

IN THE WEE SMALL HOURS

Walking by Borough Hall, beside the melting debris of winter, I count seven abandoned paper facemasks. I wonder how we'll remember this year. All those discarded masks along the curb? The parking meters shrouded in orange plastic bags: *Curbside Pickup. 10 Minutes Only. Stay in Your Vehicle?*

Here's one memory: It's 4:05 in the morning. Lynn is sitting on the loveseat downstairs in a gray robe that makes her look like a Dalek, one of those triangular robots on *Dr. Who*. I'm next to her in my flannel pajamas, so addled to be up at this hour that I'm wearing two pairs of glasses simultaneously. I look like Mr. Magoo. Lynn's laptop is open. Like so many others, we've spent too much time fruitlessly checking websites for vaccines as if they were grand prizes in some obscure sweepstakes. But tonight Lynn insists she's onto something. It has required all of us, including our dog Nellie, to get up at 4 AM, clomp downstairs and face the laptop once again. All the lights in the living room are burning.

One of the key points underlying her technique is that the cyber-underground has determined that CVS stealthily posts its daily vaccine openings between 3 and 5 in the morning. But you can't necessarily access them unless you visit the website the night before and begin applying for a state that's still showing openings – in this case, Ohio. You fill out the questionnaire to a certain point, then stop, leaving the browser open until early morning, when the new openings are posted; then you continue to fill out the form, switching the state selected to New Jersey.

This is exactly what Lynn does: returning now to her open browser with Nellie and me half-asleep beside her. She works away. A part of me doesn't remotely believe this will work. At 4:07 Lynn enters the zip code 08840, and, astoundingly, the screen actually advances, to begin scheduling, and it reveals appointments available every 15 minutes in the CVS on Route 1 in North Brunswick. I've never seen this screen before. Lynn clicks away wildly — filling out my information: “What's your Medicare number?”

Cards are spilling out of my wallet. “I don't have Medicare. I use the Aetna Educators Medicare Pla...”

“Read me the number!”

“I can’t tell if these are zeroes or oh’s.”

She’s yelling now: “Are they skinny or fat?”

“I think, skinny.”

“They’re zeros!”

She types frantically. “We’re being timed; we have three minutes to complete this... What about your prescription plan number?”

I begin to say something, but she cuts me off like a drill sergeant.

“The number! Just read it!”

I’m fumbling now for my prescription drug card, my reading glasses slipping over my distance glasses.

“What time do you want the appointment?” Lynn asks.

“I don’t care! Early!”

Nellie starts barking as she hears *The N.Y. Times* being delivered outside.

Lynn is typing away like a hacker trying to bring down the entire Iranian power grid, and, when she’s done, I have been scheduled for an appointment. *Two* appointments! Two blind dates with my new lover: the Pfizer vaccine.

It’s 4:30, and I can’t believe she has pulled this off. “Jackpot,” I tell her. “That should be your name. Doctor Jack Pot.” She’s beaming with pleasure, and she puts out her palm to give me some skin.

“Thank you for saving my life,” I say. “No prob,” she replies, and we stagger back to bed. Nellie squeezes between us and disappears under the covers, releasing, at the same time as I do, a rare, full-body sigh.