Chapter 1

Happy Birthday, Michelle!

Michelle LaVaughn Robinson's eyes fluttered open on the morning of January 17th. She had been counting down the days to turning eight years old for what seemed like a really, really long time, and it was finally here!

SHE JUMPED OUT OF BED, SO EXCITED TO LOOK IN THE MIRROR AND SEE IF SHE LOOKED ANY DIFFERENT TO THE DAY BEFORE.

She examined her face very thoroughly, like a detective on the case, and determined that yes, she definitely did look older than she did just 24 hours earlier, when she was only seven years old. Like she used to do every day, Michelle arranged her stuffed animals around her bed. They all seemed to be smiling at her. She studied her Barbie dolls. They were all impeccably dressed and groomed. As a child, Michelle cared very much about her few personal possessions. Her dolls were her friends.

Michelle could hear voices coming from the rest of the house, so she threw on her school clothes, brushed her teeth and dragged out her big winter coat (it was January in Chicago, after all!) to go and greet her family. Michelle lived with a lot of people. There was her mum, Marian, her dad, Fraser, and her older brother, Craig. They shared a tiny space in the upstairs of a small bungalow-style house with other relatives, who lived in the downstairs part of the house. Sometimes it felt really crowded because it was hard to get privacy. But on days like her birthday, she was grateful to be so close to her family, whom she loved so much. There was always someone else around, and someone to talk to.

"Where's Aunt Robbie?" Michelle said breathlessly, as her mother handed her a piece of buttered toast with scrambled eggs.

"Well Happy Birthday to you, too, Miss Michelle!" Marian Robinson laughed, giving her daughter a big smooch on the forehead, which Michelle promptly wiped off with her forearm. Her eyes darted around the room, looking and listening for signs of Aunt Robbie.

"Is there a birthday girl here?" There she was, Michelle's favourite aunt,

wearing her eyeglasses on a chain around her neck like a big glamorous necklace and singing the 'Happy Birthday' song like it was an operetta. Aunt Robbie was a talented pianist and opera singer and sometimes taught Michelle lessons. She was a little scary, but only because she was so serious and important. Michelle was not scared of Aunt Robbie, but when Aunt Robbie was around Michelle knew she was in the presence of a Very Big Deal.

"It's me! It's me!" Michelle exclaimed. Aunt Robbie smiled at her niece, then walked into her area of the house where her beloved piano sat.

"Can I play piano today?" Michelle peeked her head in and asked Aunt Robbie. "Since it's my eighth birthday?"

"May I play piano today," Aunt Robbie corrected her, and scooted over on the piano stool to make room.

Michelle stared at the keys, suddenly unsure of where to start. She felt her palms begin to sweat. Was it too late to change her mind? Then, Aunt Robbie wordlessly leaned over her and tapped the key right in the middle of them all – the Middle C. Michelle began to play a song.

Michelle was never destined to become a pianist, but her family values and sense of community were built in her hometown of Chicago. These values would inspire her to go on and change communities across the US – and beyond.

"I NEVER
MISSED CLASS.

I LOVED
GETTING A'S,

I LIKED
BEING SMART.

I LIKED BEING
ON TIME.

I THOUGHT BEING SMART WAS COOLER
THAN ANYTHING IN THE WORLD."

— Michelle Obama

“JUST TRY NEW THINGS.
DON’T BE AFRAID.”

“STEP OUT OF YOUR
COMFORT ZONE
AND SOAR...”

— Michelle Obama

Chapter 6

Hi, I'm Barack!

After being employed at Sidley Austin for a while, Michelle was told a new person would be starting at the firm soon, and she would be tasked with showing him around. His name was Barack Obama... maybe that name sounds familiar to you? At the time, that name did not mean anything, especially to Michelle, who was too busy with work to pay attention to much else.

Michelle was going to be Barack's advisor, which meant she was like his office buddy. She would make sure he was happy at work and that he had all of the resources he needed to get the job done. They also went to fancy lunches, which was a perk of working at a law firm (the company paid!). Barack was touted as a *wunderkind* of sorts, but Michelle was unimpressed in the beginning – he was late to work on his first day.

After a while, Michelle started feeling like Barack was her best friend at work. Michelle remembers how he would always lounge on the sofa in her office to have a chat. They had a lot in common, and Barack was the first person she met at Sidley who really understood the South Side of Chicago. He knew home like she knew home. That brought them together.

"Our pull towards each other was very evident and easy to understand," Michelle would later write in her book, *Becoming*. But she thought it wouldn't look good to date a colleague, so she tucked away her tiny, blooming crush on Barack and focused on her job.

That wasn't hard, as Michelle was still far too busy for dates. It did not even register on her radar that Barack was an eligible bachelor-type, and that it would be a good idea to date him. One day, he asked her out with a big smile on his face. Michelle was taken by surprise and quickly declined the invitation, though she knew she had started to develop a little crush on Barack. But they worked together! However, weeks later, the firm had tickets for two people to see *Les Miserables*... and Michelle decided to invite Barack to go with her, purely on an advisor-advisee relationship (or so she said!)

Turns out, they both hated the show and bailed on their seats during the intermission to get a drink, where they talked and laughed. Michelle dropped Barack off at his house later, where he asked if they could keep 'hanging out' over ice cream – there was a Baskin-Robbins down the street from his flat.

Michelle ordered the chocolate cone, and when Barack asked her if he could give her a kiss, she instantly leaned in to kiss him.

A plaque now sits on the kerb where the couple enjoyed their treats. It has a quote from Barack Obama's book, *O*: "On our first date, I treated her to the finest ice cream Baskin-Robbins had to offer, our dinner table doubling as the kerb. I kissed her, and it tasted like chocolate."

looked like her at the highest rank of politics in the country. And she thought about how nervous she had been to jump into this life with Barack and hold this honour. She was happy, in the end, that she had decided it was a good idea.

Michelle looked around the White House hallways that had once looked so unfamiliar but had soon become hallways where she walked with her family, where she tossed tennis balls to Sunny and Bo, and where she did some of her best thinking. She was not ready to say goodbye, but she knew she had to. She thought about what her father might have said to her in this moment: "Do what you say you're going to do, be honest and true." That made Michelle feel calmer. She knew everything was going to be okay; that this would not be the end, but the beginning.

Michelle knew that her story would impact others. That her journey could be understood by women all over the world if she was brave enough to put it into words. She knew there was a great vulnerability in sharing the stories closest to her heart, but that there was great risk in not sharing those stories with others. Sharing her truth is a form of leadership Michelle knew was important.

New adventures awaited for Michelle and her family, and she knew that it would only be a matter of time before she set out to change the world once more.