

up, but they have finally indulged for your daughter. She rips open presents as the four of you watch halfheartedly. Your parents give you gold cufflinks you will never wear, and they give your wife a name-brand bag. They give each other nothing. You say *thank you* instead of *you can't afford these*. Your wife gushes over the bag, confused. "I'm so sorry," she says, "I didn't get you anything this nice." Your father tells her not to worry. They are gifts of status, you will tell your wife later.

On the rug, your daughter rips the paper off a brand-new Nintendo. Your wife gives you a surprised look, upset that you bought a present like this without consulting her. "But I didn't even ask for this," your daughter says. You shrug. You feel your parents watching you, calculating the cost of the Nintendo, eyeing what brand it is. Gold cufflinks, video games. At least your daughter will use hers.

You are relieved when the trip is over and life resumes. You go back home to your suburban split-level with a two-car garage. You make small talk with your coworkers about the weather and the Super Bowl. You help your daughter with her math homework, a weekly disaster that always ends with her slamming the door to her bedroom and you watching *Night Court* reruns to ignore the stomping. You bury the cufflinks in your shirt drawer, behind a stack of undershirts. Your wife carries the bag when you go somewhere nice, but other than that you can forget you ever existed outside of this place and this time.

Your in-laws ship their Christmas presents. They give your daughter goggles and a swimsuit. You wake up at dawn the day of the Super Bowl to drive your daughter to a swim meet. She is swimming the 50 meter butterfly, a stroke you only know exists because of her. Your daughter is good, but you are slowly realizing that she will never be great. Maybe you always knew. Neither you nor your wife are athletes. Some things have to be born with you.

She gets third place in the butterfly. She takes her ribbon, and you snap a picture of her frown.