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I woke up with a scratchy throat. What day did I go to the fabric store to pick up thread and bobbins for those masks? The employees were wearing masks, weren't they? No wait, there was that afternoon lunch with Belinda. But we stayed outside the whole time, with no masks, because, well, because we were eating. Although when she first poured my lemonade, I forgot I was wearing the mask and brought the glass directly up to my face, promptly spilling it down my blouse. "Do you want me to wear my mask?" she asked when I first arrived. I shook my head. "No, that's ok." Belinda has antibodies, the real deal. She'd been on a cruise on the Nile when all hell broke loose. It was the beginning of March. No one knew if they should travel. I had already cancelled our family Hawaii trip. It turned out no one was really upset. We were more disappointed about missing the weekend trip to Berkeley. But Belinda fearlessly headed to her cruise ship, those floating Petri dishes, notorious for incubating infectious diseases before the pandemic. No epidemiologist would ever get on a cruise ship. Belinda said an older couple, like my age, was carted off in the middle of the night to the hospital. Belinda was quarantined in her cabin for four days. A crew member brought her food three times a day. She said it was like being in jail, waiting to hear the jingle of the warden's keys. At least she had a window, but she destroyed my lyrical image of the region by saying the Nile was full of garbage. She finally got to leave, flying into JFK on a packed airplane. At Customs, the officer only asked if she'd been in Wuhan or Iran. When she got home, she slept for two days and woke up with no taste buds. Now she gives plasma at the blood bank every month.

OK, so Belinda probably hadn't exposed me to anything. Do I have a fever? I needed to look up the symptoms again. Maybe my husband was an asymptomatic carrier? He went out daily to Home Depot—located in a hot spot!—to get various odd items needed for yard projects. Of course he always wears a mask, but how reliable is a mask anyway?

I thought about texting Greta, but she was probably out walking. Yesterday Greta asked if I had seen that idiot on Facebook who had a party with his musician friends and scoffed about wearing a mask, and was now on a ventilator. It prompted to me to look up ventilators again. There was a shortage of those mechanical breathers nationally. It had to be hell on earth to be hooked up to one. Would I soon be so sick that I'd say yes to a ventilator? I combed the internet to find descriptions of how ventilators worked and what it's like to be hooked up to one. Some people have hallucinations. How much did it

hurt? Could they *promise* to have me so drugged I wouldn't realize what was happening? Hours passed as I read every personal ventilator story I could find. I pulled out a bag of jelly beans I had stashed in the closet when I was stocking up on rice and pasta.

How do we cope? One friend stays in her pajamas all day and eats cookies for breakfast. She claims there's no adult supervision at her house. A former colleague went back to work. She didn't need the money, but she couldn't travel, which is really all she wanted to do. It seemed now that many people had no work and no food, while the few had more work than they could manage.

My brother: *This should be over in a couple weeks, right?*

No, not really. There's no treatment and no vaccine.

So what do we do?

Nothing. Stay home.

I started to feel achy. I followed my own advice and stayed home. I learned that an old friend snickered behind my back about my insistence on wearing masks. I reviewed my inventory of hand sanitizer and looked online for more. It felt like we were driving through an endless tunnel with no light ahead. Operation Warp Speed was a misnomer. Why wasn't anyone truthful about how long it takes to make a vaccine, let alone get it into people's arms? I counted the days from my last errand and waited to breathe on Day 14. I didn't practice Spanish verbs or finish sorting piles of old family photos. I realized I didn't care if my son threw away images of long gone relatives he didn't know, many of whom were not nice. I didn't finish knitting the shawl that I thought would take, at a rate of one inch per day, sixty days. I didn't bake sourdough bread. I cooked red beans and froze them in labeled baggies. I threw them away several weeks later. I exchanged crude jokes and teary fears with people who could grieve and laugh at the same time. Greta sacrificed seeing her godchildren so she could visit her granddaughter. Greta's son was very strict about the rules. I finally stopped reading about ventilators.

I worked on crossword puzzles, a feeble attempt to keep the light in my brain from fading, and thought about getting tested. I didn't drink alcohol or learn new ukulele chords. I played Talking Heads and Dire Straits and pounded on the *cajón* my husband got me last Christmas. I toggled between the Hallmark channel and cable news on TV. I took my temperature and shopped for pulse oximeters. Someone I thought I knew said she refuses to wear a mask. She thinks it inhibits her immune system. I gazed out the window at the stone wall my father-in-law built when he was ninety-two years old. He survived the 1918 pandemic. It's different this time.

