

They carried out the wordplay as they took the short route home. She skipped beside her dad and reeled off the day's encounters in a sing-song voice: 'swimming caps, arm bands, noodles ...'

'Hair dryers, showers, life guards,' her dad re-joined.

They listed everything they remembered from the day, before parting.

The best trip was the first after the upset. Safari park day: herds of zebras; prides of lions, and packs of wolves. At the big cat enclosures, a tiger prowled back and forth. She often fantasised about that day, and imagined how it would feel to revisit. Many of the more exotic animals faded from her awareness as she grew older. When all else dimmed, she sensed the tiger would remain: yellow gaze, hunched shoulders, lowered head. Its glower blazed through her. Had it noticed that she stood right there?

Her dad's visits declined with the rise of his new family.

Barbed last words, seared into her head: 'too old for games,' he said.

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She checks his coat is buttoned to the top, and they brace against a westerly wind.

On good days, she thinks he recognises her, though his lips only frame his adopted daughter's name. She wishes he was lighter or that the sinews in her wrists didn't seize as she pushed. She parks the wheelchair to face the fading day.

'Swimming cap, arm bands,' she sometimes says on impulse.

She remembers the humid intensity inside the changing rooms, the dash to get dressed, the smell of stale talc, and how her socks were always wet.

The path ahead is thick with migrated sand, and her heart starts to hammer.

He senses the juncture at which they must turn. 'No.' The pitch of his voice flattens in dread.

He'd remain in the open, staring at the grey unrest of water until the dark closed around them; until their bones calcified to stone. Mould-painted clouds swallow the sky, and when she lists safari park creatures, his shoulders hunch and twitch.

Does it matter who guides the chair or what words they attempt to express? She draws level with his lowered head. His eyes, cataract mists that never fully see her, glow in the muddy light.

'Tiger,' he says.