

Penguin



Readers

A vibrant illustration of a young Black boy with curly hair, smiling and swimming in clear blue water. He is wearing red swim trunks. On his chest, there is a prominent scar in the shape of a pig's snout. The water around him is depicted with dynamic, wavy lines in shades of blue and green.

PIG-HEART BOY

MALORIE
BLACKMAN

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CHAPTER ONE

Tickling

It was silent under the water.

Before, I could hear the shouting, screaming and laughing of my friends, but now I could hear nothing. I sat on the bottom of the pool and opened my eyes. The water hurt them, but I wanted to see what was happening around me. I wanted to stay where I was, but after a few seconds my lungs started to hurt and there was a pain in my chest. The loud sound of blood moving around my body filled my ears.

I closed my eyes and stood up slowly until my head was out of the water. My body was screaming at me to hurry and take a **breath** of air as quickly as possible. But it was important for *me* to choose when to **breathe**. I did not want my **lungs** or my blood or my heart to decide this for me.

“Cameron? Are you OK?”

I opened my eyes. My friend Marlon was standing in front of me. I took a big breath and waited for the noise in my ears to stop. It took longer for the pain in my chest to disappear.

“Of course I’m fine,” I replied.

“What were you doing?”

“I was sitting down.”

“Is that a good idea?” Marlon asked.

“Don’t look at me like that. You are worse than my mum and dad sometimes,” I said.

“If your mum and dad discover that you’re here at the pool every Tuesday and not at my house, they’ll be cross with me.”

“If you don’t tell them, I won’t,” I said and smiled.

“How long were you under the water?”

“A few seconds. Why?”

“I don’t think that you should – ”

“Stop it!”

Marlon looked sad and I felt bad, but he knew that I did not like people to worry about me. Before I could say I was sorry, Rashid shouted.

“Marlon! Do you want to do Daredevil Dive?”

“Yeah! I’m coming,” Marlon replied. He turned to me. “See you in a minute.”

Then, he swam to the middle of the pool where our friends Rashid, Andrew and Nathan were playing in the water, while I climbed out of the pool. To play Daredevil Dive, you had to dive and touch the bottom of the pool at the deep end. I did not want to watch them, but I could not stop myself. I moved closer and sat with my legs in the water.

“Is everybody ready?” asked Rashid. “The first person to dive and touch the bottom, then swim back and touch the side of the pool is the winner. One . . . two . . . three . . . go!”



The four boys disappeared under the water. I stopped breathing as I watched them. But my lungs hurt, and my heart started to **beat** harder and harder. I took a deep breath and waited for my heart to beat more slowly.

Swimming with Marlon and the others was becoming more and more difficult, because my heart was getting worse. Long moments later, Marlon and Andrew came up from the water, followed by Rashid and then Nathan. Marlon touched the side of the pool first.

“I win! I win!” he shouted.

“Let’s do it again!” said Andrew.

I kicked the water angrily and then stood up slowly. I did not want to listen to them any more.

They never asked me to join them because my heart was not strong. I had to stay in the shallow end of the pool – the part of the pool for babies and little children.

I could not remember what it was like to have a body that worked in the normal way. I walked to the showers and looked at myself in the long mirror near the side of the pool. My eyes were very sad. I began to hit the left side of my chest, slowly at first and then faster and harder.

My heart stopped me from doing all the things I wanted to do. I could not run or dance or play or swim. And I hated it! Two years ago, I caught an **infection** and became very ill. I had terrible problems with my heart. The doctors tried everything and gave me **drugs**, but it was not enough. Now, I needed a new heart.

“Cam! What are you doing?” Marlon called from the pool and I suddenly remembered that I was not alone.

“Nothing,” I said, quickly. “Listen, Marlon. I’m going straight home. OK? I’ll see you in the park tomorrow.”

“OK,” he said. “You can watch our game of football. We’re going to play against Manor Park.”

That was the problem. I could only watch, not play. Watching was all I ever did!

After my shower, I got dressed. I did not want to go home and listen to Mum and Dad **argue** about me, but I did not have anywhere else to go. I thought about my heart on my journey home. My heart was ticking – just like the sound a clock makes: “Tick, tick, tick.” A clock that was counting down my life.

TICK, tick, tick, ticktickticktick.

As I turned the key in the front door, I could already hear Mum's and Dad's angry voices. I went inside quietly and stood near the living-room door.

"No!" Mum shouted. "I won't allow it."

"Don't talk to me like that!" Dad said. "I've thought about it very carefully. What else can we do?"

"*We?*" Mum's voice cut the air like a knife. "*You* decided by yourself. You didn't even ask me what I thought about it."

"Cameron needs it. And it'll be good for our family."

"What? Do you mean making our son a pig-heart boy? How can that be a good thing?"

A pig-heart boy? What did she mean?

"It's better to have a pig's heart that works, than a **human** heart that doesn't," Dad said. "Don't you want our son to live?"



When Mum hit Dad across his face, it sounded very, very loud.

"I'll never forget what you've just said. Never!" Mum's voice was quiet, but I could hear that Dad's words made her feel sad. "I love Cameron and I'll do anything for him, but this isn't right."

"Cathy, Cameron only has one year to live. There aren't enough human hearts for everybody who needs one. So, it's very **simple**. If Cameron doesn't get a pig's heart, he'll die."

"Are you really going to allow doctors to put a pig's heart in our little boy?"

I stood with my back against the wall. My stomach turned and I felt ill.

"They use special pigs that they **breed** only for this."

"That doesn't make it right," Mum said.

"Yes, it does!"

"Stop it!" I **shouted**, then I ran upstairs. They were talking about me, but not *to* me. But it was my body. It was my heart. They should talk to me.

I was lying on my bed still trying to breathe when there was a knock at the door. Mum and Dad walked into my room. Dad sat on the bed while Mum stood by the door with her arms across her chest.

"I'm sorry that you heard me and your mum talking about it in that way."

I was not sorry because now I knew what Mum and Dad really thought.