

New Coke

by Chris Okum



The Name Of The Father

His mother remembers his first encounter with television. It was 1988. The family was watching the NBC television show *Night Court*. He was two years old. He jumped off the couch, pressed his face to the screen, and started kissing Markie Post. Then he poked at her breasts and licked her legs from the bottom up. His father told him to stop but his mother said to leave him alone. His father considered the television an expensive piece of furniture. "We can build him up," said his mother, "or we can rip him apart. I think the first option is the safest." His father rhapsodized about the rich, soft mahogany cabinet and how it was the nicest purchase he had ever made in his life. When the show cut to a commercial and Markie Post disappeared, he cried. "You can't even tell it's a television," said

his father, who kept looking at him like he was an unwanted guest from a foreign country, similar to the Russian emigres his father's parents had sponsored to come to the United States, who had the flat affect of two spies convinced that everyone else knew they were spies and therefore had resigned themselves to being taken into custody at any moment. When the show came back on and Markie Post reappeared, he started to dry hump the screen with slow, considered thrusts, which was too much for his father. "He needs to be domesticated," said his father. That was the moment his mother said she could feel it all slipping away, and so she chose to get up from the couch and smoke a cigarette in the garden. His mother remembers standing outside and feeling like the only solution to the problem of him simulating sex with the television was to give up her job as Remote Controller, a position she had appropriated as a compromise for his father's fiscally insensitive purchase of such an ostentatious television set. The remote control would make his father feel better, give the appearance that patriarchal authority had finally been consolidated, and act as a subtle reminder to both his mother and himself that a father with a remote is the proprietor of ultimate power. Better yet, his father would be able to change the channel if things got too hot between him and the simulation of Markie Post. His mother understood that she should've been preoccupied with other matters, but his behavior was going to force her to become an accomplished professional in the business of this world.

The Architecture Of Control

John Hughes visited the set of *Some Kind of Wonderful* to see whether or not Howard Deutsch was approximating the Hughes-ian style of direction that the film needed in order to achieve success, and was surprised when ten year old Candace Cameron - who played Cindy, the little sister of the film's hero, Keith - walked up to Hughes and asked him if he had heard the good news. "No," said Hughes, "I haven't. What is it?" Hughes knelt down so he could communicate

with Cameron at eye level. "Well," said Cameron, "the good news is that your salvation is still available through Jesus Christ." Hughes stood up. He looked at Cameron, lit a cigarette, smiled, and walked away. Hughes would visit the set of *Some Kind of Wonderful* five more times during principal photography and each time he did he made sure to give Cameron the silent treatment, something that was noticed by one of the film's stars, Mary Stuart Masterson, who cornered Hughes one afternoon at the craft service table, where Hughes was chugging a large Styrofoam cup of coffee. "John," said Masterson, "I saw that Candace keeps trying to talk to you and you keep ignoring her, pretending like she isn't there. What's going on? You made her cry the other day, you know that?" Hughes reared back, aimed, and shot his empty coffee cup into the trash can like a basketball. He looked at Masterson, lit a cigarette, smiled, and walked away. When Leah Thompson asked Hughes why he was giving Masterson the silent treatment, Hughes did the same thing: lit a cigarette, smiled, and walked away. Same with Eric Stoltz when he asked Hughes why he was giving Thompson the silent treatment, same with Craig Sheffer when he asked Hughes why he was giving Stoltz the silent treatment, same with Elias Koteas when he asked Hughes why he was giving Sheffer the silent treatment, and same with John Ashton when he asked Hughes why he was giving Koteas the silent treatment. By the end of the shoot the only person that Hughes wasn't giving the silent treatment to was Maddy Corman, who played Keith's other little sister, but then Corman fell out of grace with Hughes when she innocently remarked that she thought Martha Coolidge's *Valley Girl* was the best film ever made about teenage girls. By the end of his life Hughes had a list of over 160 people he was actively giving the silent treatment to, and when asked by his wife why he persisted in being alienated from so many people, Hughes said, "What are you supposed to do when everyone is always saying mean things to you?" Hughes' wife could not answer this question, and so she remained silent, which Hughes perceived as her tacit agreement with all who had hurt Hughes in the past. Hughes had not spoken to his wife in six weeks when he

suffered a fatal heart attack while walking in New York City. In the ambulance on the way to the hospital, flitting in and out of consciousness, Hughes overheard one of the EMTs remark that they were brining in an unknown male and needed a cardiac crash unit ready to go immediately upon arrival. Hughes took offense at not being recognized and decided to give the entire world the silent treatment, one that would last forever. That would show them.

You Had Best Remember This

It's not fun to watch your friend become successful. One minute they're just like you, i.e., a nobody, unsuccessful, confused about how they're going to make their way through life, and the next minute their eating clams on the Long Island sound with Ed Burns, laughing at a joke cracked by Angelina Jolie, comparing cufflinks with Danny Aiello. You try to hold on to them, but they float away nonetheless, looking down at you, shrugging their shoulders. Successful men do not keep in touch with unsuccessful friends. Because if you aren't making dollars, then being friends with you doesn't make any sense. "Sorry, man," they say to you, "but you didn't make the cut." You can't take it personally. You have to tell yourself that you did your best. And you should try and see it from their perspective, which is that it's your fault. They didn't do anything to you, you did everything to yourself. Sometimes you'll be out in public and think you see your friend, but you only think you did. It was just someone dressed up like the Marlboro Man. You fling yourself in the other direction and before you can get out of earshot you hear the Marlboro Man say, "You decide." You've had enough. You run like a coward in the dirty rain. You leave the house of love. You hear the sound of a wooden string. What are you waiting for. The sky becomes red and gray. You feel ill. Your spirit starts to heave. You've got everything you need. It's just your imagination running wild. You follow the black horizon. Watch your friend float back down. Gravity always wins in the end.

Uh Huh Huh Huh

Brian Jones fathered five children before the age of 27. He couldn't write a song no matter how hard he tried. When he listened to the blues he often confused the effect the music was having on him with the things the music symbolized. He liked to spike other people's drinks with LSD. His father never got over having to kick Brian out of the house when Brian was 17. He was the oldest looking 26 year old Michael Lindsay-Hogg had ever seen. He screwed Marianne Faithful, who also screwed Mick and Keith. He screwed Anita Pallenberg, who also screwed Mick and Keith. He liked to drink scotch and Coke all day long and mitigate the effects of the alcohol with massive quantities of speed. His father was a jet engineer. His mother never showed him any affection. His mop top/bowl/Prince Valiant hairstyle was a way to cover up the odd shape of his eyebrows and well as his impending baldness. When he listened to the Beatles he often hallucinated that he was ten years old again and at school and running through the halls and into the boy's washroom where there's a boy standing at the urinal and he taps the boy on the shoulder and the boy turns around and the boy is him. He liked to use Bill Wyman's head as an ashtray. He was nervous around Paul McCartney, according to Paul McCartney, but then again, Paul McCartney says everyone is nervous around Paul McCartney. He wanted to get the bags under his eyes removed. He considered 'Satisfaction' to be "vulgar" and not the kind of music he thought his band would wind up making when he founded the Stones. During the filming of *Rock and Roll Circus* he left the stage in the middle of 'Jumping Jack Flash' so that he could hide backstage and write in his journal a theory he had been working on about Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* which had to do with the movie being an allegory for itself. He wanted his sexuality to be free of domestic orthodoxy. He liked looking out into the audience and seeing girls being unable to control their emotions. He didn't like people making fun of him. He drowned. He played pool against Bo Diddley almost 20 years before George Thorogood did. His last

words, said to himself, were, "Oh no, I'm going to hell." When told by an old man on the streets of London that he and his bandmates were a bunch of reprehensible toads, he smiled and said, "Perhaps, my good man. But that still doesn't explain where the music comes from." He had submechanophobia, the fear of submerged man-made objects, such as sewers and pipes. He believed his clothes and savoir faire served as a form of social commentary, critiquing the superficiality and hypocrisy of Late Victorian society, which is what he considered England to still be stuck in as of 1964. He taught himself how to play the sitar without any instruction from outside sources. When not under the influence of drugs and alcohol he could swim the length of an Olympic-sized pool while holding a loaded Webley revolver in one hand without getting it wet. His favorite television program as a child was *Andy Pandy*. He told his last girlfriend, 21-year-old Swedish Seamstress Anna Wohlin, that he had no idea how he had lost his way, and when she put her hand on his arm to console him, he laughed and did a spit take with a mouthful of brandy. He was 5'6. He would bless dogs when he walked past them in the street. He sought emotional control and cognitive closure by not tolerating any joke that did not provide a resolution of its incongruent elements. He bought a shiny red typewriter just so that he could go "clack-clack, clickty-clack, clack-clack, clickity-click, clack-clickity, clack-clack."

Kingdom Of The Same

Close me I'm a book. Hang me I'm a plane. Eat me I'm a gun. Watch me I'm a breeze. Rip me I'm a smile. Break me I'm a lake. Drain me I'm a blank. Melt me I'm a fire. Clean me I'm a cloud. Bake me I'm a rock. Kill me I'm a clock. Love me I'm a growth. Add me I'm a noun. Pinch me I'm a dick. Hammer me I'm a hand. Spill me I'm a tree. Visit me I'm a ghost. Catch me I'm a thought. Deal me I'm a dance. Milk me I'm a kiss. Sort me I'm a song. Ride me I'm a hat. Wrap me I'm a check. Hold me I'm a cough. Enjoy me I'm a fact. Ignore me I'm a bomb. Name me I'm a void. Touch me I'm a loss. Wake me I'm

a fish. Bounce me I'm a gate. Grow me I'm a breath. Knot me I'm a tongue. Quit me I'm a life. Claim me I'm a light. Hunt me I'm a thought. Slap me I'm a war. Protect me I'm a trick.

When The Stars Threw Down Their Spears

He waited on the hotel bed for the woman he had been seeing for a few weeks to get out of the shower. He stared at the room service cart, the half-eaten cheeseburger, the still-filled glasses of ice water, the crumpled napkins smeared with ketchup, and the tiny vase holding a single red rose. The red rose spoke to him. The red rose said, "If you sleep with this woman you will ruin your life. You will end up poor. You will end up fat. You will end up miserable. You will disconnect from your family. You will lose all of your friends. You will watch your child die. Everything you ever wanted to be will disappear the moment you decide to be with this woman. And it won't be her fault. It won't. It's just the way things are going to be. I'm telling you. Run. Get up from the bed right now while she's in the shower. Put on your clothes. Walk down the hall. Get in the elevator. Leave. Go. Do not look back. You are about to make not one of the biggest mistakes of your life, but the biggest. Please listen to me. I know I'm just a rose. But I can see you're thinking about it. Just do it. Do what I'm telling you to do. You have mere seconds to act. Act now. Please. Before everything changes forever." The woman came out of the bathroom, dripping wet and shockingly nude. She laid down on the bed. She told the man to make love to her. And so he did, slowly and incompetently. And so everything the rose said came true. He lived in poverty. He became obese. He suffered from depression. His wife got pregnant and gave birth to a son he could not afford to raise. The son died. Then his wife died. At his wife's funeral he sat up front and stared at his shoes. When he was finally alone he stood over his wife's closed casket, upon which there was a single red rose. "I should have listened to you," said the man to the rose. "Don't worry about it," said the rose. "No one ever does."

Brand New Clothes And A Big Fat Place

People talk about the lurid reign of Jean-Bédél Bokassa, who was the second President of the Central African Republic (CAR) from 1966 to 1979. People who were imprisoned by him. People who were married to him. People who were President before him. People who were fathered by him. People who worked for him. They talk about his 18-year-old Romanian dancer wife, who intentionally flaunted her affairs in front of Bokassa so he would kill the men who had made him a cuckold. They talk about the walk-in freezer which contained stacks of dead bodies that Bokassa would have his personal chef prep, cook, and season for his gustatory delight. They talk about two daughters named Martine and how Bokassa had the Martines' husbands killed, one for trying to assassinate him, one for murdering his grandson. They talk about torture, how Bokassa had one of his rivals chained naked in a cell for three years without any human contact. They talk about his hatred for his fellow Africans. They talk about his ceaseless self-promotion. They talk about his promise in 1966 to abdicate power once the Communist threat had been defeated, a promise he did not keep. They talk about his rule that men and women between the ages of 18 and 55 had to provide proof that they had jobs, or else they would be fined or imprisoned. They talk about his friendships with Muammar Gaddafi and Nicolae Ceaușescu. They talk about the constant atmosphere of dread and terror he created, encouraged, and nurtured. They talk about his implementation of a new constitution that transformed the CAR into the Central African Empire (CAE), how he gave himself the title of "His Imperial Majesty" Bokassa I, and his formal coronation that took place on December 4, 1977, which cost his country roughly \$20 million, one third of the CAE's annual budget. They talk about Bokassa with a shrug and a rueful smile. Because there is no end to the parade of little men whose dream is to wear a gaudy costume as they ride in the back seat of a horse-drawn carriage towards their gilded palace of sin, ecstatic with lust, and indifferent to life. And

here they come, these little men, stomping all over the moonlight.
They talk in someone else's voice, resistant to surrender, and there's
a dimness in their eyes that's all the way doubtful.

