



## 5 SECONDS

5 seconds give or take. That's all that is required for Alec Baldwin to disrupt your life. It was a normal day. I had stepped inside the corporate pharmacy to purchase a feminine hygiene product for my then partner. The cornucopia of options left me daunted and she had given no further instruction. I find myself at the outset in a state of anxious dissociation. I figure, attempt to discern the mean and go for that, some pads in purple wrapping (European, Non-Americans seem to prefer this, but who can say?)

After making my selection I wander, in a bit of an aimless fashion, to find some products I might need for myself: gum, nicotine, deodorant.

I hear a voice, authoritative, gravelly, a voice hiding a childlike bitterness towards himself and the world, it's Alec Baldwin. I know it immediately. His voice fills the entire store, magnified in an awful way by the acoustics that only a CVS can produce. The doppler effect suggests that he is coming closer. I steel myself, unto myself. Dissociation over, on alert, high alert. Echolocation in full effect. I'm now making out what he's saying, he needs something, and he needs it now.... Heading away from where the pharmacy is. His prescription has been left unfilled, life unfulfilled, someone has made a grave error and they'll need to pay.

Darien Belemu

He emerges from out of the aisles decked out in some designer suit. This entity makes a tall and imposing figure. He is followed by his brown body man. And I can see that he is broken at this point, head down, knowing he'll have a bad day, if not a bad weekend. I feel some empathy for his servant, indignation, the righteous type. This leads to anger, it overtakes me, righteous anger. I hear the tabloid voicemail he left for his teenage daughter a few years prior playing in my head. This anger moves my attention back to this premier Baldwin brother and we lock eyes. My brow is furrowed, and he looks towards me, his brow furrowed. We are together furrowed and alienated from one another, yet in recognition at the same time.

He is annoyed at being seen; I am annoyed at my shopping trip being interrupted by Alec Baldwin. 'CVS is the people's house' I say to myself, 'how dare he attempt to be the protagonist in this place!' He slows for a moment. I see him... a shill, he sees me... glaring. His gait slows, I stand firm. The iPhone drops a bit and the receiver is no longer at his lips. Who can say how long that moment truly lasted but we are both changed for the good or the ill.

The top Baldwin regains his focus, leans back into his tirade, and moves on, exits, his assistant in tow. He continues to lambast they who may or may not have been responsible for

his current anxiety. The sliding doors open for him, the sound fades off into the distance. it stays in however small or large a way, I can feel it now.

Mr. Baldwin, a deranged artist, would later in the course of filming a Manifest Destiny period piece, allegedly shoot and kill a crew member. The incident was in large part due to hiring scabs to oversee on set adherence to regulations and safety procedures. Initially charged with manslaughter, those charges against Mr. Baldwin will later be dropped. A friend who lives in Montana has told me he saw Mr. Baldwin back on location to finish his accursed film. He saw him working out at the local gym. My friend said Mr Baldwin seemed disappointed that no one gave a shit that he was there.

Prior to my encounter with Alec Baldwin, I had finished a shift at an F. Scott Fitzgerald inspired coffee shop and 'Speakeasy'. The vanity project of a Manhattan power couple. The roaring twenties themed fever dream was the vision of an heiress from some semi prominent political family. The husband, a renowned surgeon who had won awards during medical school for anatomical dissection. He had the eyes of a lizard set in the face of an eyewear model.

The heiress would periodically drop in to observe my work. She would station herself at the bar, pretending not to watch me from behind a laptop covered in nativist and libertarian stickers: NRA, Atlas holding up the earth before he shrugged, and the angry rattlesnake.

During one of the inspections, I made the mistake of engaging her in conversation. I ask her about the US state sticker on her laptop "O, are you from \*redacted\*? I lived in \*redacted\*." Without hesitation she begins to tell me her pedigree, how she grew up some Gulf state, her father a Petroleum executive, her grandfather a \*redacted\* supreme court justice. She makes a point of telling me about going through the year-long process required in New York City for acquiring a concealed carry permit, the gun safety course, fingerprinting process, and her at cost psychological evaluation. "I always carry a small arm on my person. Like right now, I'm using an ankle holster. You always have to be ready."

Even then at 11am in the financial district checking the quality of my latte art. I grew concerned, she began to bear a striking resemblance to Allison Williams. I start looking for a new job when I get home. I have occasional nightmares about the heiress hunting me on some property upstate, and the doctor vivisecting me in the pursuit of scientific progress.

These are the type of people who trigger my limbic system to engage in the fight or flight response. Those with the prerequisite wealth and power to shape the environments around them, able to dictate normalcy and the proper rules of behavior to the rest of us, in short they enforce cultural hegemony. Ostensibly liberal men like Alec Baldwin engaged in the production of art that reflect the myths, dreams, and collective memories of bourgeois society. The police procedurals, and thrillers where men take the law into their own hands., Pieces of media that teach the public to fear the other. Socialites like \*redacted\* who hope to invoke in her patrons' the feeling of living -if just for a short time- in a period of American history when the working class were treated with even more disdain than they are now, and when the extra-judicial killings of minorities were not just tolerated but celebrated.

I moved here 6 years ago, in part, to avoid loud, angry, paranoid white folks who were legally allowed to openly carry a sidearm at the grocery store. People who were encouraged and free to live out their maladaptive cowboy daydreams. I wanted to escape the hostile cultural norms of the American interior. The idea of living in a city full of other black and brown people appealed to me. But I find myself realizing more and more everyday that the same paranoid delusions, and unearned sense of entitlement exists here, just in a more haute culture form.

Many people move to New York from residential cul-du-sacs or gated communities to live out one personal fantasy or another. This tends to be called gentrification and left at that. However, I don't think the term on its own adequately describes the larger forces at play. When taken in the aggregate this cross section of the upper middle class are engaged in some play at the taming of the West in reverse. The urge to migrate to Big Sky Country has been replaced by the drive to reclaim urban spaces, infrastructure already developed, free to be remodeled into more suitable forms that are closer to their natural habitats.

Just as staking claim to the Americas required useful idiots willing to do violence, so too does the reclamation of America's cities. For instance, Daniel Penny, an aspiring bartender, avid surfer and Marine Corps infantry squad leader. I'm not sure what specific personal fantasy Danny wanted to play out which led him to leave the perceived safety of Long Island. Danny came from a place called West Islip. A seaside town situated on the South Shore. The town has a median household income of \$141, 957 according to the US Census Bureau. That would put the predominantly white West Islip around the 80th percentile nationally

So again, why did he come here? Especially, given his progenitors fleeing New York or some other urban center to avoid having to interact with people like Jordan Neely, the man he murdered. Danny, whether he knows it or not, was on the F train to enforce the ongoing reshaping of the city. White return requires a reenacting of Manifest Destiny, and all of the violence, displacement and extraction that comes along with it. This is where men like Danny are transformed into its willing instrument.

This is all to say that there are indeed dangerous, delusional individuals roaming the city who have no issue with murder at the slightest provocation, without consequence and with little remorse, Jordan Neely wasn't one of them, he was an innocent victim. A 14 year old boy left alone, following the femicide of his mother, treated like a piece of flotsam by the forces of capitalism that have reshaped American cities over the past 40 years into places more palatable for a new wave of urban settlers. Jordan was another in a countless number whose families came here in exodus generations ago. Drawn here by a false covenant: that by fulfilling the creature needs of New York's elite, their descendants would enjoy a better life and be full participants in a city that would ultimately never take fruition. Instead their child was made the object of a ritualistic sacrifice in the service of some new, death-driven, project.