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I love swimming. I go to the local pool every Wednesday night with Mr Davidson, my PE teacher, and some other people from our swimming club at school. There's only ten people in our group and we have so much fun.

Mr Davidson says I'm a fantastic swimmer with "great potential", and deep down I know it too. He'd been a professional swimmer when he was younger but decided to become a teacher because he wanted to earn more money. He always says I should come to more swimming classes like the others, but Nan can't drive me

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there in the mornings because of her rota at work.

I could stay in the pool for hours. I put my goggles on, hold my breath and imagine I'm a beautiful mermaid, swimming at the bottom of the ocean among the sand and coral reefs. I pretend I'm from a regal underwater kingdom, with a beautiful king and queen for a mum and dad, and all the friends and presents I could ever wish for.

Grandad took me to the leisure centre all the time when I was little. He'd taught me to swim without armbands by the age of three. We'd drive there every Saturday and swim all morning, then treat ourselves to sandwiches and crisps in the café after. We'd watch the grown-up swimmers from the café window, diving head first into the water.

"You'll be as good as that someday," he'd say confidently.

Nowadays we can't go swimming together because Grandad isn't feeling too well. He'd been a gymnast when he was younger and had always kept himself fit, but now his hip hurts too much to even *drive* to the leisure centre. Nan says swimming would probably help soothe his joints

but he won't listen.

Last year I came bronze in our school's swimming competition. I don't like to brag, but I'd hardly even practised. It's part of an end-of-year event held before the summer holidays, where our school rents a local outdoor swimming pool and holds a fete on the grassy bit nearby. There's a burger and ice-cream van, lots of stalls selling homemade things, and colourful signs and banners everywhere. We had to swim up and down the length of the pool four times as quickly as possible, and people lined up to cheer us on.

When Mr Davidson handed me my bronze medal, everyone in the crowd began clapping and cheering. As I walked round the fete with the medal round my neck and a damp towel on my shoulders, people were patting me on the back and telling me how well I'd done. It actually felt quite *nice* being the centre of attention for once, especially when I'm so used to Chloe being it all the time.

"With a bit more practice I reckon you could think about entering the regional swimming contest next year," said Mr Davidson. "Who knows – you might even win another medal."

Grandad said he'd never been so proud.

"I love this song!" squealed Neada as we drove through the town. Chloe was in charge of the radio, switching through stations before we even had a chance to hear what was being played.

"Me too," said Jess. "My brothers went to see them in concert."

I didn't know who the boy band were, but pretended I loved them as well and nodded.

"They're so lame," Chloe said. "I've told you both that before."

Neada and Jess looked at one another. Recently Chloe had become a lot bossier than usual. Even though she was being mean, they couldn't say anything back to her when Chloe's mum was in the car. I certainly wouldn't want to argue with her.

Chloe's mum quickly changed the subject. "It's that school swimming competition in a few weeks' time," she said as we pulled into the leisure centre. "I remember you doing so well last year, Molly. You got a bronze medal, didn't you? Amazing."

I nodded. I always get shy talking to Chloe's mum. She's just so *pretty*. Words seem to jumble out of my mouth and I sound silly in front of her.

I wondered if this is how some people felt when they spoke to Chloe.

"It was *only* bronze," Chloe muttered.

"Bronze is a brilliant achievement," Chloe's mum replied, raising her eyebrow. "Why don't you think about joining the swimming club, Chloe? You always enjoyed it when you went with Molly and her grandad. It's just a shame Jack's too ill to take you both any more."

Chloe scoffed and rolled her eyes. "Yeah right, Mum. I did that when I was seven."

"What's wrong with swimming?" her mum asked. "Swimming's great for toning. I have a friend who swears by it after having twins. Isn't that right, Molly?"

I didn't say anything. I wouldn't know. I only swim for fun.

"The only people in the swimming club are geeks," Chloe replied, and began to fiddle with the beading on her dress.

Chloe often has a habit of not thinking before she speaks. Sometimes it feels like she says things just to be mean. She *knows* how much I like the swimming club and the fact Mr Davidson thinks I'm good enough to start practising for regionals.

I couldn't tell if Chloe's mum wanted to tell her off or not, but, either way, she didn't seem best pleased with her.

"If you want to stay slim as you get older, you need to take up some form of exercise," her mum said, which I thought was a bit odd, considering Chloe is one of the thinnest girls in our entire school. "You can't keep eating the junk you do and expect to stay slim forever. I'm warning you now – wait and see."

"Well, swimming *obviously* doesn't make you slim. Just look at how fat Mol—" Chloe started, before stopping herself. Everyone went quiet suddenly, and it took me a couple of moments to realise who she was talking about.

*Me.*