

## Chapter One: Brooklyn, New York, August, 1965 (excerpt)

Miriam stepped into the ocean, waiting for the next wave, bracing herself although she knew that balance was useless when the water had its way.

“Mimi, you just go in all at once to get used to the cold. It's the only logical strategy,” Aaron called out as he strutted past her in his baggy swim trunks. But when the water rushed high over him before he was ready, she saw the fear in his eyes as he doggie-paddled back toward her. The undertow streamed between her ankles, and she stepped in farther, her father walking into the water steadily, one step at a time, just like her.

Aaron was 13, she was 14, but most people thought they were twins, both the same height and small for their age, sharing the same face although Aaron's was much darker and more freckled. Their difference showed most in their hair: Miriam's was dark brown, smooth and curly, “white hair,” her mother told her, and Aaron had a short, pale brown afro.

Soon Miriam and Odin, her father, were used to the temperature and rhythm. “Here's another one,” she would tell him as they both jumped at the exact moment, sea water spraying their damp faces. Aaron had zoomed his tiny figure back into the water and was now trying to swim laps, overcome by each new crescendo. At one point, he disappeared and stayed disappeared as Miriam counted to 10, waiting for him to pop up. Odin threw himself forward, determined to save his son.

The two people Miriam loved most were in the sea. Which way to swim, and who to save first? The undertow tugged at her ankles, and with all her force, she leapt in, swimming harder than she ever had, keeping her large eyes open in the tumble of bubbles in the green-brown haze of moving water. When she rushed upward, gasping for a breath, she saw Aaron, waving and smiling crooked at her.

“You look like you've got to get somewhere fast,” he called out, thinking it was a joke.

She turned her head so fast to each side that she felt her neck quiver. “Dad!” she screamed.

Aaron's expression changed on a dime. Both of them dove under, swimming frantically, looking for their father, who they knew loved the ocean but didn't move as quickly and easily as they did. They popped up at the same moment, looked around, panicked, and went back under. For Miriam, that stretch of time confirmed what she always knew would happen. Her heart beat so hard she was amazed she could swim.

Then, skirting the bottom of the sea in the still-shallow sands just beyond where the waves broke, she felt something brush her foot. Nothing there, but two words that wrapped blessing around her: “Not yet.” She surged back to shore, looked far to the left, and there was Dad, standing on the beach. He had been pulled in by the undertow, and spit back out again, but in a different place. She signaled Aaron, and they sped like fish until the waves poured them at their father's feet.

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