Chapter 1

Oprah's Early Childhood: The Little Preacher

Oprah Winfrey sat on the steps outside her grandmother's farmhouse in Kosciusko, Mississippi, inspecting the dress she had been given to wear that morning. She was only four years old, not even old enough to go to school, but she knew she was different from the other children she would see in town and at church.

While other girls wore pretty cotton dresses in hues of blue or yellow or pink, Oprah's dress was made out of a potato sack. Her grandmother, Hattie Mae Lee, had fashioned it for her. They were very poor, and at $2.60, pretty dresses were too expensive for Hattie Mae to buy. Hattie Mae, like Oprah, was black, and in the 1950s, being a black woman in the South meant you didn't have a lot of opportunities to get good jobs that paid good money. It also meant that white people treated you differently, like you were less worthy of a good life because of the color of your skin. And so Oprah's dress was made out of potato sacks for being a poor black girl.

Oprah clutched her corncob doll tightly and thought about her mother, Vernita Lee. She hadn't seen her mother for a few years. Vernita had been a teenager when she had Oprah on 29th January, 1954, and she didn't have a job to support herself or her daughter. She went north to find work as a maid, but she couldn't bring Oprah with her. So, Oprah lived with Hattie Mae on the farm.

Oprah knew life was harder for her because of the color of her skin. Her grandmother was born in 1900, a revolutionary time for black people in America. Slavery had been abolished but segregation and discrimination were still deep-rooted in the country, especially in the South. Though Hattie Mae was not born a slave, she was often treated like a lesser human by the white people she worked for. And yet, Hattie Mae would tell Oprah that she should hope to grow up to be one of those "good white folks" who would sometimes spare her

IT WAS HARD TO MAKE FRIENDS WHEN YOU WERE "SACK GIRL."




"THE HAPPINESS YOU FEEL
IS IN DIRECT PROPORTION
TO THE LOVE YOU GIVE."
– Oprah