

My room is at the top of a three story house overlooking the sea. The walls curve inwards like the inside of a conch shell, sloping pink and white. A seashell hangs from the ceiling, turning slowly. My bookcase is in one corner, filled with college textbooks. My backpack is in another corner, ready to be used tomorrow. A dark shape crouches in the corner, the boxes from my old house. Most of them are scuffed and falling apart from the move. The labels are faded from the summer sunshine. I know that if I open the box labeled "Photography," I'll see them smiling at me. Their graves are in Kansas, where our old house was. It was quite a shock to come here and see the water.

I turn the radio on, but there's so much static that it's almost impossible to hear anything. "Hurricane Sandy is approaching New... Citizens advised to evacuate... Do NOT stay in your house... Election Day may be af..." I turn the radio off.

I pick my way downstairs, avoiding the sharp corners of broken stairs. My steps echo in the emptiness. When it was a boarding house, it must have been full of noise and movement. Later, when it was used for parties, it was probably filled with bad music. But now, it's silent. Dust motes are illuminated in the weak daylight. The back door jambs host nesting spiders whose silk threads stream out into the brisk sea breeze. I open the screen door and step out onto the beach.

The air is fresher here, despite the darkening sky and the whitecaps that are now surging over the miniscule breakwater in the harbor. Sandy. I should go indoors. As I turn around, a ruby piece of beach glass arrests my eye. Its edges are smooth, battered by the wind and the waves until it's tossed up on a foreign land. I pick it up and put it in my pocket. The sand shifts under my feet, creating a small sinkhole that sucks my toes into a puddle of seawater. The rain now falls in a steady flow of icy pins, and a distant flash of lightning illuminates the sky like a thin needle.

The sea is freezing in winter.

As I lean forward into the rain, the house looms up before me. I see an awkwardly assembled pile, as if a giant had lumbered its way onto the beach and just sat down there, right at the waterside. A three story house isn't the best place to be in during a hurricane, especially if it doesn't have a breakwater (or at least not a good one). But I don't want to leave just yet. And the house has stood through worse storms, hasn't it?

I make my way to the mailbox. The rain has thickened, streaking the brightly colored pieces of paper advertising shampoo and detergent. It hardly seems worth the ten steps between the mailbox, the door, and the cold soaking. But as I dump it out on the kitchen table, a pamphlet catches my eye. "What to Expect When Sandy Hits," is in bold black letters on neon yellow. I briefly flip it over. The tone is formal and stiff, like one of the invitations to my grandmother's parties when she was alive.

"... In the event of emergency, the gymnasium of Somerville High School will shelter evacuees. Evacuees are expected to bring clean clothes."

I toss the pamphlet upon the wet heap on the kitchen table, letting it flop into the steadily growing pile of junk mail. The walls have begun to shiver with the thunderclaps. One-one thousand, two-one-thousand, three one-thousand, four one-thousand boom! One-one thousand, two-one thousand, boom! The shortening time between thunderclaps means the storm is moving closer, according to what my mother used to say. I head back to my room and the box of photographs. I dig through a pile of old photos until I find the right one. My mother and father are smiling, a white-capped mountain in the background.

"They were on their honeymoon in Switzerland," my grandmother had said one afternoon, while I was sitting in her kitchen. She was slowly whipping chocolate icing with her wooden spoon. Chocolate and sugar wafted from the oven. "They loved to ski so much. I still have a cuckoo clock from their last time they went to Europe." That was the last time I saw her. When I came back to her house for college, I found an empty place, lonely and sad. But it's cheaper than renting an apartment.

I suddenly shiver. I jump in the bed and fall asleep to the sound of heavy rain, drumming on the roof.

I awake to the sound of high whistling. The wind batters the house, which creaks and weaves uneasily, like a losing boxer. I rise to my feet, groggy. Something is wrong. When I peer out the window, through the sheeting rain, I see what it is—the waves have completely surged over the breakwater, and the water has submerged the beach. I stand transfixed, as the waves surge towards the house, lapping at the door like a hungry dog. I have to get out. Now. I hastily grab my coat and run downstairs, scraping my foot in the process.

The wind and rain demand entrance, howling and beating upon the door. When I open it, they strike me in the face. I can barely see the silhouette of the garage, although it is only a few steps away. As I stumble towards it, fine sand grains grind into my nose, mouth, and ears. I lurch to the thin gravel pathway. As I briefly glance back at the house, I can see that the waves are up to the front porch, trying to steal the rocking chair.

When I finally wrench open the garage door, I can breathe again. The rain has seeped through the garage roof, creating small puddles in the gravel. My sneakers sink into one, making a mournful squelching noise. I unlock the door of my Volkswagen Beetle and shiver for a few seconds in the driver's seat. Where am I going? Then the neon of the pamphlet flashes in my mind like a light. As I start the engine, I see that the sea has started to creep under one of the garage walls. When I start the engine and reverse, the wheels send up a spray of water, dyed red by the taillights.

I peer through the rapid movement of the windshield wipers and distortions of water, looking for the brick outline of Somerville High. The summer beach houses are shuttered and boarded against the storm, turning their faces away from me. I am lost. The bullying wind is trying to push my tiny car into one of the ditches that are on either side of the highway, and I must fight to keep it on the road. It's all I can do. A road sign flashes by, but the rain is so thick

that I probably wouldn't know if I was in Kansas. I've been concentrating so hard, it is a surprise when the high school rises into view.

The gym doesn't seem to have lost power. The high, vaulted ceilings are illuminated by the lights. I squint in their brightness. Voices echo off the brick walls, murmuring. A haphazard assortment of colored cots fill the gym. Some cots have people slumped on them, others strewn with blankets, and still others are loaded with plastic garbage bags of hastily grabbed possessions. Others come in after me, voices buzzing. I hear a baby crying, but its cries are muffled in the vast space. I pick a cot and put my coat under it. The blanket is a little scratchy, rubbing against my feet. However, the pillow is surprisingly soft, and despite the noise, the people, the bright lights, and the storm outside, I somehow manage to fall asleep.

In the morning, my neck is sore. Coffee and donuts sit on several cafeteria tables under the basketball hoop. The coffee is fresh-brewed, warming my hands through the styrofoam. The chocolate-frosted donut is delicious, a little stale but microwaved into a semblance of freshness. After hesitating, I take another. It is filled with ruby jelly, which oozes a tart cherry sweetness when I bite.

As I drive through town, the air is hushed and quiet. Electrical wires lay limply, their frayed ends emitting jiggling sparks that jump and fizzle out. Traffic lights lay broken in the street, bits of red, yellow and green glass strewn across the blacktop. Storefront windows gape empty, spangled bits of silver scattered across the pavement.

I arrive at the house. Or, where it was. I am not sure at first it is the right place, and I must pause for several seconds. The first floor still stands, black wood silhouetted against the wan sky.

I push through the screen door, which is only hanging by one hinge. Once inside, the kitchen is illuminated by a strange light. I glance up and realize that I can see the sky through the gaps in the second story floor. The stove and refrigerator are unmoved, but the refrigerator door is ajar, sand spilling out from the lower shelf. The oven's finish is scratched, pummeled by

sand, wind, and water. I look out a window and see that my cardboard boxes are strewn on the rocks, their sides darkened with water, their tops gone.

I run outside. The contents are scattered upon the beach sand. The sea nudges the photographs gently and almost absentmindedly. Some photographs are drained of all color, now black and white. My parents smile, unaware of the sea surrounding them.

As I face the great vastness of the ocean, the sun broaches the gray expanse of sky and the beach is lit, light creeping over the waves. I see things glittering all around me. Beach glass has been washed up on the shore, glinting in the sun.