

I got the idea to pull the fire alarm at my high school back in my home state towards the end of senior year. There was another school in the district, an elementary school, whose fire alarm went off several years before during a big storm, which messed with the wires or some shit and caused it to malfunction and go off. With that senior prank spirit in the air and in the middle of some big spring storms ourselves, I got to thinking about that incident. I thought, "I could pull the alarm and they'd pin it on the storm, and by the time they realize someone pulled it, the year will be over and I'll be long gone." Now, if that sounds like a bit of a stretch, well, that's because it was; look, I was a dumb teen, alright? But then again, I figured that even if they found out someone pulled it before the end of the year, they'd never suspect it was me. Why? Because I was pretty much a nobody in high school: no friends, decent grades, kind of a wouldn't-notice-if-I-was-gone sorta person. (Heck, you probably wouldn't notice me even if I *wasn't* gone.)

So I tripped the alarm at the end of Jefferson hall, next to the doors by the quad, in between classes when the halls were packed: that way, I could use the crowd as cover, discreetly tripping it as I passed before slipping away in all the people. But I was so keen on setting it off that there was something glaringly obvious I didn't even consider (again, dumb teen), which would turn out to be the first of three things I didn't foresee about the incident: that students tend to evacuate the school when the fire alarm goes off, usually to the back field. Well, that's exactly what happened, albeit not without the fair bit of confusion and disorientation that you'd expect. It wasn't long before everyone realized that standing out in the pouring rain wasn't very fun and that mass migrating to the church down the street was a lot more desirable, although the church couldn't hold the entire school and while most of us packed inside, a lot of us ended up snaking around the outside of the building, huddled under the roof. (I found myself in the latter group, but eh.)

At some point we got the go-ahead to go back to the school, which is when we discovered the second thing I didn't realize would happen, though I had no way of knowing it would: the power was out. I don't know if the fire alarm short-circuited it or if it was due to the storm, but yeah. And it ended up being out for the rest of the day, which sounds cool because, you know, free day and all (on a Friday, no less), but it ended up being pretty boring, at least for me.

There *was* one interesting thing that happened, though. After having enough of drifting the halls and eavesdropping on all the talk of my handiwork, at some point I ended up in Mr. Williams' room, which is where I usually went to have lunch, just to sit alone in the dark with all my thoughts. Williams was talking with Mr. Liotta about the latter's new baby, whom his wife had just given birth to and whom Liotta himself had conceived. (Which is kinda weird to think about, isn't it? The idea of your teacher doing the nasty. But I guess, in the end, teachers are people, too, and have sex just like everyone else.)

It was just the three of us in there for a bit, the faint sound of conversations from the hall being heard in the dark, before these three girls who I think were in the anime club wandered in and sat

down on their phones, hardly saying anything other than hi. I remember those phone screens were the only source of light in that almost pitch-black room. Not long after the girls, one of the special-ed teachers came in with these two big plates of food, saying they were in the fridge in the teacher's lounge and were gonna go bad now that the power was out unless someone got to them first. And I mean, these things were *delicacies*: a thick tower on each plate of something breaded, I assumed some sort of meat, with what looked like radishes and sauces and other good stuff surrounding their bases. And that smell, oh, that smell... I think she said they were originally for the Japanese class, something the girls immediately perked up at.

But the thing about these things, sticking straight up from the plates like they did, with the radishes or whatever at their bases... Well, they really just looked like a couple of dicks. I mean, I'm not gonna beat around the bush about it. (No puns intended.) Like, they even *curved* a little. And no offense to the Japanese, but... I wasn't gonna [eat a dick](#), so while everyone else had no problem diving into these twin towers of food, I refrained.

But anyway, fast forward to Monday and the third and final thing I didn't see coming: they found out immediately that someone pulled the fire alarm. Our principal laid bare over the loudspeaker: come forward, and you'll be in trouble; don't, and it'll be double. And speaking of 9/11, he put on his best Bush impression: "We're gonna find you, motherfucker," like I was bin Laden or some shit. (He didn't actually say "motherfucker," but you get the point.)

But anyway, I wasn't keen on getting in *any* trouble, so I was like "fuck *that* noise" and come forward I didn't. And the longer I didn't turn myself in, the more extracurricular events they started canceling to try and pressure me into doing so, stuff I wasn't even involved in, eventually culminating in prom getting canceled. (Oh no, I thought. I was so looking forward to going to that with my girlfriend that I don't have!)

But as they were canceling more and more things, it was becoming increasingly clearer that they were no closer to catching the culprit. With prom canceled, and possibly coupled with lingering feelings about having to stand out in the rain, *everyone* was out for blood, even faculty. At any rate, the consequences for whoever was responsible were looking to be much steeper than they otherwise would be, with some talking of suspension or even expulsion (which, granted, seemed a bit extreme). But I was right, no one ever suspected me: in the increasingly open back-and-forths over the usual suspects, my name never came up. (Sometimes, there *are* perks to being a nobody.) In the end... they never caught me.

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One thing they couldn't cancel was our end-of-the-year softball game with the private school down the street. (This was a couple weeks after the fire alarm incident.) Softball was a pretty big

deal where I'm from – even bigger of a deal than prom, evidently – so we had morning classes before it was basically a free day. We could head on over to the field and watch the game, just kinda hang out otherwise, or even go home if we really wanted to.

I was watching the game, but only to pass the time: it was in the middle of the fifth that I got up to leave. I was on the top bleacher, and the only problem with that was, close to the stairs, Elaine Schulte was standing in the middle of the walkway with her back to the game, talking to a couple people. ("Schulte" wasn't actually her last name, but it's close to what it really was.) Outgoing and generally good-looking, Elaine was one of those girls who you sorta liked, but that you probably weren't the only one and that most of the guys in your grade probably had a thing for. But anyway, she's standing, like, *right in the middle of the walkway*, and I'm not assertive when it comes to talking to *anyone*, let alone girls.

I got to her, and I thought she'd notice me and let me through without me having to say anything, but she didn't. (She was pretty wrapped up in the conversation, something about who fucked who at a party or whatever.) So I did this thing where, awkwardly standing there, I tried to make it look like I was invested in the game, my arms crossed and everything, even though I was just waiting for her to move. Several agonizing seconds of this passed, and since I had somewhere I needed to be, I bucked up and said, "Uh, excuse me." (I didn't look directly, but in the corner of my eye I think I saw one of her friends giving me a look.) I don't think I was loud enough, though, because still no change. *For fuck's sake...*

Something interesting happened in the game right then because the crowd started cheering, an opportunity I took to quickly sidestep around Elaine, my elbow grazing her upper arm in the process. "Sorry," I muttered, though I was relieved. Not only was I happy to finally be on my way, but it was the first physical contact I'd had with a girl that wasn't my sister in like, two years. (Which is great and all, though granted, it would probably be some of the furthest skin-to-skin contact I'd ever get with a girl.)

Elaine didn't seem to notice or care, but I did notice the Reverend, who happened to be sitting in front of Elaine and whose back I brushed with my knee when I stepped around her, shooting some nasty side-eye in my direction. I always found it kinda funny that that school had seminary classes and a reverend while at the same time having a big STEM emphasis, but I guess that's the South for ya. The Reverend never really liked me, though, for whatever reason. He *had* to be close to retirement because the guy was like a dinosaur, with this mad-scientist hair and a bushy mustache that were greying by the day. And for whatever reason, he always dressed like it was still the Great Awakening: right then, he had the sleeves of his white shirt rolled up at the elbows, a black vest, a flat cap to keep his hair at bay, and shoes that looked like they'd just been shined by some kid on the street corner. I mean, this guy had "alcoholic" written all over him.

Maybe that side-eye was saying he knew it was me that pulled the fire alarm? (I heard he wasn't too happy with the interior of his church being soaked after most of the school took refuge in there from the rain.) Even if he did know, it's not like he'd go to the administration about it; he didn't have any proof, anyway. No one did.

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In the parking lot not far off were several food trucks, and it was in front of the Domino's one that I met with my contact. Someone in the junior class was the kind of guy that could get you things, and I needed a gun. You see, my younger sister and I were home alone that week while our parents were on vacation somewhere where they could have all the uninterrupted sex they wanted: a couple days prior, we were watering the plants on the front porch when this black guy came walking around the corner and down the street. Imagine an older Craig Robinson, like in his forties or fifties, and in a turtleneck. (Wait, apparently Craig Robinson *is* in his fifties... Eh, whatever.) And it looked like something was *really* up with this guy, like, mentally: he was walking in this spastic sort of way and mumbling things not too inaudibly. Angry things. He saw the two of us staring at him and it's like that set him off because he straight-up started *walking across our lawn towards us*. I think I got a bit deer-in-headlights at this because while my sister did the smart thing and slipped inside the house, I sidestepped him into the lawn.

He came at me like he was trying to get me but was fairly impeded by his goose step; I couldn't decide if this made him scarier or less so. Bear in mind, this guy *was* bigger than me, of course, and I'm already not the most physically intimidating person out there. The whole thing was totally surreal; I think it's the sorta thing you don't think will ever happen to you, but then it does. The only thing I knew in the moment was that I couldn't let this guy catch me. We went around the lawn, then out into the street, all the while him saying something about how white people are "always keeping us down." Like... dude, you're (unfortunately) not wrong, but we're fucking *kids*, on our own fucking *property*. But like I said, though, something was seriously wrong upstairs with this guy, and I hope I'm making that clear enough.

The message got through to him when my sister emerged from the house with Dad's shotgun leveled and shouted "HEY!" Pretty soon he was on his way, but not before saying something about how he'd be back with his "friends" and I think something about a fucking MAC-10. Now, this guy was clearly mentally ill and we didn't know if he was lying or not, but we didn't wanna take our chances. We didn't wanna call the cops, though, because we didn't want them finding the weed farm inside our house. So we figured it was up to us; however, Dad's shotgun was the only gun we had and we made the unfortunate discovery that he didn't keep a whole lot of shells. We didn't know who, if anyone, we were gonna be up against, so I arranged something over the next couple days (during which the coast remained clear, thankfully) and that's what I was now doing in front of the Domino's food truck at our school's end-of-the-year softball game.

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Pretty crowded in front of the food trucks, but I guess that was the point – it was the last place you'd expect a gun to be exchanged. Why didn't we just meet somewhere, oh, I dunno, *private*, you may ask? Can't tell you; I didn't make the rules for this thing. I assume this was just the time and place that worked best for him. And it really was ingenious, I must say. We found each other in the crowd, I slipped him the money (my own personal savings) and he slipped me the piece, which I discreetly tucked into my pants. And that was that, no one noticed a thing, but then, we've already established that I have a knack for doing things without people noticing. (I'd probably make a pretty good magician, or pickpocket.) The exchange was over in an instant and I never saw that guy again.

From there, I headed inside the school for my locker. No, not to drop the gun off, I mean, *obviously*; the absolute *worst* thing I could do would be to remove it from myself. I was getting something, I can't even remember what at this point, but it's not important.

I stepped into the entrance of Washington hall. There was still a good chunk of the student body in the school, and Washington hall was no exception. Students in clusters talking with each other, or maybe even with teachers. At the far end of the hall, the late-morning sun poured in through the windows in the double doors, basking the hall in a golden light and really setting the mood. It was kind of a bittersweet mood, though, as while things were loosening up as the end of the year drew closer by the day, everyone was also aware that this was one of the only school-wide get-togethers we had after so many events got cancelled. Now, don't get me wrong, I'm not *entirely* a heartless cunt – I did feel kinda bad that I indirectly fucked a lot of people out of what probably would've been some good times. But hey – admin gave me no choice, and it's not like I *asked* them to cancel all those things, either.

Went to my locker and unlocked it. Never did keep a whole lotta crap in there. "Hey, Little Man," I heard from the other side of the door.

*Welp, there goes the good mood...* I took my face out of my locker and sure enough, there was Damon to my left, arms crossed, backed by his cronies.

He went on: "Thought you could get away from me *today*, eh, Little Man?"

I'd been putting up with these same five guys since middle school. Even on days I thought Damon couldn't possibly ruin, he always found a way to. He called me names, he pushed me around, and sometimes he even acted overtly sexual. (Those times were the worst. I thought it was obvious he wasn't completely straight, though of course no one was gonna admit it, least of all him.) I already didn't have any friends and was already a pushover, but I guess that's exactly

the kind of people guys like him target. But by the end of high school, I was *really* sick and tired of his shit, and with everything I was already going through in the past few days...

All of this was going through my head along with his words, but I still couldn't stop myself. Well... no, I didn't *want* to stop myself. This was it; I'd finally snapped. One thing I did keep in my locker was this hole puncher, you know, one of those long three-punch metal ones. In response to his question, I absent-mindedly replied "Yeah...", took the end of the puncher loosely in my right hand, brought my locker door out of the way with my left, looked Damon square in the eye, and I think that was the hardest I've ever thrown anything, period.

Years of first-person shooters paid off: it hit dead-center of his face with a sickening crack. (I think I broke his nose.) I guess it was pretty much at point-blank but it was still an amazing throw, if I must say. The puncher bounced off his face and landed with a clatter somewhere as Damon fell to the floor, out for the count. For a split second, everyone else was standing there with their mouths agape, processing what just happened, but I wasn't: I socked Jim hard in *his* nose but that's when they pulled themselves together and I got my ass handed to me. Next thing I knew, I was on my back and they were really laying into me. I mean, it just went to show how much these guys truly idolized Damon. I had no real chance of fighting back but it didn't matter because it wasn't long before, one by one, they were all pulled off of me. And then I was hoisted to my own feet.

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Principal's office, all of us. (Except Damon, who was admitted to the ER.) I found out later that day when I looked in a mirror the extent of what I myself sustained from the fight: bloody nose, bloody lip, two black eyes, the whole nine. Expulsions were doled out, including mine. Guess it was a good thing I was a senior and the year was pretty much over, anyway. Alright by me if I didn't get to walk at graduation – I was never planning on it to begin with. "But walking across that stage is a rite of passage..." Yeah, big fucking whoop. I mean, I didn't *choose* to go to high school, I *had* to; why should a big deal be made about something I had to do, especially considering I'll never have it so easy ever again? (Now, graduating college? *That's* something worth celebrating over.)

But I digress. I swallowed whatever they told me, that my parents would hear about this as soon as they got back from their vacation, that we (meaning I) would probably have to foot Damon's hospital bill, blah blah blah. He may not have been there that day to receive the full justice he deserved, but in that moment I thought it was all worth it: I finally got him back after all these years, I'd no longer be around for him to harass anymore, and as the cherry on top, he lost all of his lapdogs. But the best part that I think came from all of this? Between the fight and the principal's office, they never found the gun on me. Because I'm just awesome like that.

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It occurred to me that Damon might come after me after what I did to him. If I were in his hospital slippers, I probably would, too. If he did, though, it might come as more than a little surprising to find that I was packing heat now.



*They probably never even realized they expelled the person who pulled the fire alarm.*