

Widow Makers were kind of like potato chips, except they weren't made from potatoes. In fact, they weren't made from anything recognized as a food source. They were the new snack from Johnson & Higgins, a manufacturer of chemically engineered foods created in a laboratory by evil men in white lab coats. There was a list of thirty-two ingredients in Widow Makers—nothing the average citizen could recognize or pronounce. The only people who knew what was in them were the people who created them and the FDA, and neither one of them was talking. They came in six flavors. Bacon-Ranch was the most popular; Pepperoni Pizza Party was a close second. According to the surgeon general, Widow Makers were not a healthy food option. They had more calories than three Big Macs. They had more fat than two pints of Ben & Jerry's Chocolate Fudge Brownie. They were five times more likely to cause cancer than bacon. And they were more habit forming than black tar heroin. Withdrawals from Widow Makers included: heart palpitations, irritability, cramps, toe fungus, anal discharge, hallucinations, and dry mouth. But they were so crunchy and delicious that most people didn't care.

In one year, obesity rates in the United States went from 32% to 74%. The town mail carriers were soon too fat to deliver mail. Fire fighters walked into burning buildings because they were too fat to run. The town prostitute was too tired to stand on the street corner; instead she sat on the curb and waved at passing motorists. Despite the damage being done to the country, most Republicans in congress didn't want to see Widow Makers taken off the market, claiming it was our God given right to eat whatever the hell we wanted.

Just to be safe, Johnson & Higgins thought it best to put a warning label on the bag that said: "Eventually, this product will kill you. Enjoy responsibly. And don't even think about trying to sue us because YOU are responsible for your own actions." Johnson & Higgins originally marketed Widow Makers to children. They put a cartoon picture on the bag of a fat man in his underpants, sitting in a recliner, clutching his heart as if he were having a heart attack while watching TV. Kids would have contests to see who could eat the most Widow Makers before being rushed to the hospital to have their stomachs pumped. But after so many deaths, angry mothers from all over the country demanded congress pass a law pulling Widow Makers from high school vending machines and raising the legal purchasing age to 21. Congress did so, begrudgingly.

And that is why Little Jimmy Ferguson stood outside the local 7-11 on Friday night, waiting for someone cool to buy him snacks. (There were two Jimmy Ferguson's at Fifth Avenue Middle School, and

Little Jimmy was the shorter of the two. Hence the name.) He had just started ninth grade two months ago and already he was failing all his classes due to his snack addiction. Little Jimmy's hoodlum friends had entrusted him with their allowance money and they were waiting for him behind the store. If he didn't come through for them they were going to kick his mother fucking ass— and they told him so in no uncertain terms.

Little Jimmy stood outside the store and searched the faces of people entering, looking for someone sympathetic to his cause. He had to be careful; he didn't want to ask the wrong person and risk someone calling the cops. It was getting late. He was scared to ask the wrong person, but the cravings were forcing him to take risks. He saw someone approaching who looked like a possibility. The man was probably in his early-fifties, shaved head, powerfully built—albeit still an old man. He was wearing a Nirvana T-shirt that was too tight. Jimmy approached the man tentatively and said, "Excuse me, sir, can you do me a favor? If I give you money, can you buy me some Widow Makers?"

"What do you want to eat that shit for, Kid? You know what's in that crap? Those snacks'll kill you."

"No they won't. I'll be careful."

"Those chips are made from recycled plastic that they fish out of the ocean."

"So? I don't care. I'm only going to eat one serving size and then I'll put the rest away for later."

"Yeah, right. Nobody eats one serving."

"I will," said Little Jimmy. "Honest to god I will."

"You've got your whole life ahead of you, don't throw it away on bad snacks."

"Please, I gotta have some."

"I'm sorry, Kid. I can't do it."

"Please!" Jimmy shouted, hands trembling. "I just need four bags for me and my friends. Any flavor is fine. But if you can get Cheeseburger-Cheeseburger—"

"No. You're too young."

The man started to walk away. Little Jimmy pulled another five dollar bill out of a velcro Van Halen wallet that he'd bought on Amazon. "Here's another five. You can keep the change."

"Hey, I can't be responsible for what happens if you OD. I don't need that hanging over my head."

Little Jimmy sighed defeatedly. The old guy wasn't budging. "Okay, fine," said Little Jimmy. "Be

that way.”

“You want some beer?” the man asked. “You want a case of PBR?”

“Nah.”

“Cigarettes?”

“Already got some,” said Little Jimmy, patting the pocket of his jeans.

“Sorry, Kid.” The man walked inside the store.

“Damn it!” cried Little Jimmy. That was so close. That was the closest he’d come all night. He could almost taste the BTHQ coating his tongue. It was so disheartening. He took a deep breath and tried to regroup. He had to stay positive, even though it was past his bedtime and no doubt his parents would be waiting for him when he got home.

Jimmy became less selective, asking everyone who approached the entrance, but everyone refused. An hour passed. Some people laughed at him. One lady lectured him. Then someone went inside the store and told Adir, the store’s owner, there was a child in the parking lot propositioning people for snacks. Immediately, Adir grabbed his trusty broom and marched outside to confront Little Jimmy.

“You stay away from my store! There will be no snacks sold to minors!”

“Yeah, whatever,” said Little Jimmy. “You said that last time.”

“I mean it! I’m calling the police right now.”

Little Jimmy walked into the shadows, keeping one eye on Adir. This was the same dance they performed every weekend. Adir came outside with a broom poised above his head, but he never hit anybody. Around midnight Adir might call the police, but the cops were so fat it wouldn’t even occur to them to get out of their cruiser and chase someone—even someone as fat as Little Jimmy.

Little Jimmy stood under the street lamp, shaking, sweating, smoking another cigarette. There was a parking lot entrance on Larkfield, and another entrance on Clay Pitts; Jimmy stood somewhere in the middle, chastising himself for asking the old man to buy him Widow Makers. His phone clucked like a chicken. It was his friends sending him a text message: “What the fuck r u doing?” They were still waiting for him behind the store. “If u r eating r Widow Makers u die!” Little Jimmy texted them back: “Fuck U.” His phone clucked like a chicken again, but this time he didn’t bother to look at the message. He took another drag on his cigarette and wiped the sweat from his eyes. The activity in the parking lot was slowing down. His stomach was rumbling. If he didn’t get some snacks in his mouth soon he’d be having

conversations with his dead grandma by midnight. Either that or he'd shit his pants again.

She pulled into a parking spot before Little Jimmy had a chance to throw his cigarette away. It was Misti Boster, the UCC pastor where Jimmy's family sometimes attended church. She got out of her Honda Civic and walked toward him. She said, "Is that Little Jimmy Ferguson?"

Jimmy quickly tossed his cigarette in the bushes and feigned a smile. "Hello...pastor." He couldn't remember her name. "I was just getting ready to go home."

"How's your mother? Is she still waitressing at the Waffle House?"

"Yes, ma'am." Jimmy took a small step backwards.

"Oh good. How old are you now?"

"Thirteen."

"Thirteen. Not twenty-one."

"No ma'am. Not yet."

"Not old enough to buy Widow Makers."

"Widow Makers? No. I would never do that. I don't even know what they taste like. I mean, I hear they're pretty good, but—"

"And not old enough to smoke cigarettes."

"No. I was just holding that for a friend."

"Okay, good. Because I know your mother loves you very much Jimmy, and she'd be really upset if you were out here Friday night eating Widow Makers and smoking cigarettes."

"Not me." Jimmy laughed at the absurdity of such an idea. "Not this kid. No way. I'm on my way home right now. It's been a long day," he yawned and stretched out his arms, "and I'm ready for bed. Good night, Pastor."

"Good night, Jimmy." They parted ways. And then as an afterthought she turned around and yelled, "I'll see you Sunday!"

Jimmy waved as he walked behind the 7-11 where he found his friends watching porn on their phones, their bicycles still lying on the pavement. Quinn yelled, "Where the fuck have you been, asshole?"

"Open your mouth!" Rozmus yelled. He grabbed Little Jimmy's face, squeezing his cheeks. "Open!"

Little Jimmy opened his mouth and his friends checked his molars and tongue for anything orange. They found nothing.

“What the fuck is taking so long?” asked Billy. “I’m dying over here.”

“Yeah!” The boys shouted. “We’re dying! What the hell is taking so long?”

“If you think you can do a better job, then get off your candy ass and show me how it’s done!”

“Don’t give me that bullshit,” said Rozmus, it’s your turn. Now you get back out there and you get us some Widow Makers! And if you have to get on your knees and suck someone off, then do it!”

“Yeah,” shouted one of the boys. “Suck someone off. You’re probably good at that.”

“Yeah, I’m great at it,” said Jimmy, walking away. “You’re Mom taught me everything I know!”

Little Jimmy returned to his post near the front of the store, thinking one day he’d tell his friends to fuck off and ride his bicycle to South America. He stood around sulking, almost in tears, wondering if they had nice beaches in Buenos Aires, wondering if they sold Widow Makers. There was very little traffic this time of night. The chances of him scoring some Widow Makers seemed less and less likely. Each “no” he received was more devastating than the last. He thought about the possibility of stealing some Widow Makers, but they were kept locked behind the counter. He didn’t have access to a gun –not even a BB gun– and he didn’t like the idea of going through withdrawals while incarcerated at the Yellowstone Juvenile Detention Center.

Three more people refused to help. The sweat ran down the sides of Little Jimmy’s face. Then his prayers were answered. A fat man pulled into the parking lot from Larkfield Road. The man’s windows were down and Jimmy could hear music, something about a hotel in California. When Jimmy approached the man’s car, he smelled oregano. The man was so fat it looked like the steering wheel was imbedded in his stomach; the car rocked side to side as he struggled to get out. His long hair was tied in a ponytail, and on his T-shirt was a stain that might have been ketchup.

“Excuse me, sir. Sir? Can you do me a favor?”

“What do you need, Big Worm?”

Jimmy pulled money out of his wallet and said, “Think you can get me four bags of Widow Makers?”

The fat man looked over his shoulder, scanned the parking lot. “Maybe. What’s in it for me?”

“Ahh—I don’t know.”

“How much money you got there?” Jimmy showed him the money. The fat man said, “How about one bag for me and three bags for you?”

Jimmy didn’t have to think about it. “Deal.” He handed the fat man his money.

“Meet me around back,” whispered the fat man.

“Okay. Thank you.”

“Right. What flavor you want?”

“Anything. Just anything they have.”

The fat man went inside the store and Jimmy ran around back to tell his friends. “We got snacks! We got snacks! I got some fat son of a bitch to hook us up!”

The boys jumped in the air and cheered. “We did it!” shouted Quinn. “Yes!” The boys hugged and cheered and exchanged hi-fives. “We got snacks!”

“He’s gonna keep one bag for himself.”

“What? Why?” asked Quinn.

“I had to,” said Jimmy. “He wasn’t going to agree to it otherwise. We still have three bags. That’ll tide us over until tomorrow.”

“Yeah, I guess. What flavor is he getting?”

“Who the fuck cares?”

Quinn said, “Maybe we should hit him over the head with a brick or something and take all the snacks?”

The idea was quickly dismissed as too dangerous. The boys sat on the curb and updated their Facebook status. “Feeling satisfied” typed Rozmus with a check-in from the 7-11 parking lot. No explanation was necessary. The boys took selfies. They sent text messages to other friends who had attended a house party in Hardin. Maybe they would meet up later.

“That’s him!” Shouted Jimmy. Everyone stood up to get a better look at the old hippie in the Subaru. Jimmy waved to the fat man as the car approached. There were several bags of Widow Makers on the front seat and a Big Gulp in the center console. The fat man was smiling. He rolled down the window and said, “Thanks for the snacks, asshole. Now get yourself some!” He flipped them the middle finger and made the tires squeal as he pulled out of the parking lot laughing like Satan himself.

