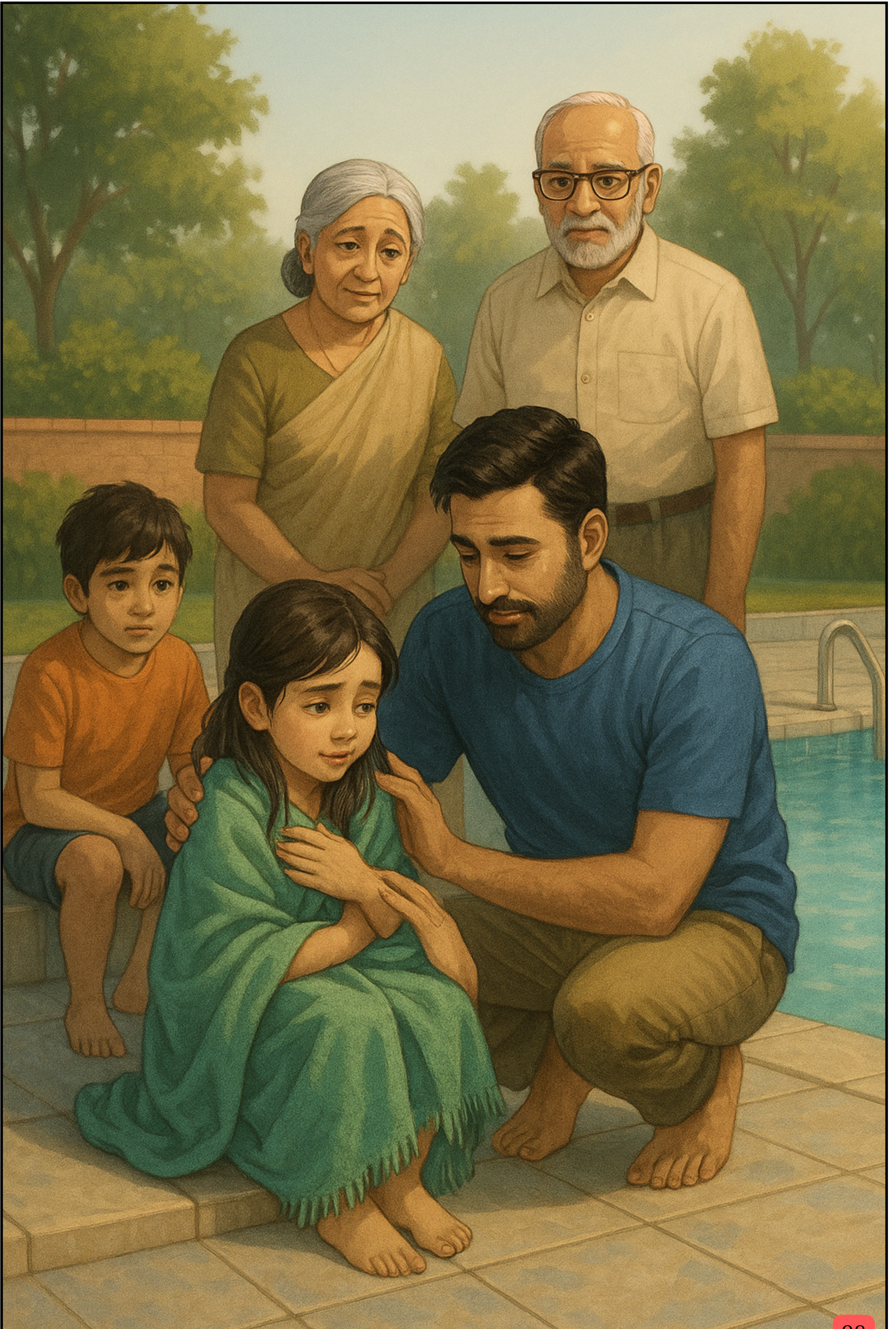


CHAPTER 20 — PANIC AT THE POOL (NEAR-DROWNING RESPONSE)



The sun shimmered brightly over the community pool, turning the water into a sheet of sparkling diamonds. The Verma family had planned this outing for weeks — a break from routines, screens, and schedules.

Raj carried a large picnic basket.
Neha held towels and sunscreen.
Aarav marched proudly with goggles around his neck.

And Mia... bounced with excitement.
“I’m going to swim like a dolphin!” she declared.

Aarav smirked.
“More like a baby turtle.”

Mia stuck her tongue out.
“Turtles are cute, so thank you.”

Everyone laughed.

Soon, they settled near the shallow end. Mia splashed happily with her bright inflatable arm bands while Aarav practiced diving and kicking techniques in the deeper area.

Raj watched carefully — half parent, half self-appointed lifeguard.
“Stay in the shallow zone, Mia,” he reminded her.

“Yes, Papaaa!” she shouted, already busy pretending to be a sea explorer.

For a while, everything felt normal — joyful — carefree.

Then things changed.

Aarav tossed a pool toy toward Mia to make her laugh. It bounced gently... and drifted farther.
Mia reached for it.
Just one step.
Then another.
The edge became deeper, but her excitement masked the danger.

She stretched her small arm toward the floating toy — and her toes lost contact with the pool floor.
Her body bobbed upright — legs dangling, unable to kick properly.
Her arms stiffened.
Her mouth opened — but no sound came out.
Her head tilted back just enough to keep her face above water.

No splashing.
No yelling.
Just quiet struggle.

Aarav was the first to sense something was wrong.
“Mama... Papa...” he whispered, voice tightening.

Raj turned — and instantly saw what many adults miss:

**Real drowning doesn’t look dramatic.
It looks silent. Frozen. Vertical.**

Raj's heart slammed against his ribs.
He dropped his towel and ran toward the pool.

Neha gasped, covering her mouth.

Aarav held his breath.

Time slowed.

Raj dove smoothly – not chaotic – reaching Mia in seconds. He supported her head and body with practiced movements, guiding her toward the wall.

Mia clung to him immediately, gasping sharp, fast breaths.

Raj's voice remained calm, steady – the opposite of everything he felt.
“You're safe. I've got you.”

Neha stood by the poolside, opening a towel with trembling hands.
When Raj carried Mia out, she wrapped her arms tightly around his neck.

Mia's voice was tiny – shaking.
“I tried to call... but I couldn't...”

Neha gathered her into her lap, holding her with quiet strength.
“I know, sweetheart. You don't have to speak. Just breathe.”

Aarav sat beside her, eyes wide and guilty.
“I didn't know it could look like that. I thought drowning was splashing and screaming...”

Grandpa placed a gentle hand on Aarav's shoulder.
“Most people think that. But real drowning is the body fighting just to breathe – not shout.”

Mia buried her face in Neha's shoulder.
“I got scared... and then everything got stuck...”

Raj knelt beside her, speaking softly.
“Fear freezes the body – but you're here. You're safe.”

After a few minutes, Mia's breathing slowed. Her body relaxed little by little as the shock dissolved.

Neha brushed the wet hair from her forehead.
“Are you feeling dizzy?”

Mia shook her head slowly.
“Just shaky.”

Raj wrapped a second towel around her shoulders.
“That's normal. The body responds to fear like it responds to cold – shivers and fast breathing.”

Aarav leaned closer.

“You didn’t do anything wrong. Pools can trick you – one step feels safe and the next step is too deep.”

Mia looked up with wide eyes.

“So drowning doesn’t make noise?”

Raj shook his head gently.

“No. When someone is drowning, their only job is to breathe. There’s no energy left to shout.”

Grandpa nodded.

“That’s why we watch – not just listen.”

Dadi arrived with a warm bottle of water.

“Drink slowly. Small sips.”

Mia took tiny careful sips.

Neha continued soothing.

“You don’t have to go back into the water today.”

Mia whispered:

“I want to... someday. But maybe not now.”

Raj smiled softly.

“That’s perfectly okay. Confidence returns slowly – and we’ll help.”

Aarav raised his hand dramatically.

“And next time – the dolphin, turtle, or mermaid stays in the shallow zone.”

Mia giggled weakly.

“Maybe... I’ll start as a goldfish first.”

Everyone laughed – gently.

The fear in the air softened into relief.

Because the family learned something powerful:

**The difference between danger and safety
is not strength –
but awareness and response.**

WHAT TO DO & WHY (Near-Drowning Response)

1. Stay Calm and Approach Safely

Why: Jumping in recklessly can create two victims instead of one.

2. Keep the Person Upright and Support Their Head

Why: Helps maintain airway and reduces panic.

3. Check Breathing and Reassure Them

Why: Panic can restrict oxygen even after rescue.

4. Keep Them Warm and Still

Why: Fear and cold water can trigger shock or shivering.

5. Monitor for Later Symptoms

Coughing, vomiting, difficulty breathing, or fatigue hours later could signal secondary drowning. Seek medical help if any occur.

CLOSING SUMMARY

Mia's silent struggle was a reminder:
danger doesn't always shout.

But calm eyes, quick action, and knowledge turned a terrifying moment into safety.

**Preparedness protects —
even when fear freezes the body.**

If you find this chapter of any use, share with your family members in your own style