the tall trees. People of many races lived and worked there, and a person's colour wasn't important. There was only one problem for Barack – his father wasn't around. His grandparents, Gramps and Toot, and his mother, Ann, told him stories about his father, but it wasn't the same.

Then Ann fell in love with another student at the University of Hawaii. His name was Lolo Soetoro and he was from Indonesia. Lolo spent a lot of time at Barack's house. He listened to Gramp's stories for hours and he had 'play fights' with young Barack on the floor.

One day, Barack's mother had some important news. 'Lolo has asked me to marry him,' she told Barack. 'He wants to take us to his country – Indonesia.'

Indonesia! Barack was only six. He only knew Hawaii. What was this new country like?

'They've still got tigers in Indonesia,' Gramps told his grandson. It sounded like an exciting place.

Ann and Barack's new world was very different from Hawaii. Most people were much poorer. Men and women worked in the fields. People washed themselves and their clothes in the wide brown river. Barack's new home was in a village in south Jakarta. Their house was small and unfinished, but it was open and cool with a fruit tree in the front. The back garden was full of animals. There were chickens and other birds, a big yellow dog, a monkey and two small crocodiles.

'There were three crocodiles,' explained Lolo, 'but one of them escaped.'

There was a man who helped in the house and with the cooking. When they arrived from the airport, he was in the garden. He had a chicken under one arm and a long knife in his other hand. He held the bird on the ground and then cut its head off. The blood was bright red in the sun. The bird stood up and ran around and around. Then the blood slowed down and the bird fell dead on the grass. For a six-year-old boy, this was a very cool new life!



Barack went to the local school. He found the Indonesian language difficult, one of his teachers remembers. But she saw him as a future leader.

'He always helped his friends. He looked after the smaller ones,' she said. One day the class were writing about the future. What job did they want to do?

'I want to be president,' wrote Barack.

Barack made friends with the sons of poor families, and they ran around the streets morning and night. Sometimes bigger boys wanted to fight with him, so Lolo taught him how to fight back. Barack wrote to his grandparents and told them about his adventures. He visited them each summer too, so he didn't forget his life back in Hawaii.

Life was often hard in Indonesia. One year there was no rain and nothing grew in the fields. The next year there was too much rain and the water in the streets came up to Barack's arms. Everywhere on the streets poor people asked for money.

Ann wanted a good future for Barack. He was an American, and she felt that his true life was in America. But he was learning important lessons in Indonesia. He always said please and thank you. He worked hard and he didn't ask for things all the time like some American children.

Most of the American children in Jakarta went to the International School. It was too expensive for Barack's family. They had a new baby to look after now – Barack's little sister, Maya. So, five days a week, Ann woke Barack at four o'clock in the morning. She gave him breakfast but he never wanted it. Then she gave him English lessons. They studied for three hours, before he went to school and she went to work.

Barack tried different excuses. 'I'm ill,' he said, or, 'I'm too tired.'

'Well, this is no fun for me either,' Ann said.



Ann wanted Barack to be a good person. She taught him about being fair. She taught him to think for himself. And she told him all about his father.

She found books for Barack on black history and Martin Luther King. She told him stories about black children from poor families in the south of America. Those children worked hard, she said, and they became important – doctors and lawyers and politicians.

But the early morning lessons and the books weren't enough. Ann wanted more for Barack. She decided to send her son back to America.