

Part the First

AS WRITTEN BY RACHEL QUIST

16 JULY 2020

Before the interview, Georgia couldn't remember the last time she had visited the Super Value Foods on the corner of Lexington and Fifth, three blocks from her family's home. For the past few years—ever since the virus became worse and her sister became confined to the second-floor bedroom—she and her family had utilized the home delivery option. The minimal monthly delivery fee allowed the four of them to reduce contact with the outside world, and Georgia had hardly given a second thought to the Super Value bags that appeared on the front doorstep like magic every Monday: paper on sunny days, plastic when rain was predicted. She and her mother would rifle through the bags and place the cans and boxes in the cupboard; the two of them would gripe about the half-melted carton of ice cream, the lack of on-brand laundry detergent, and the inevitable apology notes taped to the various canned and boxed goods. *We have substituted your request of Organic Valley Fresh Mushrooms for Sunrise Farms Canned Mushrooms in Water this week. We apologize for any inconvenience and will do our best to have your item back in stock shortly.*

Georgia hadn't fully settled in the chair across from the

associate manager's desk before her interview was practically over. "Do you want to drive or stock?" Janet—the nametag on her right lapel displayed, albeit slightly crookedly—asked, pushing a slip of paper toward Georgia. It was the first and only question Georgia was asked; the hour she'd spent preparing for the interview with her mother scanning down a list of potential interview questions had been useless. Janet was not interested in how she dealt with conflict, whether she demonstrated leadership skills, or how she incorporated constructive criticism into her daily life.

"Drive," Georgia responded, glancing at the form Janet had slid across the desk. *Super Value Foods: New Hire* monochromatically adorned the top.

Janet nodded toward the form. "Fill that out. Sam drives number five, but his route's gotten busier and he could use an extra set of hands. You good to lift up to forty pounds?"

Georgia nodded mutely.

"Great," Janet said, sliding a set of keys across her desk. "You can start Monday. Sam'll meet you outside by the van."

The walkie-talkie holstered on her side suddenly crackled to life, and Janet winced, turning down the volume. "You can see yourself out?" she asked Georgia, distracted. "I have to go help unload the truck. I'll see you next week."

Now, Georgia tugged self-consciously at the bottom of her bright blue store-issued t-shirt and glanced at the fleet of vans, their engines running in the dedicated parking spots right outside the sliding doors of the grocery store. She twisted the keys around her first finger and adjusted her store-issued surgical mask, trying her best to look like she knew what she was doing. Every few seconds, she tried to surreptitiously scan for anyone who could possibly be Sam, but so far, every Super Value employee had walked right past her. The name didn't give her much to go off of, not even a hint to gender, so Georgia waited silently as every other van besides number five pulled out of the parking lot.

Just as she was about to give up and search for Janet—the only person she could identify here—inside the refrigerated expanse of the store, a voice came from out of nowhere. "Georgia, right?" She jumped around quickly to see her copilot, his dark eyes and tuft of black hair barely visible behind the stack of insulated tubs balanced in his arms.

"That's me!" Georgia said, jumping up too quickly. She reached to help lift the tub at the

top of his stack, but he turned away from her and motioned toward the automatic doors with his head.

"I've got it," Sam said. "You go inside and help with the rest of the order. We've got ten minutes before the Jefferson order is late."

"I don't... I'm not sure where the rest of the order would be. It's my first day." Georgia offered weakly.

The words made no difference in the cadence of his work, but he nodded slightly. "Got it. Janet likes to sort of throw the new hires into the mix," he said, setting the last of his boxes down in the back of the van with emphasis. He straightened, brushed at the condensation which had collected across the front of his shirt, and extended his hand. "Sam," he said. "I'll show you the storeroom and explain the job while we go. Last week Janet had to give Mrs. Jefferson twenty dollars off her order because she claimed her fish had gone rancid in the heat."

Georgia did her best to keep up with Sam and take mental notes on the organization of the pick-up and delivery of grocery goods. Between the two of them, the van filled quickly, and Sam seemed impressed at her ability to keep up with him.

"You're working full time?" he asked when the two of them settled into the van—Sam in the driver's seat, Georgia to his right. She was attempting to type

addresses into the maps app on her phone, but Sam waved her hand away. “Don’t worry about it. I do this route every week.”

Georgia tucked her phone under her leg and shrugged. “Full time for now,” she said.

“School?”

“Not anymore.”

“Yeah, I don’t know anyone who goes either.” Sam said. “I got a year of college in before all this shit went down.” Sam turned the van sharply to the left and braked abruptly in front of a large Victorian-style house. “Jefferson,” he said, grinning. He nodded toward the clock. “Two minutes to go. Grab the shelf stables – ah, non-refrigerated stuff – and follow me.”

The food was successfully delivered to a waiting Mrs. Jefferson, who inspected each of the bags thoroughly before huffing into her house and returning with a crisp five-dollar bill.

“Take care of yourselves,” she said, handing the bill to Georgia and holding eye contact for a second too long before disappearing back into the large foyer of her house.

Georgia stared at the five-dollar bill in her hand. “We get tipped?” She tried to remember if her mother had ever offered money to any of their delivery drivers; she was relatively certain it had never happened.

Sam shrugged, yanking open the back of the van and piling the empty containers to the side. “Some of them feel bad for us because our deliveries mean they don’t have to go out. Lots of drivers

get sick. Mrs. Jefferson is probably surprised to see I’m still running the route every week.”

Georgia sank back into her seat, lost in thought as Sam joined her at the front of the van. What had seemed generous at first glance now felt dangerous, like bribe money. She knew the turnover at the grocery store had been high—Janet had mentioned something in the midst of the brief interview—but Georgia had thought the reason for the turnover had been the job. Unskilled labor, she had rationalized, often has a high turnover as people move on and look for bigger and better things. She hadn’t considered any other reason that Janet would be struggling to fill client-facing positions like delivery.

“How should we split it?” Georgia asked.

Sam shrugged, eyes trained to the road. “She gave it to you,” he said.

“Right, but it was meant for both of us,” Georgia said. “Could we change it out for singles when we’re back at the store?”

“If you want,” Sam said.

Georgia turned the bill over in her hand. “Does she always give you a five?” she asked.

“She’s never tipped me before.”

“Oh, that’s strange,” Georgia mused. “I wonder why she decided to today?” The question was posed quietly, more to herself than anyone, but Sam turned to her anyway.

“Most of the clients don’t like to talk to me. The higher up the

hill you go, the more expensive the houses, the more anxious people get about people who don’t look like them. They see me and their minds make connections before they even realize it— black means poor, poor means sick, and suddenly it doesn’t matter that I’m risking my life to bring them food because they’re all about self-protection. Potential threat.” His voice was level, quiet, like he’d had the same conversation with ten people that day.

“I mean,” Georgia said, trying to gather her thoughts. “I’m just as likely to carry the virus as you are. We’re not really... I mean, it’s not like my family can afford to live in one of those gated communities anymore.”

Her mother—once a renowned professor of American History at the university Georgia used to attend—had been working at the post office for the past two years trying to make ends meet. Meanwhile, Georgia had stubbornly continued with her effort to finish her bachelor’s degree. When her university shut down due to lack of funding and a sharply decreasing number of enrolled students, Georgia transferred to another online university to attempt to finish out her freshman year. The incompatibility between the two schools had been frustrating, but she’d sent an endless barrage of emails to both registrars and finally had her plan for the next three years settled when she’d received an email from the second university: they, too, were shutting down their online system at the end of the year.

Georgia transferred six times before finishing her second year of college, and when her sister became sick, she took it as a sign that it was time to give up on her education.

That was what brought her here: to Super Value, to the van, and to Sam’s nauseating driving across back roads that he assured Georgia were a “shortcut” to the next address on their long list.

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Part the Second

AS WRITTEN BY GRACE SCOTT

23 JULY 2020

Sam was driving out of the city now; a few minutes' drive wound the Super Value van through the narrow streets of the outer city, then beyond a stretch of industrial wasteland, and finally into the pastel mansions and vast green lawns of the suburbs. They were already hopelessly behind schedule. Georgia knew her inexperience was slowing them down. She was trying not to count how many times she'd picked up the wrong bin or accidentally knocked on the front door when the delivery instructions required her to ring the doorbell. So far, Sam had been kind enough not to mention it.

Sam took a sharp exit off the main road onto a wide lane with a line of trees down the middle. Dotted along either side of the road were cast-iron gates, each with its own guard post. The gates were plastered with bucolic names, which were hard to make out passing by, but in aggregate they were placid and reassuring. It had been years since Georgia had been to the suburbs and returning brought back faded memories of birthday parties and swim classes.

There were always families scrambling to leave the city. Those who had the means had evacuated

as soon as it became clear that the virus would not relent. Time was not kind to the middle-class who waited—plenty of families who might have been able to leave a few years ago watched as real estate prices in the sheltered suburbs soared into seven, eight, even nine-figures. The sprawl seemed even greater than it had back then. Even with the ridiculously inflated prices, the gated communities multiplied each year.

As they continued on, they passed increasingly elaborate gates, with gold leaf ornaments on the wrought iron and delicate barbed wire atop the walls. Sam signaled and turned right into a driveway, stopping before the metal bars. This gate was especially tall and narrow, and read, in cloying script, *The Woods*.

"Get the bins ready," Sam said, pulling up to the guard post. "The rest of our deliveries are all here." He rolled down the window.

The guard sat behind thick glass, with a little slot at the bottom through which visitor passes could be issued. He was fixated on some video on his phone.

Sam pressed a red button on the outside of the glass.

"We're with Super Value Foods," he said, taking an ID card

from his wallet. *Essential Worker*, it read, highlighted in yellow above his picture.

"Passes?" The guard responded, barely looking up. Sam slid his through the slot in the glass, while Georgia watched with wide eyes, once again entirely lost.

"I don't think I got a pass," Georgia whispered anxiously to Sam. He glanced at her before turning toward the guard.

"Are we good?" Sam asked, holding his hand out for his ID.

The guard leaned over to peer at her, before lazily gesturing them forward and fixating again on the screen of his phone. The gate swung open slowly.

"Make sure Janet gets you a pass for next time," said Sam, a sliver of warning in his voice. He tucked his ID back into its slot as Georgia shrank back in her seat.

Beyond the gate were rows of uninspired mansions, each like a sibling to the next. The houses were partially obscured, however, by a ten-foot-tall picket fence, which separated the road from the houses and the sidewalk. Signs posted along the fence read in block letters, *Current Vaccination Required Beyond This Point*. The white expanse of fence was interrupted at regular intervals by two doors: one, a large automated door, through which a vehicle could drive; the other, a small hinged door about the size of a rabbit hutch, several feet off the ground. Both doors matched the styling of the fence perfectly. Only the handles gave away their existence. Separate signs instructed

that deliveries should be left in this hutch, or "pod."

Sam drove slowly down the winding cul-de-sac, careful not to break the ten mile-per-hour speed limit. Georgia noted the blinking eyes of security cameras on every streetlight.

"You see that house?" Sam asked, gesturing to the largest mansion at the end of the street. Georgia nodded.

"That's Chloe Galt's house... as in *Galtch Pharmaceuticals*."

"No way," said Georgia, "I thought her show was set in Monaco?"

"Well, when a pandemic makes your father richer than God, you can afford more than one house."

They arrived at their next stop—the Campbell household.

"You want to take this one?" Sam asked. Georgia was eager to redeem herself in his eyes, so she nodded, with no idea what to do.

"In these neighborhoods, they don't want us inside, since we're not up-to-date," Sam said, nodding toward the vaccination signs. "So instead, you go up to that little door, push the buzzer, they'll unlock the pod, and you leave the groceries inside," Sam explained.

Georgia got out, unloaded the groceries, and pressed the pod's buzzer. The door clicked, and she placed the groceries inside. They'd left a five-dollar bill on the floor of the pod, which she understood to be a tip. She took it and closed the door again. There was a faint hiss

from within—the sound of sanitizing spray.

She began to walk back to the van. Before she could open the door, though, she heard a voice from the other side of the fence.

“Georgia? Georgia Johnson?”

Georgia turned. Her heart sank. Of all the gated communities, of all the suburbs outside the city—what were the chances? She plastered on a smile.

“Sophie! It’s so nice to see you.” Georgia waved lamely and began to return to the van, but Sophie was determined.

“You know, it’s wild to see you here, since you kind of fell off the face of the earth. Like, everyone from school thought you died or something.”

“Well, I’m still here.” Georgia laughed artificially. Though she couldn’t see much—Sophie’s face was obscured both by the fence and her designer mask—Georgia got the impression that she looked much the same as she had in eighth grade, when they were friends. Even from this distance, Georgia could sense the shark smile. She was suddenly very aware of her Super Value uniform.

“So, you’re working? That’s the worst. My mom made me get a job last summer. On her friend’s senate campaign. *So boring.* This looks fun, though, delivering groceries?” Sophie peered at Sam sitting in the van. “Ooh, and with a *view*. Did I ever tell you my last boyfriend was Black? Connor—you remember Connor, right? Anyway, it didn’t work out, obviously, but it

was so exciting. My mom hated him, of course, but of course she would *never* say that out loud.”

Sophie’s laugh was high and obnoxious, and it grated on Georgia just like it had in their shared freshman literature course. Georgia nodded, staring at her feet. She stepped backwards, inching toward the van, ready to give an excuse to leave.

“You ended up transferring, right?” Sophie asked, her voice calling Georgia back toward the fence. “Where do you go now?”

A lump was forming in Georgia’s throat. Her face was hot.

“I’m actually not in school anymore. My mom lost her job when the university shut down, and I guess you know about my dad, but now my sister’s sick.” Georgia trailed off. She couldn’t say any more without crying.

“Oh my god, I had no idea—you know, you should add me back on Snapstream and, like, if you *ever* need anything my family would be *so* happy to help.”

“Thank you. I’m fine. I should be going now.”

“Oh, I’m late for my yoga class anyway—”

Taking the exit, Georgia got in the van and slammed the door. Sophie was saying something else, but she couldn’t hear it through the window. Georgia put her head in her hands. She could feel Sam looking at her, but again, he was too kind to say anything. He started driving. They passed through the iron gates and turned back onto the wooded lane. Sam

put on the radio. A song trickled in through the van’s tinny speakers; something soft, and lilting, hopeful the way music had been before the virus. Georgia reached toward the volume knob to turn up the music and her hand bumped into Sam’s. They looked at each other and exchanged a smile.

They were the last drivers to return to the Super Value Foods parking lot. After they clocked out, Georgia finally checked her phone—five missed calls. She suddenly remembered that her mom had to leave to take a night shift, and couldn’t leave until she returned, since her sister couldn’t be left alone.

Georgia rushed out the door of the Super Value and ran down the block. Again, she heard a voice behind her. It was Sam, telling her to wait.

“Georgia, hold on a second.”

“Sam, I *really* need to get home right now.”

“Yeah, I’ll walk with you. I’m headed that way too”

Sam was different after work. He was less formal. They got to the first stoplight before either of them said anything. Georgia wondered if he would bring it up, or if she should. Sam cleared his throat.

“That was a friend from school?” Sam asked.

“Not really.” Georgia was still shaking, though the fear of returning home late had overtaken the emotions of earlier. “When I left school, I didn’t really tell anyone. I didn’t want them to know

about my mom or my sister or anything. A lot of people I knew from back then are about to graduate college. Some of them are like me, but some of them live in the gated communities now. Like Sophie.”

Sam nodded. “I just wanted to say—I’m sorry about your sister. Seems like everyone has someone they’ve lost or are about to lose.”

Georgia looked up at him.

About to lose?

“That’s not what I meant—she might recover, lots of people do—just, this job doesn’t pay very much.”

“I know, but my mom’s working too. We’ll have a little extra every month now.”

“I don’t know anyone who’s been able to buy the vaccine on minimum wage, even when they keep their jobs as long as I have. But, then again, you’ve already been getting a lot of tips.” He laughed gently. Georgia winced.

“Look, I know this is all new to you, but I’ve been at this for a while. You should know, there are other ways, if you want to find them.” They came to another intersection. Sam said goodbye and turned down the cross-street, leaving Georgia on the corner to guess what he meant.

She could remember a time when the sidewalks bustled with people at this time of day. Rush hour was no more. It was only Georgia and a few other essential workers coming home from the day shift. She suddenly felt keenly alone. Sam’s words rattled around in her

Part the Third

AS WRITTEN BY RYAN MCCANN

30 JULY 2020

A bead of sweat dripped down Georgia's face as she raced up the final steps to the third floor of the stifling stairwell. In lower class apartment buildings, proper airflow was never high on the landlord's to-do list, despite the recommendation of health experts to keep air filtered to lower infections. The result was a stairway with no windows that hovered around 86°F in the summer, making her family's apartment with the one fan in the window feel like an oasis when she burst in the door.

"Mom, I'm back!" she yelled, looking at the clock. It was 6:47 pm. Her mom needed to be across town for the night shift helping to disinfect hospital equipment by 7:30. It wasn't much time, but she hoped it would be enough. With many jobs having become obsolete in the most recent years of the pandemic, employers had applicants lined up around the block to take the place of anyone who was more than a minute late.

"Georgia, I'm over here. Please hurry, I have to go," her mother called from down the narrow which led to the room where her younger sister Fiona had been trapped in quarantine for the

past four and a half weeks. Four and a half weeks of not knowing if Fiona was sick or not. Even that morning when Georgia left for work, there had been no news. With the new strain of the virus, symptoms could appear anytime up to two months after exposure, and tests for the new version would only be positive the day before the symptoms appeared.

"How is she doing?" asked Georgia, bracing herself for the answer.

"She spiked a fever today. 102°," replied her mother. Georgia's shoulders sagged in defeat. "Also her most recent test results came back today. She has it. The new one."

Georgia bit her lip to hold in a scream. The most recent iteration of the coronavirus now had a mortality rate of about 10%, indiscriminate of age or preexisting conditions. She didn't feel like she could speak at all without a sob coming out.

"Georgia, is that you?" called Fiona a few seconds later, her voice distorted by both the glass door between them and the raspy cough that had appeared the day before.

"Yeah...yeah, it's me. Sorry I'm late. This job definitely

doesn't have a guaranteed end time." The apology she choked out as she composed herself to be hopeful for her sister's sake was addressed to both her sister and her mother. "How are you feeling?"

"I mean, I have the 'rona eight-point-oh, so...pretty much like shit." The chuckle that followed her dry-humored comment was quickly cut off by another burst of coughing. One thing that hadn't changed through this ordeal was her sister's brand of humor; it had been dark and sarcastic before, so her diagnosis really just added fuel to the fire.

"Fiona! Don't think that just because you're on the other side of that door I can't still wash your mouth out with soap," scolded her mother.

"You're right, you're right. I'm being dramatic. I'm actually doing just fine! That's me! Good ol' 'rona Fiona!"

"Just keep an eye on her," Georgia's mother whispered to her, sounding slightly exasperated, "you know she hates asking for help." All Georgia could do was nod. "I love you both. I'll see you in the morning," her mother said, loud enough for Fiona to hear this time. Georgia felt the blast of heat from the stairwell and heard the door click shut as her mother rushed to make it to work in time.

Georgia slid down until she was sitting with her back against the glass door that separated her from her sister. These doors, a recent invention via necessity to keep the virus

contained at home when all the hospitals were full, had become almost universal over the past few months, with nearly every house having a room with one. Specially designed with gaskets along the edges that inflate when the door closes to create a virus-proof seal around the perimeter, the door was marketed as "Keeping the virus inside and your family outside™". What they failed to advertise is that the virus always takes someone inside with it. In addition to the sealing sides, another selling point was the cubby at the bottom corner of the door, which functions as a one square foot version of the pods Georgia saw in Sophie's gated community. Georgia loaded some candy and gum into the mini pod and closed it to begin disinfecting. It seemed to Georgia that bringing snacks and trinkets from the outside world back to her quarantined sister seemed a bit cliché, but Fiona insisted.

As the disinfectant hissed, Georgia began to think about the invention of the door. With it prevalent in every household now, it seemed like such a simple solution. *If only I'd thought of it first, been the one to pitch it to Galtech, maybe we'd be in that gated community now. Maybe my sister...*

"So what's the outside world like?" The serious tone of her sister's sudden question snapping her out of her downward spiral of self-criticism, "I can't express how little I know about the outside by staring at the building on the other side of the alley."

“It’s pretty much the same as five weeks ago. Everything basically sucks, no one goes outside who doesn’t have to, and people still treat each other just as horribly,” Sophie’s comments when she saw Sam for some reason lingering in the back of Georgia’s mind, “but I got to go into one of those gated communities.”

“No way! What was it like? Did they make you wear hazmat suits? Did they march you through at gunpoint to make sure you didn’t walk on any of their pampered lawns with your ‘rona covered feet?”

“I mean, it was surprisingly lax on the security. It kinda felt like ‘none of these peasants would dare try to do anything we don’t want them to, so we don’t need a guard on high alert.” This earned a chuckle from her sister. “But I did run into Sophie Blake. She lives in that community. *That* was an encounter I could have done without.”

Georgia proceeded to describe her run-in with Sophie. Throughout the story, Fiona sat on her bed staring at her sister’s back through the glass door, with the look on her face growing more sour with each word. When the brief story ended, Fiona sat in silence for a couple seconds, then burst into a coughing fit.

“That bitch!” Fiona said when she finally recovered.

“Hey! You know mom doesn’t like it when you swear.” For a kid who had been through so

much, it was easy to forget that she was only twelve years old.

“I mean, am I wrong though?” Georgia sat silently, fully agreeing with Fiona’s sentiment despite not being able to say so. “You’re bringing her food so she doesn’t have to leave the safety of her private little gated and virus-free compound, and she has the nerve to make jokes about you not being in school?”

“Maybe that’s just how she talks to people?” Georgia replied, trying to give her a half-hearted benefit of the doubt.

“Oh so she got to ignore you for two years, but now she’s gonna be friendly? You know you haven’t even gotten a single text from her since you left school. And not to mention she and her family sound pretty racist. Not all that shocking, but still.” Throughout her tirade, the coughs that forced her to stop and catch her breath had become more and more frequent.

Georgia shifted focus onto the other places she had been that day, until Fiona began to yawn and her eyelids began to droop.

“You should get some sleep.” Fiona simply nodded and shifted from sitting on the edge of her bed to laying down. Her sister capitulating to sleep at 9:00 pm was a sign of just how drained she was trying to fight off the virus.

After looking to make sure Fiona had placed the portable breathing monitor under her nose, Georgia gathered up some pillows and a blanket and camped out in

the hall outside Fiona’s door, just in case.

As she prepared to go to sleep, Georgia scrolled through the virus headlines on her phone, trying to find some good news. She was sorely disappointed. “COVID-19.8 Death Rate Rises to 12%”, “Galtech Treatment and Vaccine Combo for COVID-19.8 Released at \$10,355 per dose”, “Vaccine Deliveries to Close Roads, Check Local Information”.

Georgia locked her phone and slammed it down beside her as tears began to well up in her eyes. *It was just a goddamn fluke*, she thought to herself. Georgia had hung out with a couple of her friends, all of whom had tested negative the day before. But the morning after, Fiona’s phone rang with the fateful news: the lab had called and told her friend that the tests had been mixed up in the computer and she had actually tested positive. Although not unheard of, given that the entire population gets tested every few days and mistakes are bound to happen, it was still a rare enough occurrence that it prompted near constant thoughts of “why her? Why not anyone else?” Fiona had been in quarantine since that phone call.

The breathing monitor woke Georgia up three times during the night, its beeping indicating that Fiona was only breathing eight times per minute, well below the healthy twelve. After a few seconds, the beeping would subside, and Georgia knew her sister would be okay for the

time being. But each time the monitor went on and then off, as she drifted back to sleep: *It was just a goddamn fluke*.

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Sliding into the passenger seat of the van the next morning, Georgia sat silently as she waited for Sam to leave the parking lot. Once they were on the road, Georgia took a deep breath, knowing the magnitude of what she was about to ask.

“Sam,” she said quietly, almost a whisper, as if she expected others to be listening in, “those other ways you were talking about yesterday...what are they?”

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mind— she almost missed her family's building. She unlocked the door and started up the stairs, readying herself for what awaited her at home.

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Part the Fourth

AS WRITTEN BY ARJUN SRINIVASAN 6 AUGUST 2020

A couple days ago, when Georgia first asked how she could get a vaccine for her sister, Sam had hesitated to tell Georgia the truth: that many of his neighbors had tested positive for the newest strain of coronavirus, that the local health authorities had deemed his neighborhood — one of the few black neighborhoods in the city — a lost cause, and that he'd been planning to steal a couple of the next batch of vaccines from the Galt's neighborhood to give his own a fighting chance. Georgia didn't seem like the kind of twenty-year-old up for a robbery. Sam himself had only come to the conclusion he had to steal the vaccines after seeing so many of his neighbors die.

"Let's review the plan one more time," Sam had suggested as they got in the Super Value delivery vehicle. "You'll call your friend who lives in *The Woods*, say we're making a special delivery and that you're running late, and ask your friend to let you in. Once we're in, we'll pull up to the vaccine delivery vehicle, and while they're making a vaccine delivery, we'll steal a couple vaccines out the back of their truck." "Exactly," Georgia confirmed, before pulling out her phone and calling Sophie.

As the phone rang for the sixth time, Sophie finally picked up. "What's up?" Georgia hesitated; she'd always been awful at lying. "Hey. Sorry to bother you, but I'm in a rush to finish my shift, I forgot my pass, and I need to get home so my mom can go to work; would you mind calling the guard hut to let me in?"

Sophie was confused. "Why are you out delivering groceries today? It's vaccine delivery day. Aren't all other delivery services closed for the day?"

Georgia nervously continued with the script Sam and she had decided on. "But my boss called me in — she said someone in your neighborhood requested a special delivery. I *have* to deliver their groceries before I can go home."

Sophie hesitated: "I don't know. I can try... but I'm not sure if they'll let you in. You know how paranoid people are before the newest round of vaccinations. It's a felony to get in the way of vaccine delivery."

Georgia knew Sophie needed a nudge before she'd let them in. "I know, I know... it's just that one of the families in *The Woods* is hosting a banquet, and we need to

deliver the groceries for it. I left my pass at the store and if I have to go back, the produce will spoil, my boss will fire me, and I won't be home in time for my mom to make her shift. Please Sophie—" It pained Georgia to continue, but she knew she had to: "For an old friend?"

Georgia knew Sophie only picked up because she felt guilty about what had happened to Georgia's family. She knew Sophie couldn't bring herself to make Georgia's life worse than it already was. Finally, Sophie relented.

Over an hour later, Sam pulled the delivery vehicle up to the guard hut before the gates, but the guard looked surprised to see them. "Sorry — no non-vaccine deliveries today." Georgia started to panic, as her mind jumped to the logical conclusion: of course, Sophie had lied to her; how could she have expected any better. Sam went ahead with the plan. "We're here for a special grocery delivery. One of the residents, Sophie Clarke, should've called ahead of time."

The guard checked his clipboard and glanced at his notes. "My mistake. I'll let the Clarks know you're coming. Just be fast."

The gates lifted. They were in! Sam slowly drove down the main road of *The Woods* as Georgia looked for signs of the vaccine delivery vehicle. "There! At the end of the cul-de-sac." Georgia pointed.

Sam spotted the white armored car in the distance and drove towards it. As Sam pulled up, Georgia realized this was their only shot; the vaccine delivery man was

making his way towards the delivery pod for the house across the street, and the armored car's trunk was open. The vaccines were in plain sight—now was their chance to steal a couple without anyone noticing. But before Sam had made a complete stop, Georgia realized there was one giant hole in their plan.

"Georgia!" Sophie exclaimed through her mask, waving from outside her house's gate.

What were the chances... the vaccine delivery car happened to be stopped across the street from the Clarke's mansion.

"Now what?..." Sam asked, exasperated. Sam was risking his stable job for a chance to save his dying neighbors, now only to lose both. They didn't have time to distract Sophie or to come up with a new excuse for stopping near the vaccine vehicle. "I guess we have to improvise," Georgia said, with a slight smile.

Just then, Sophie approached the passenger side of the grocery van where Georgia was sitting as the van stopped, but before she could get a word out, Georgia swung her door open, shoved Sophie to the ground, and ran for the back of the vaccine delivery vehicle.

As Sophie lay flat on the pavement, her head bleeding, Sam realized Georgia's next move. They weren't just stealing a *couple* vaccines anymore; they were taking the entire delivery vehicle filled with them. Georgia closed the back of the truck and dashed towards the

open driver-side door. As she stepped in the vehicle, she saw the delivery man turn around. Sam had ditched the grocery van and was now making a run for the passenger-side of the vaccine delivery vehicle. As the vaccine delivery man sprinted towards the vehicle and caught the attention of the guard hut security, Georgia and Sam closed their doors. Sam glanced at Georgia, was shocked at how ruthless she had become, but thankful that she'd salvaged the heist. "I didn't know you had that in you," he admitted.

As Georgia pulled away, she could see Sophie's silhouette slowly fade into the background in the rearview mirror. The guard hut security had started to lockdown the community, and the gates were closing fast.

"Floor it!" Sam yelled, and Georgia slammed the gas. The armored car they had commandeered practically flew out of the cul-de-sac towards the entrance. She sped towards the entrance of *The Woods* as the gates began closing. As they approached the gates, they knew the gap between the gates was too small; they weren't going to make a clean exit. Georgia jammed the gas pedal down and braced for impact.

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The End