

These are things I know. I know to *pull* when leaving the post office. I know the cut throughs and the dead ends. I even know the dead ends that look like dead ends that break into bike paths. I've been around long enough to know what you need to do and what you *really* need to do. You don't need to wear shoes when you drive. Gas goes on sale on Wednesdays, but not everybody knows that, so it's good to pay attention and to get your gas on Wednesday.

My dad doesn't carry around a set of keys. Just one key. In his pocket. That's all you need as long as your garage door opener is in your car and you don't need more than one key to get into your house.

I don't think that coupons here have expiration dates, but I'm not really sure. It seems like there are always store coupons and they always belong to everyone. I guess that means it's cheap to live here, but I don't really know. You should ask my dad.

Here, everyone wears flip-flops, except chefs and firefighters. I guess chefs and firefighters can wear flip-flops when they're on their way to work, so even though it looks like everyone wears flip-flops, they don't. Not all the time.

You're not supposed to go barefoot, but, people do. Living near the beach makes it a lazy place, but only half-sleepy, like someone who just woke up from a power nap. School's not that bad. I know everyone in the whole school. When I get older, I want to be a veterinarian. I'm told I have good people skills, but I think I'm better caring for animals. We don't have any pets, but I want one. I don't want to be a veterinarian here. I know that because I've been here long enough.

My dad loves hurricanes. He loves hurricanes because that means it's hurricane season and that means he gets to surf more than usual. The waves today are bigger than they were yesterday. If waves wore shorts, today they'd be wearing extra large. They're as tall as surfboards. It looks like when they crash and flatten out it's an army that sending out a hundred tiny water men in every direction. Then that army joins forces with another wave's army forces and then they crash all over again.

It's kind of strange to come to the beach at four o'clock. The sun is on its way out the door, headed for the horizon, but it's still kind of useful and warm. There's a lot of tourists standing at the boardwalk and watching the waves. They're sunburnt. I can see their tomato faces from here. They're probably going out to eat. Tourists love to go out to eat when they're sunburnt. And these tourists are probably wondering why people are swimming even though there's a red flag flying, because besides going out to eat when they're sunburnt, tourists love to follow the rules.

I'm here only because my dad made me, and the red flag is something you don't have to pay attention to. I know that, too, from living here for so long.

I think my dad wishes I wanted to be a surfer. But I don't. I want to be a vet. That's what I keep telling him, but today he said, get your things, let's go to the beach. When I said, but, Dad, I have homework, he said, enough with the homework, you can bring your pencil if you want.

Mom taught me about compromise and I'm getting better at it. So even though I didn't want to go to the beach, I brought my pencil because I wanted to.

The waves are really loud. Way louder than they were. It sounds like somebody opened up a giant laundry machine and turned the volume as loud as it could go. I think my dad falls in love during hurricane season, with the ocean. Like he did with my mom.

Even though he can reach the zip cord on his wet suit, I know my mom used to always be the one to zip it up for him anyway. Now, I do it. He gets down on his knees and I zip him up and then tap him on the shoulder twice like my mom used to. We always do it this way now. Then he heads towards the water and doesn't look back. Surfing dads don't miss waves like these. I sit quiet and wait until he's done.

There's all these shells buried in the sand, but I don't pull them out. I think you should just leave them where you found them. Maybe it's an Army Spy Shell and he's supposed to be there, to get some information and then when he gets carried back out to sea he relays it to Mr. Army Shell Director. My mom collected shells. We have a glass vase on the counter in my parent's bathroom full of them. Once that got full she used to put them on the windowsills like polka dots. They're all still there. I feel bad for the bits of sand that are on our windowsills and not at the beach anymore. They're like sand particles that moved away from their

neighbors. But, I think my mom knew what she was doing and only picked special shells that were ready to move away.

The wind blows sand into my eyes and I have to squint hard in the other direction. A guy in a Yale shirt just walked by. He's as old as my cousin, but he probably didn't go there. To Yale. Dad says people wear shirts like that as a cover up and a conversation starter. Never let them think that they're better than you, he says. I look away. But then I watch him again. He has pair of tennis shoes in his hands. He's not from here. Maybe he did go to Yale. I don't know. Maybe I'll go to Yale. Then I'll get a shirt that says, "Yale!" and then in parenthesis it will say "I really went here. This isn't a cover up or a conversation starter." I'll get one for my dad. I bet he'd laugh.

My favorite couples are the ones that hold hands on the way to the shoreline, like these people. It's such a short walk, but they do it anyway. My parents did that. I liked it. I can hear the red flag flapping on the boardwalk. It sounds like someone's shuffling a deck of cards. There's a girl in a green bikini by the shoreline. She's pretty. She's walking backwards and she has a dog whose ears are blowing inside and out from the wind. The dog's not on a leash, and I like that. I don't think dogs should be on a leash. Especially at the beach. Now she's running backwards and I think the dog thinks it's a game. I say hello to her, quiet. Then I fire-surge and scream, HELLO!, but the wind is loud and swallows it up like a monster.

I stick my pencil in the sand as far down as it will go. My dad is paddling next to another guy in a wetsuit and I think it's Mr. Fisher because Mr. Fisher has a yellow surfboard, but there are probably a lot of yellow surfboards in the world, so I'm not sure. He's talking to someone. The waves are big and both of them have wet hair.

When my dad's hair gets wet, he's usually in a good mood because that means he's been around water. My dad loves water. It's his favorite thing. I asked him one time what his favorite thing was and he thought fast and said you and I said no you can't say me because I'm your son and he said okay and he thought for a while. I knew he was going to say my mom and I knew he knew I was going to say he couldn't say that either so he was thinking about his third favorite thing. We were driving. Then this turtle crossed the road and we stopped because my dad always stops for the turtles and then he said water. I believe him.

I'm ready to go home. I lay down because I'm ready to go home. Wind is so cool. If you lay down you can't hear it anymore. It works on levels, I think, so if you sit up, it blows in your ear and goes straight down the tube into your head. But then, if you lie down, or turn your head, the wind totally disappears. It gets so quiet. I didn't bring a towel, so I probably shouldn't lie down otherwise I'll bring home the sand that's not ready to move away. It's getting darker. Not dark, just darkening. A fat seagull tries to take off, but she can't. She's flapping and flapping but just stays

in the same place. Poor seagull. I hold onto my hair because it's trying to get blown off my head. I'm ready to go. I want to tell my dad I'm ready to go, but he loves his water and waves like this. I should wait. I lie down and dream about hurricanes and hurricane ladies and hurricane goddesses and wonder if they all have huge washing machine tea parties. That's all I remember.

I didn't have my pencil. And it was cold.

"It's not that bad," Mr. Fisher said. "Everything's going to be alright."

I didn't know where we were. I had not been here before. My spine felt like a skyscraper holding things up. Or like the backbone of a skeleton left in a freezer.

"Where's my dad?" I asked. The front of my shirt was wet.

"It's going to be alright," Mr. Fisher repeated. "It was a big wave."

I left all the shells the way they were on the beach. I didn't touch a single one. My pencil was stuck in the sand like some new kid and all the army water men did something to my dad.

"What happened?"

"It was a big wave..." That's all he said. Things felt bad. Mr. Fisher was lying: it wasn't going to be all right and it wasn't just a big wave. My dad can handle big waves. It must have been a huge one. Mr. Fisher had on flip-flops and his hair was still wet and I saw a brochure on the table that said this was the hospital that was on the island. We were near the gas station that had the gas, on Wednesday.

We sat and waited but I didn't want to ask any more questions to Mr. Fisher because all he did was lie. I told him I was going to the bathroom and when he said he'd come with me, I said I didn't have to go anymore.

"I understand," he said. I didn't see how he understood.

"Are you hungry?" he asked.

"I'm not hungry," I said, "But I need to go home."

"We have to wait," he said and patted my leg, twice.

He shouldn't have done that. But now I missed my mom. And where was my dad? She didn't want to be in a place like this when she died. She didn't even come here. She saw Dr. Phillips and that was that. People came to our house, these nice nurse ladies that took their shoes off at the front door and closed doors really quietly and sat with me at the kitchen table until a beeping went off in her room and they told me they'd be right back.

If my dad would have asked me what my favorite thing was, he should have asked me what my favorite thing was because I don't even have a number three. Mom was my number one. And then when she wasn't my number one anymore he was my number one. Who would be my number one? Mr. Fisher would never be my number one.

"It was just that wind...and that wave. It was big. Maybe the biggest."

He kept shaking his head and running both hands through his hair. I couldn't tell if he was talking to me, but I asked Mr. Fisher if I could go find my dad.

He looked at me like I was a bad art project and then smiled and got up to talk to the woman behind the window. He came back and said that I could.

The lady walked me through these doors and swiped her badge that was on a string at the wall and these other doors opened. She brought me to an area that had a shower curtain pulled around people in beds with wheels. We stopped in front of one.

“It might be difficult to see your father like this,” she said.

“Okay,” I said and felt my skyscraper spine crumble. I felt destroyed. I think I got a little shorter but I tried not to show it.

My mom used to say that everyone was useful, “even if you’re donating blood and in the back of the line.” I couldn’t remember what I thought she’d say if she were here, but it would have been the best thing. Hurricanes are wind and waves and rain and they loved talking to my dad. He told me you always say thank you every time they come around. I said I didn’t understand because people died and they lost their houses and dogs and shutters and important stuff. He said you have to say thank you anyway. You have to say thank you wind, thank you waves. He told me to be a surfer and then I’d understand. Would a vet understand, I wondered. Would he think a vet could understand? The nurse pulled back the curtain. She turned and looked at me like somehow I had just been set free.