

CHAPTER 1

UKI'S ARRIVAL IN BENIN

Uki cannot hide his happiness as their car drives into his grandpa's compound in Benin City. Last year, his mother made a promise to him that he would visit grandpa's house, and the Qba Palace as one of his 8th birthday gifts. He had waited so long for this visit and now that they were finally here, he couldn't wait to get out of the car!

So, as soon as they get into grandpa's compound, Uki runs to warmly embrace him.

"Grandpaaaa," Uki exclaims with a smile in his voice.

Grandpa Eƒosa is so happy to see him and his mother.

"Uki my boy, you're now so big! You were tiny the last time I saw you," Grandpa Eƒosa says as he pulls Uki's suitcase into the house.

"Of course, he's now a big boy. He never misses breakfast," Uki's mom chimes in response.





Grandpa had been informed about Uki's visit, so he instructed his cook to make black soup and pounded yam. The meal is one of Uki's favourites so he eats it with relish. After dinner, Uki goes into what would be his room for the rest of his stay.

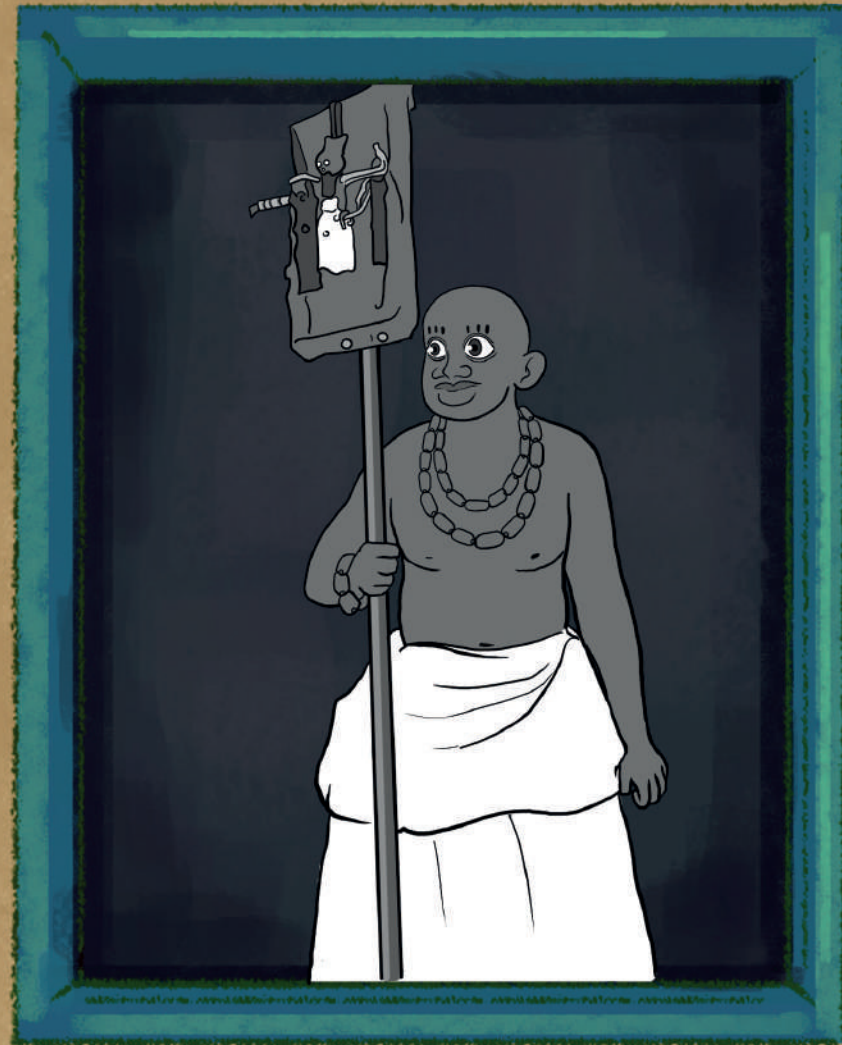
Grandpa and Uki's mom are putting away the last of Uki's belongings. Uki looks around excitedly. One after another he picks and drops the different bronze artworks on the shelf. One really catches his attention— a big bronze head that's wearing a crown.





Soon, a framed photograph on the right corner of the wall catches his attention. The young man in the photo has a white wrapper tied around his waist, a coral bead on his neck and a colourful wooden totem in his hand. The totem has tiny wooden sculptures fixed to it.

"Grandpa, who's the man in this picture?" Uki asks, pointing to the black and white photograph on the wall.



"That's me at the last coronation of the Oba of Benin Kingdom," grandpa replies.



Grandpa watches Uki as he continues to stare at the photograph in amazement. He is still watching when Grandpa gives him the good news. Grandpa says,

"It's so good you're here. The coronation ceremony for our new Qba starts tomorrow, and will continue for weeks. You know, the coronation of the Qba of Benin is the biggest cultural celebration amongst the Edo people. Don't worry, Uki. On the last day of the coronation, you will wear the same clothes and beads as I am wearing in this photograph."

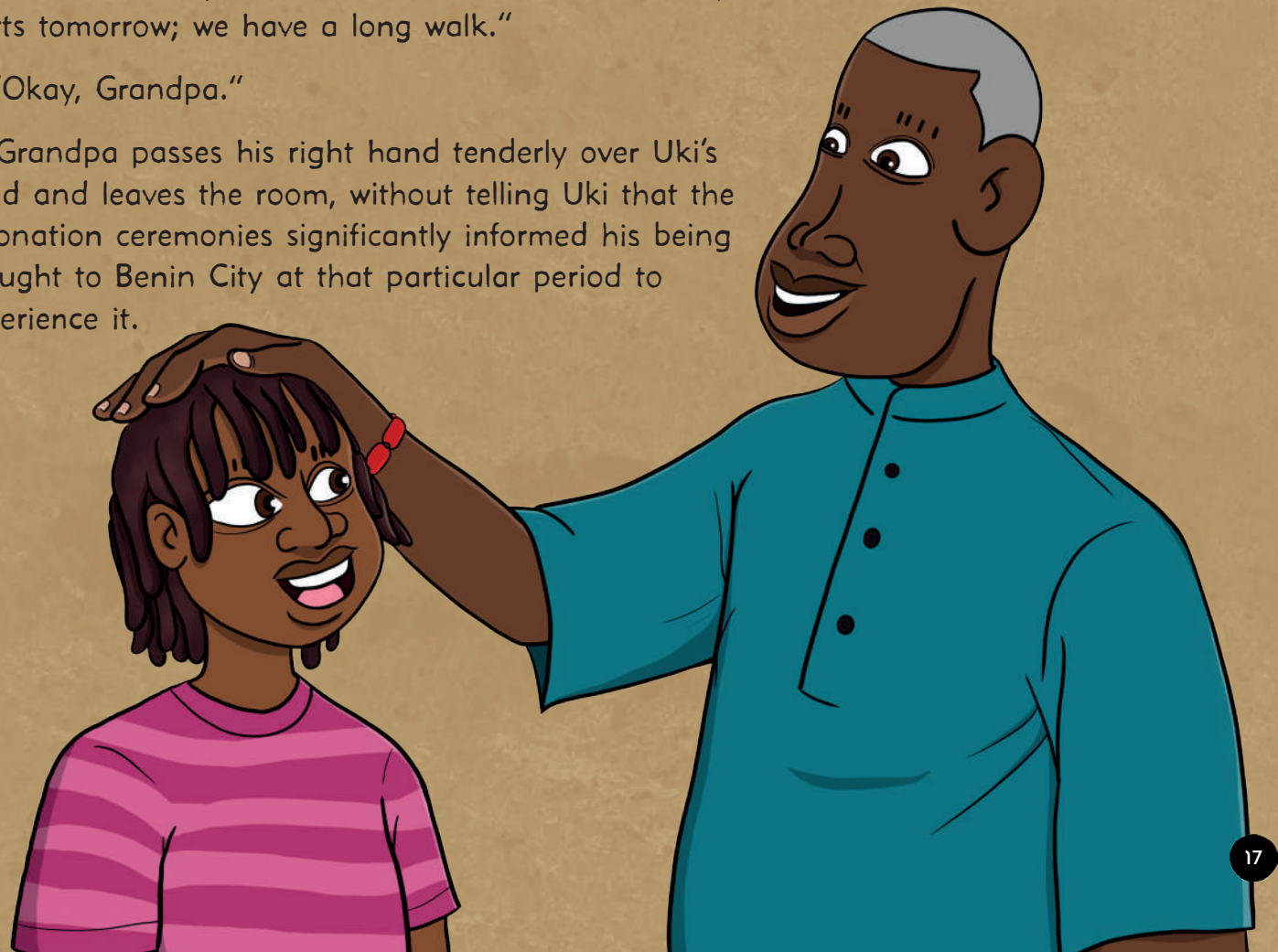
"You REALLY MEAN THAT, Grandpa?" Uki queries.

"Yes, I do," Grandpa assures him.

"For now, Uki, you must rest because the ceremony starts tomorrow; we have a long walk."

"Okay, Grandpa."

Grandpa passes his right hand tenderly over Uki's head and leaves the room, without telling Uki that the coronation ceremonies significantly informed his being brought to Benin City at that particular period to experience it.





His mother who has been listening and smiling at their exchange also says goodnight to Uki. She turns off the light and closes the door behind her as she walks away. Uki lies down to sleep but finds it hard to do so because he is very excited.

He is still awed by the photograph of his grandpa in pure white clothes like a priest. He recalls all that his grandpa said about the coronation, and this makes him even more excited.

But not so long after, Uki's eyelids become heavy so he falls asleep.