



The paper came every day at 5:30. I was up, having coffee and a piece of toast. Corbina, warm in bed. I would hear the thump and rise to fetch.

The first time I saw my son, I was surprised and angered. He intruded in this life I had sought out and crafted. Intruded by swimming the butterfly faster than anyone else. The picture in the paper: tight silver cap, goggled eyes, mouth open, shoulders propelling him up and out of the water.

I closed the paper, put it down, and piled it under the other sections.

The next day I dug it out.

I stared at his face, the water spraying around him, the tightness of his lungs evident by his coloring.

What a demented drive to win. My children are creatures I do not understand. Their young brains and ambitions.

Seeing my son, red-face and successful, brutalized me back to the family table. His eyes red-rimmed, hair wet, the chlorine smell absorbed so deeply into his fingers you could smell it

across the table.

My daughter, dark haired, ironic glasses, snapping her fingers at him in a hostile way, upset at some unthinking thing he did. So different, so much a mirror of my parts. And now, that stupid surprised silence of my chair at the table.

And she was next. I found her in the paper a few weeks later, also being successful. Cheeks round like her mother's, hair behind her ears, confident.

Reading the paper now held a different intent. Section by section, scanning. Then I could start reading in my usual order, rotating chairs with the sun, feeling my circulation start to warm in my old legs.

Why did I fold the papers, use my thumb to sharpen the fold, and then tear neat boxes with their images of success? Did I ever see them in the paper before I left? I thought back to our refrigerator. Magnets and a few Sunday comics. Nothing of note. How absent I had been while there, how present now.