*Before*

Even though Katherine’s days have a clear structure and she tries to keep herself as busy as possible, she often feels very lonely and depressed. She misses her husband a lot, his jokes and presence always cheered her up. She thinks about him frequently when she is gardening and remembers how he used to sit and watch her. She is looking forward to going to the zoo later to visit her little pygmy marmoset, Mr Spix. Two hours later, on her way there, however, sitting in the back of a cab, she can feel herself shaking and becoming lightheaded. Her chest hurts and she almost asks the driver to pull over and stop, or better yet turn around and bring her back. She closes her eyes and lets the heat flash over her, trying to concentrate on the music coming from the radio and the smell of the car. By the time they reach the zoo, Katherine feels a bit better and is glad to see her husband’s old friend Dominic, the zoo director. He opens the door for her and tells her about the news of the zoo: one of the sloths had a baby, Lento, and they have started a new volunteering service. He gives her a pointed look then and informs her that the next training session is, in fact, in an hour. Katherine understands what he’s telling her, but she is worried, afraid of joining something new and unfamiliar without the presence of her husband by her side. ‘Please, at least try it.’ Dominic says and she sighs: ‘Fine.’

*During*

Outside the cage of Mr Spix, she finally takes out her phone and downloads the app using the free zoo Wi-Fi, which Dominic has previously set up for her. The app opens a splash screen and then asks her to input a code. Dominic explained this to her, this is done so that only people above a certain age can sign up and each code only works once. She inputs the code; her name and date of birth and the app takes her to the next screen: a map of the zoo. She struggles to sign up for today’s training session in the calendar feature but finally manages to do so. She confirms her selection and the map highlights her position on the map and shows her where to go to. She struggles to follow the route of the map as she did not bring her reading glasses and the phone’s screen is small.

Finally, outside the building, she nervously knocks and is let in by the training leader. She introduces herself as Doris and, after learning Katherine’s name, in turn introduces her to the group. Katherine, however, fails to remember any of the names, too nervous and at unease to pay attention. The group she joins is talking about their grandchildren, and Katherine shyly greets them. The woman next to her smiles and asks her if she would like some cake. She reintroduces herself as Janice when she gives Katherine a slice of lemon cake and a cup of white tea. The man on her other side, Albert, she learns, is talking about knitting, specifically, about an Indian town that knitted elephant jumpers to protect the animals from the unexpectedly cold winter. He thinks this was a fantastic idea and says they should do so this winter, too. Katherine thinks it is a crazy idea but does not want to say so.

Then, Doris asks for their attention and explains in more detail the service and how it works: Smart glass panels, ‘*or glass TVs*’, she says, have been installed in front of the animal cages and automatically connect to anyone signed up to the service who has started the tour and is in close proximity. The screens give information on nearby facilities, the animals and the route direction. This is why people want to sign up for the tours, as it is the only way for them to view the smart technology features. Once they start the training tour, Doris shows and explains it all in more detail. She teaches them how to navigate the app and how to start tours, form teams, and access the chat.

Afterwards, Katherine feels very overwhelmed and tired but even she must admit that she has not been able to talk and connect with people this much in a long time. She goes to three more sessions in the next month before feeling ready to attempt leading a real tour herself. She has made good friends with Janice, who, while having started doing tours already, has been attending training sessions still. Katherine feels relieved that Janice has offered to do the tour with her. Her phone notifies her that a new visitor group is ready to be picked up and she and Janice sign up together as a team.

However, during the tour, Katherine has trouble remembering the recommended route due to her nervousness, when she notices big arrows on the screen behind her, telling the visitors which way to go. At the next cage, the tigers’, the screen shows the paw print and size of the animal and the visitors can compare their hand size to it. The screen also transforms to show the natural habitat of the tiger, a wild mixture of tropical plants and greenery. A heat camera is installed withing the cage and highlights the tiger’s position on the glass screen. After two more stops, Katherine is beginning to feel very tired and struggles to talk in front of the people. Luckily, Janice swiftly takes over and tells her that she will finish the tour and to take it easy. ‘The first tour is always tough, and you did amazing.’

*After*

Janice comes to check on Katherine when they have finished the tour and said goodbye to the visitors. Together, they take the tube home as they live in the same neighbourhood. They agree to do a tour together next month and Janice asks her if she would like to meet up at a small café next week for lunch. Katherine agrees happily and excitedly walks home. There, she gets a call from her son and tells him about her experience. ‘It is a great service and I am very happy to keep going but it is so very much emotionally stressful at times. I don’t think I could ever give a tour by myself.’ Her son laughs and tells her about his recent adventures. In the following weeks, Katherine keeps going to the zoo for training sessions and the occasional tours. She finds that the afternoon tea training is a lot more fun than the tours really. Katherine has also begun to regularly meet up with Janice and others of the team, even Albert. She is planning to host a dinner part next week for their little group of friends.