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this new rule.

We also made the mistake of taking lightly her few initial comments about Avian Influenza. News stories of 2004 told the rest of us that there was a risk, but news stories of 2004 told my mother that we would all inevitably—and soon—contract the virus and die. One day I received a phone call during English class, which in high school demanded that my teacher answer the wall phone and look up worriedly, calling my name so that the whole class turned to stare. I stepped outside the classroom to answer, pulling the cord around the corner and out the door.



Tear Down

“Molly?” My mom—someone must have died. “Just wanted to let you know, I ordered some masks during my lunch break. I’ll be putting them in the basement next to the cat litter. I’m picking up maybe ten gallons of water after work. Won’t last us long, but they’ll at least get us through the initial shock of it. See you tonight!”

That night my mother came home with ten jugs of water, just as she’d promised, and sat us all down to discuss an emergency preparedness plan.

By the end of my senior year, my mother’s quirks were no longer funny—they were infuriating. Her absent-mindedness and her constant anxious chatter in particular became the subject of my own Embarrassing Mother Stories. I could now see a familiar sparkle of pity in my friends’ eyes as I told them each new tale.

It was during the retelling of such a story that frustration with my mother