

CHAPTER 6

Finding a sister

'We didn't feel like strangers.'

Barack wanted to find out more about his Kenyan family. In 1982, he decided to write to his half-sister, Auma. Barack and Auma had the same father but different mothers. Barack's father married Auma's mother, Kezia, in 1957, when he was eighteen, and they lived in Nairobi. Barack's father was working in an office when the University of Hawaii offered him a place. He left Kezia behind and, six months later, Auma was born. It was five years before Barack's father returned to Kenya. And when he came back, he had a third wife. Auma grew up in Kenya.

Two months after writing to Auma, Barack went to meet her at Chicago airport. 'Will this be difficult?' they both were thinking before they met. But they didn't have to worry. 'We talked and talked,' Auma remembers. 'We didn't feel like strangers.'

Auma says her brother is like their father. He moves and sits the same way. He's quiet like his father, and he sits and thinks very hard. 'And we've all got the Obama hands,' she says.

Back at Barack's flat they talked for hours. Barack told Auma all about himself. She told him all about herself. She was studying in Germany. She had a nice flat and a boyfriend. But she often thought about her life and her family in Kenya. Germany and Kenya – they were two different lives.

Over the next few days, Auma told her brother all about their father. She remembered when he came back to Kenya, to Nairobi. He had a big house and a big car, and a new American wife, Ruth. She and her brother Roy went to live with him. He worked for a big American business, and then got a government job. But then there was trouble between President Kenyatta*'s tribe, the Kikuyus, and the Luo. Their father said that tribes were bad for Kenya. People were getting jobs because of their tribe, not because they were good at the job. Kenyatta heard that their father was a troublemaker. Things became very bad for him. They gave him an unimportant government job.

Their father began to drink a lot. He hardly spoke to Auma and Roy. People stopped coming to visit him because it was too dangerous for them. His American wife left him and then he lost his job. He moved to a terrible house in a bad part of town with Roy and Auma. But he still said everything was fine. Auma and Roy were the children of Dr Barack Obama, a man who went to Harvard – but there was no food to eat in their house. Roy and Auma both left home when they finished school – Roy went to America and Auma went to Germany.

After President Kenyatta died, their father got a job again. He lived alone in a hotel room. Then he found a young girlfriend and they had a son, George. George was a new start for Dr Obama – he could do the right thing for one of his children. But then he had the car accident and he died.

Dr Obama's American son was very important to him. 'Our father talked about you so much,' Auma told Barack. 'He showed your picture to everybody. He and your mum wrote letters, and he loved those letters. During the really

* Jomo Kenyatta was President of Kenya 1974-1978.

bad times, he read them to me.'

Before he met Auma, Barack's picture of his father came from his mother. He was a great man and Barack wanted to be like him. But this was a different picture. He wasn't a great man at all. His idea of his father was now in pieces.

Auma stayed for ten days and then flew back to Germany. As they waited for her plane, she told him about their grandfather's land in Kenya. She said it was the most beautiful place. Their grandmother still lived there. They planned a visit there together ... one day soon.

Barack worked in Chicago for three years. People in the Altgeld community knew him well. He was very busy but he felt he could do his job better. He decided to go to Harvard Law School. He wanted to learn about the law, about business, about money and power. He planned to come back to Chicago after law school, and work for real change.

After three years' hard work, he needed a break. He thought about his father and his family in Kenya. He knew he had to go. What was he waiting for? Auma was teaching in Nairobi. He booked a ticket. Finally, Barack was going to find his family.