

big mac, strawberry shake and large fries by craig shafer writing as jared botticelli

Apollo, a young man, somewhere between 17 and manhood, picks up a cup and takes a long drink through a straw. He looks with appreciation at the cup and then puts it down.

Strawberry shakes rock my world. No kidding. Right now, I can't really think of anything that makes me happier than a friggin' Micky D's strawberry shake. My boys always gave me crap about ordering strawberry, like it was the pussy's choice or whatever, but, ya know what, Real Men drink Strawberry. I kid ya not.

Apollo picks up his Big Mac and pulls the paper back. He takes a bite.

Add in one of these beauties, and, well, you've died and gone to Big Mac heaven. But, umm, seriously what in the hell is the secret sauce? Why's it a secret anyway? Who knows the secret? Ronald? I wouldn't ask that freak anything. I'd run the other way in a hot minute. Seriously. But, whatever, nothin' like a Big Mac. Whoppers suck.

He eats the last bite of his burger, crumples the paper into a ball and tosses it.

Last bite. Yum.

He calls out to someone other than the audience before him.

'K, I'm done. I'M DONE. Okay, guess they don't care. Uh, so it's kinda funny, but that's what I had that night. You know, "The Night of the Incident," as everybody and their mother likes to call. Okay, hold up. Hold up. I need to give some history here. Get you guys up to speed with all of this. Lemme press the rewind button and we'll go back there. See, was me, Peach and Slideshow that night. Three of us boys. We'd just been out driving in my Mustang. Cherry Ked. Really killer. My Mom and Pops bought it for me for graduation. Only had it for a coupla months. So, anyway, we're out driving around, went to McDonalds, and umm, Peach used his fake ID to score us some beer at 7-11 and we drive down to that park in Midtowne. Ya know, triangle park...the one that's shaped like a triangle or whatever. The cops don't usually go through there at night, so that's where we'd go to drink or whatever. So, that night, we're sitting on the wall, drinkin, talking about going away in the fall, right? We'd been there awhile when we see this dude walkin down the sidewalk across the street. We could see him, ya know, plain as day with the street lights and what-not. And Peach and Slideshow, they start laughing, right? They start bustin up because he looks like...he looks like he's queer, ya know? Like he's a guy gay. Friggin' tight jeans like a chick would wear, muscle tee, whatever. We knew he was walking home from the gay bars, right? Cuz there like two or three blocks down from the park or whatever. And umm, we start yelling crap across the street to him. Stupid stuff, ya know. "Hey homo", "Why don't you come over here and show us what you're good for?", just teasin', right? And then, umm, somebody yells, "Faggot" and this guy, this gay guy, he turns and he yells back, "Screw you." And see, the thing is, that's what got us pissed off, that's what started all these. If he'd just kept walkin', none of this woulda ever happened...but, umm, he yelled back. And then, umm, all of a sudden we're not sittin' on the wall anymore, somehow we're across the street, right where the dude was walkin'. And somehow, Slideshow has the bat from the back of my 'Stang, and that guy, that gay dude, is down on the cement, and his arms and legs are goin' all crazy, like an octopus or something, just swinging around, and Slideshow, he's holdin' that bat just like when we were in high-school, gettin' ready to dash for first base, and then, Slide is swinging the bat and he connects, but he's not hittin' a ball, he's hittin' this dude, and he swings and hits swings and hits swings and hits and the guy is making these sounds like a wild animal, cryin' out, growling, begging, screamin', all this stuff all at once. And, uh, then Peach takes the bat and he swings too, and he hits this dude, like a buncha times. Then we're all just kinda standin

there, ya know? And uh, Peach, he says to me, "Do it, man, you gotta do it. You gotta hit the faggot. Just like a pinata. Just like a pinata, man." And, uh, see the thing is, I wasn't gonna hit him at all, ya know? He was busted up bad already, and, uh, I thought we should just split, right? So I'm just standin' there, not doing anything, and Slideshow says, "What's the deal, Apollo? You feel sorry for the faggot? You wanna kiss the queer and make him better? What are ya, queer, Apollo?" And, uh, I'm not, of course, and my boys they know that, but I got so pissed off that I took the bat, my bat, and I'm looking at this guy on the ground and he's bleedin real bad, but he can still talk, can still yap, ya know? And he looks up at me and he just says one thing, jus' one. He says, "Tell my Mom I love her," and I swung the bat and when it connected it was like hittin' something soft, but then there was this cracking and I'm swinging and swinging and then, I dunno. I hear Peach say, "Dude, that's enough man, we gotta split. The queer might have AIDS...we gotta go get this off." And I realize there's all this blood. So much blood. Like the three of us are in a horror movie or somethin with gallons of cherry syrup all over us. So we split. And we left that guy on the sidewalk.

The dude's name was John Smith. Plain-ass name if I've ever heard one. And, guess what, he was a gay guy. Had a boyfriend or life partner or whatever they call it. He was 25. He died in the ambulance on the way to the hospital. And, uh, by morning it's all over the papers and on the news and whatever. And Peach, he doesn't even last a day before he squeals to the cops. So I get arrested the next day and that's when everything starts goin' really bonkers, ya know? And my Mom and Pops they get this team of lawyers, and they come every day and ask me questions about everything. Stuff that doesn't have anything to do with "The Night of the Incident." I have to answer questions about my family and Peach and Slideshow and whether I've ever had a girlfriend (negatory on that front- never found one that met my standards, ya know?) and they just keep askin' all of these questions, and then the trial starts. And, I guess, to tell ya the truth, that's where I get a little sketchy on everything. It's like it just went on forever. And, um, this probably sounds way cracked-out or whatever, but I started to see it like it was a circus. Like I was six again or somethin' and I'm at the circus with my pops. And the lawyers are all lions growling at each other, and all the people that came and talked about blood types and stains and splatters are just clowns and some of them have happy faces and some of them have sad faces, and the judge, this old bald guy with big glasses, he's the ringleader, ya know? Directing all of them. It's like I could smell the popcorn and hear that music, the circus music, just playing on a loop over and over again. My lawyers did good though, they did, they tried to help me, tried to say it was Peach who beat the dude last and that it wasn't my bat and they used words I didn't even know what meant, like "Narcissistic Personality" and "Internalized Homophobia" and, uh, the thing is though, I did it, ya know? I did. His blood was on my clothes, in my 'Stang, everybody knew I did it. And so, one day we're at the circus, the trial, and this District Attorney, this small chick with perfect blonde hair and big red lips, she's really chappin' my ass, and she's just grillin' me, askin' me the same dumb questions over and over again, "How many times did you strike Mr. Smith with the baseball bat?" "Did you intend for Mr. Smith to die?" "Did you mean to strike Mr. Smith in the head?" And the circus music is just like drillin' a hole in my head and I'm feelin' like I'm gonna puke and I just see red, all this red blood all over everywhere and I put my head down and then I just said it. I just lost it. I did. "I killed him, okay? I knew I was gonna kill him when we went over there. I beat his friggin' head in with a bat, okay? I fuckin' killed him." I don't even know why. I just did. It was like I was the one bleedin' all over before I yelled and then afterwards, everything was quiet. And I look out across the circus and I see my Mom, ya know? And she's just mouthin' "I love you" over and over again. And that was about it. It was over pretty quick after that.

Apollo turns from the audience and urinates in the toilet in his cell. As he turns back he is zipping up his fly.

Sorry. There ain't a whole lotta privacy in here. I don't get my own bathroom or anything. It's weird, ya know? Time doesn't make any sense in here. Sometimes I think I was drivin' around in my Mustang with Slideshow and Peach a coupla weeks ago and sometimes it feels like years. But, most of the time I look in the mirror and I'm still 18. It's just the same. There's this thing, you guys know, this appeals thing. And some of it you have to do. You can't get around it. But, uh, I told the lawyers I didn't want to do anymore of it. Just let it go. Every time I'd have to go down to the room and meet with them it was just more questions about all kinds of crap and it made my head hurt and I'd feel sick again. My Mom and my Pops, they begged me, ya know? Begged me to "stay positive," but uh...I had to meet with all kinds of shrinks to

make sure I wasn't crazy, that I knew what I was deciding...and well, they decided I wasn't crazy and that I knew. If you remember anything I tell ya- it's that sometimes you have to let things be.

I never used to dream very much. But in here. I dream about the freakiest stuff, seriously. Don't laugh, but umm, it's about this giant bird, like a dove or something, and it's like made of glass, you can see right through it, and it's filled with water and sometimes this giant bird has my face and sometimes it's that dude's. Ya know, John Smith. And it's just flying around in circles and circles and when it hits something it just shatters into a gazillion pieces, but the pieces disappear and the water inside just falls like this warm rain all over me. Remember, I'm not crazy. Even the shrinks don't know what the hell that means. And then, another one...I'm driving my Mustang, and I'm going to the seashore. I drive right up onto the sand and I walk down the beach without any sneakers on, and the sand is all warm between my toes and frickin' John Smith is sittin' on the beach, totally fine, totally calm. And umm, this is totally weird, but we roll up our jeans and we walk along the water together, kinda wading or whatever. And we're talking, we're always talking in this one. But the sound of the ocean is so loud that I can never hear what we're saying. I wanna frickin' know what we're saying but I never can. And umm, sometimes, this dude, he touches my hand. Not in a homo kinda way, ya know? Not like that. But this way, like he knows somethin'. But I don't know what it is. I've never even seen the ocean, but I know exactly what it looks like.

I'm not an expert on life or anything, but I guess screwed-up shit just happens sometimes. Anything coulda changed that night. I coulda gotten food poisoning from my Big Mac or we coulda gone to see Slideshow's girl or I coulda told Peach....whatever. Ya know what I mean, right? It coulda turned out way different is my point. But it didn't. And sometimes you gotta let things be. I'm not a bad kid, I just did something screwed up. Maybe I thought it'd fix something inside me. I dunno. I kinda think that this life is sorta like boot camp. Trainin', ya know? Trainin' for something else. I don't know what the somethin' else is, but if I find out, I'll be sure an' let ya know. Fo Sho!

Someone from outside the audience addresses Apollo and he responds to them.

Huh? It's almost time. Gotcha. I gotta finish my fries first. I always leave my fries 'til last. Cuz they burn my tongue when they're hot. Best part of the Number #1 Supersize. I told my Mom I was gonna be really brave about all this. I did. But uh, right now...I...umm, I don't wanna sound like a Mama's boy or anything, but when I was a little kid my Mom used to sing this song to me, the mountain song, ya know, "*She'll be coming 'round the mountain when she comes, she'll be pulling six white horses when she comes...*" and so, I'm just gonna kinda sing that all the way through, all the way, ya know? I really love my Mom. I won't be able to see her through that mirror thing, but I know she's gonna be there, and I know her mouth'll be moving... Hey, if you guys see her or whatever, you let her know that. Let her know that it wasn't her fault. The fact that the bad stuff happened, or that I'm...well, just talk to her.

You get to hearin' about the gas. The chamber, ya know? They say it's like you're drowning- like you're goin' out to sea and ya never come back. They say you gotta breathe in deep, real deep, ya know? So that's what I'm gonna do. I don't wanna drown. So I'm gonna breathe in deep...real deep. I'm gonna let the sea take me home.

Apollo responds again to an unseen voice.

Okay, okay. Jeez. I just got a fry or two left. Yup. I gotcha. *She'll be coming 'round the mountain when she comes. She'll be comin' round the mountain when she comes.*