

## What Really Happened

Samantha, Ashley, Sally, Bob, and George are all friends at O'Leary Jr. High. One night they were bored and dared Sally, who is new to the school, to steal chemicals from Ms. Miller's storage room so they could make explosions. Ashley, Ms. Miller's ninth-grade clerk, said she didn't think this was a good idea and would have no part of it. Sally said she would do it, hoping to gain more acceptance at O'Leary and prove she was "cool." So the others devised the plan behind Ashley's back.

Since Ashley said she wouldn't help them get Ms. Miller's key, George said he would make an impression of one of the custodian's master keys and get one made at his older brother's hardware store. He did this at lunch. The custodian has his keys hanging off his belt. While a bunch of students distracted the custodian, George pulled the key and made the impression in wax before anyone figured out that it was missing. The students didn't know the code to the building alarm system, so they knew they would have to be in the building before the custodians set the code when they left at 11 p.m. George, Sally, and Samantha stayed after school to get help from their teachers, and then instead of leaving, they hid in the bathroom, which is always cleaned by 5 p.m. They stayed in the bathroom playing cards, reading magazines, and eating snacks until 11 p.m.

The custodians left the building at 11 p.m., set the alarm code, and locked the doors. The students then let themselves into Ms. Miller's room with the key George had made. When they tried to use the key for the back room, it didn't work. They didn't realize that the master key does not work for the chemical storage rooms in the science classrooms. Each of these rooms has a separate key. George was disappointed that all his efforts had gone to waste in getting the key made, but it then dawned on him that he could probably get into other rooms...even the custodian's room. He left to see if he could find the storage room key. When he got to the custodian's room, he couldn't find any of the keys. He didn't know that they are actually stored in the safe in the front office. He then went to look in the principal's office to see if any more keys might be stored there, but had no luck there either. It was then that he had a brilliant idea.

George had gotten into trouble the week before with a substitute teacher who wrote up a referral on him. He just needed one more offense and he would get in trouble with his probation officer and possibly have to go back to the juvenile detention center. Even though he acted like he didn't care about school, he really did like O'Leary. He knew that all discipline referrals got entered into the discipline database on the school's computer system. He had taken several computer classes and thought maybe he could hack into the system and erase the referral. He planned to come back to the principal's computer later, after he solved the storage door situation.

Meanwhile, the girls decided to try picking the lock in case George couldn't find the key. They didn't have much luck, but they did strip the key hole. George came back and had the brilliant idea of hacking into the door with a crowbar that he saw in the custodian's room. This actually worked while causing minimal damage to the door. George told the girls to get the chemicals and meet at the edge of the field by Bob's house. He lives very close to O'Leary, and there is a huge farm field next to his house. George told his parents that he was spending the night at Bob's house. Bob lives close to Sally. Samantha was spending the night with Sally. Sally's parents were out of town and her older brother was in charge, which means nothing because he hardly even notices her. Bob had to attend a concert at the high school with his family and would sneak out later and meet them.

The girls were curious why George was so anxious to leave so quickly. He told them it was because he had to meet Bob at a certain time. This was partly true, but he also wanted to stop by the principal's office and do some hacking. He didn't want the girls to know this because he was concerned that they would tell, and because he didn't want them to know about his history of discipline referrals.

George left and successfully hacked into the computer and changed his discipline record; while he was at it, he decided to change his number of tardies and absences, too. He had no idea that in a few days, his hacking would be noticed and would lead to his ultimate downfall.

Once the girls were in the storage room, they found the chemical shelves and were overwhelmed with the number of chemicals on Ms. Miller's shelves. If only Ashley had come; she had just completed a chemical inventory for Ms. Miller so she probably would know the uses of some of these chemicals. They knew they could take the zinc, manganese, hydrochloric acid, and hydrogen peroxide because they had just completed a lab in Ms. Miller's class and knew that these chemicals could generate hydrogen and oxygen gasses. They experimented with small quantities of these in class, but they figured they could do the same things on a bigger scale and get huge results. Just as luck would have it, they found the chemical inventory list that Ashley had completed. Ashley was helping them out and didn't even know it. She had listed each chemical and different uses for each.

Armed with the chemical information, they decided to also take zeolite (powerful deodorizer), aluminum potassium (powerful astringent), potassium chloride (fertilizer), sodium silicate (gel), and sodium chloride (salt). This would be their little gift to George. George had terrible foot odor, and the zeolite would certainly solve his problem. The girls thought the silicates would be fun to play around with and it reminded them of the diaper lab they did in class and how each of those little beads soaked up 200 times its weight in water and formed a gel. They figured they could get creative and find something to do with the potassium chloride and aluminum potassium. They decided to also take the sodium chloride because they thought it was a chemical that reacted violently with water. They didn't realize it was just salt.

Sally used the ladder to get the chemicals from the shelf. In reaching for the chemicals, she lost her balance and fell backward, hitting her head on a shelf, dropping the jar of zinc, and spilling a bottle of sodium borate (borax) onto the ladder and the floor. Samantha caught her before she fell completely to the floor. Neither of them realized that when Sally hit the shelf with her head, it left some of her hair and blood. She had a bump on her head with a little bit of bleeding but otherwise was fine. She used some napkins that were on a shelf to wipe the blood and threw the napkin away into the trash can.

There was a small whiteboard in the storage room. Just to be funny, Samantha wrote on the board, "Thanks Ashley." Sally said that was too mean to do to their friend, so they erased the board and gathered all of the chemicals.

At midnight, just as they were getting ready to leave, they were startled to hear the school alarm go off. Afraid to go out into the hall and out the door, they quickly left through the classroom window. Samantha grabbed the crowbar and while escaping through the window, tore her shirt and dropped her gum onto the ground. As Sally went through the window, she spilled some zinc and then snagged her hair, leaving several strands on the window ledge.

Samantha and Sally ran to the meeting place in the field, sure that George had left long ago, but when they arrived they found him there. They didn't have a clue what made the alarm go off. George knew, but wasn't planning to tell them. After he finished with his task in the office, he left through the side doors. When he opened the door, the alarm sounded. He thought the alarm would only sound if it was opened from the outside, but apparently he was wrong. Bob finally arrived, and they told him what happened. They decided to go home since the police would be checking the surrounding area. They planned to meet again over the weekend and continue with their fun. This gave them more time to figure out what to do with the chemicals. Sally kept the chemicals in her bedroom.

The police arrived at the school and noticed a car parked by one of the buildings and checked that building first. They found Ms. Ramirez working in the auditorium cleaning up after the big school play that had been performed that night. They checked her ID badge and verified her story. The police concluded that she must have set the alarm off accidentally when moving around in the building. They are always getting false alarms like this from teachers, who never seemed to know how to arm and disarm the system properly. Everything appeared normal. There was no apparent vandalism and nobody lurking around the premises, so they left.

The next morning when the principal and custodian came to school, they noticed their doors were unlocked. They thought that the night custodians forgot to double check all the doors before leaving. Nothing was stolen and no vandalism was apparent, so they didn't think any more of it until Ms. Miller discovered her back room had been broken into and was a mess.

Sally, Samantha, Bob, and George met in the designated field two days later at 9 p.m. to experiment. They successfully made a big enough explosion that neighbors nearby called the police about the disturbance. The kids ran to Sally's house and later dispersed. They agreed that they were done with their antics. They decided there were too many variables involved with mixing chemicals, and they didn't really want to hurt anyone, least of all themselves. This was too close of a call. Police did a search near the neighbor's house and found an area in the field that had fresh footprints. Later testing revealed residue of hydrochloric acid, hydrogen peroxide, manganese, and zinc in the same area. The police filed a report, but didn't have any real leads.