

POSTMORTEM

Larissa Mae Suarez

Before

She woke everyone in the house, and cooked breakfast for five. They came down one at a time. Her husband was late for his presentation. Her daughters were furious with each other over some misplaced earrings. Her son was the only one who remembered to kiss her goodbye, before he clambered into the car, still young enough to be excited about school. When they were all gone, she sat down, ate, then washed all the dishes, and went upstairs to collect the laundry.

During

She woke everyone in the house, and cooked breakfast for five. They lingered at the table, the children sniping at each other, until they had to go up and turn on their laptops. Her husband commandeered the bedroom. She didn't have to do too much laundry; they had all fallen into the habit of wearing the same ratty shirts for days at a time. She helped her son with his math class, and made her daughters take turns using the newer laptop. The old one took five minutes to start, and the letters "U," "I," and "O" hadn't worked properly since coffee spilled on the keyboard. Her daughters demanded, how can we write anything without those three vowels? After just a few days of laborious copy-pasting, she went to the mall for the first time in months to buy another laptop. They had the budget for it; there had been no vacations or restaurant dinners or shopping excursions for a while now.

After

You were warned of the risks. You know you're diabetic. Was it worth it? Was it really you who had to go out for groceries every week? No, I'm sorry, we can't let anyone in. No exceptions. Your family was very determined to visit. They even came up with a plan to sign a waiver absolving us of all liability if they contracted the virus while they were in here. But you understand, the concept of duty: they can hate me but I won't let anyone else get sick if I can help it. I will be the one to stay with you. I won't leave you alone. Here, lie on your stomach. This is called prone positioning and it will help you breathe more easily.

Now

Scattered stacks of unwashed laundry, like small hills in every room. Bowls of instant noodles and plates of gummy eggs and tough hotdogs, and half-empty glasses of milk and beer and softdrinks, like miniature skyscrapers navigated by lines of intrepid ants. Outside someone has drawn a heart, like a harmless snapshot of someone else's life, in the dust on the back window of the car. In time they will learn to do everything without her. For now they are in separate rooms, waiting for two weeks to pass, waiting to comfort each other.