

CHAPTER I
BREAKFAST IN HOUGHTON



June 24, 1995

He awoke, as he always did, at 4:30 in the morning; he got up, got dressed, folded his pyjamas, and made his bed. All his life he had been a revolutionary, and now he was president of a large country, but nothing would make Nelson Mandela break with the rituals established during his twenty-seven years in prison.

Not when he was at someone else's home, not when he was staying in a luxury hotel, not even after he had spent the night at Buckingham Palace or the White House. Unnaturally unaffected by jet lag – no matter whether he was in Washington, London, or New Delhi – he would wake up unfailingly by 4:30, and then make his bed. Room cleaners the world over would react with stupefaction on discovering that the visiting dignitary had done half their job for them. None more so than the lady assigned to his hotel suite on a visit to Shanghai. She was shocked by Mandela's individualist bedroom manners. Alerted by his staff to the chambermaid's distress, Mandela invited her to his room, apologized,

and explained that making his bed was like brushing his teeth, it was something he simply could not restrain himself from doing.

He was similarly wedded to an exercise routine he'd begun even before prison, in the forties and fifties when he was a lawyer, revolutionary, and amateur boxer. In those days he would run for an hour before sunrise, from his small brick home in Soweto to Johannesburg and back. In 1964 he went to prison on Robben Island, off the coast of Cape Town, remaining inside a tiny cell for eighteen years. There, for lack of a better alternative, he would run in place. Every morning, again, for one hour. In 1982 he was transferred to a prison on the mainland where he shared a cell with his closest friend, Walter Sisulu, and three other veterans of South Africa's anti-apartheid struggle. The cell was big, about the size of half a tennis court, allowing him to run short, tight laps. The problem was that the others were still in bed when he would set off on these indoor half-marathons. They used to complain bitterly at being pummelled out of their sleep every morning by their otherwise esteemed comrades' relentlessly vigorous sexagenarian thump-thump.

After his release from prison aged seventy-one, in February 1990, he cased up a little. Instead of running, he now walked, but briskly, and still every morning, still for one hour, before daybreak. These walks usually took place in the neighbourhood of Houghton, Johannesburg, where he moved in April 1992 after the collapse of his marriage to his second wife, Winnie. Two years later he became president and had two grand residences at his disposal, one in Pretoria and one in Cape Town, but he felt more comfortable at his place in Houghton, a refuge in the affluent, and until recently whites-only, northern suburbs of Africa's richest metropolis. An inhabitant of Los Angeles would be struck by the similarities between Beverly Hills and Houghton. The whites had looked after themselves well during Mandela's long absence in jail, and now he felt that he had earned a little of the good life too. He enjoyed