

The Nickel and the Soda Machine

By A. C. Zito

Francis laughed at his wife as she curtsied with the can of Coke the tour guide handed her. She took her non-existent frilly hat off and exaggerated her bow as she said to him:

“How do you do, Sir Francis of Montgomery County?” Francis laughed at her terrible British accent.

“Madame of Cynthia; I am quite parched. Would you mind if I have a sip of your cold beverage?” Cynthia took a step back in shock putting her free hand to her chest replying:

“Sir Francis! Now *where* are your manners? Would I mind? *Would I mind?* No, my good sir; do *you* mind?” Francis couldn’t stop laughing. He smiled at her, taking the can from her hand, chuckling out:

“Oh stop being such a goofy goober and give me the can!”

“Now who made *you* the Earl of Montgomery? *Hmmm?*” Francis didn’t have time to reply. He was too busy chugging the rest of the Coke.

“Gosh I love Coca-Cola... say! When do you think they’ll give us another one? I mean we’re surrounded around the sugary beverage. You’d think we’d be able to have an unlimited amount of it during the entire couple of hours the tour lasts!” Cynthia looked at Frank shaking her head with her usual dry expression whenever she felt her *Frank-rant* coming on.

“Look at that belly, Francis! Do you really think you need *another* soda? And why did I even agree to spend part of our vacation in Georgia at the Coke factory? My mother would let me know if she saw me now: *‘That’s how you know you have an overweight husband, sweetie!’*” Frank threw the empty can into a nearby trash-can and responded:

“Well, at least my three-pointer is still *on fleek!*” She shoved him in the back. And hard too, yelling out:

“I WISH MY HUSBAND’S BODY WAS ‘ON FLEEK!’” Frank hated when she got this way. What else were they supposed to do? They’d already been to the Mall of Georgia; Atlanta Motor Speedway; she made him walk to the top of Blood Mountain; at some point at Martin Luther King Jr. National Historical Park he passed out from the heat; and this was their last stop besides Fort Pulaski National Monument. All Frank wanted was to walk around in the World of Coca-Cola. That’s all he cared about.

“I’m sorry I love soda. Cynthia... look at my body... does it look like I like water?” She didn’t reply. He decided to leave the conversation as it is and hope she’ll try to get him in shape during any time *but* their vacation when all he really cares about is trying to relax and have a good time.

A little child that seemed to be around seven or eight went up to his mother and tugged on her shirt.

“Mom, do you think I’m fat?” The boy was rather heavy which made Francis feel uncomfortable with what his wife started. The mother quickly said:

“No, sweetie, you’re how God made you!” The boy smiled at this and went back to the front of the tour group skipping merrily with his extra-large cup of Coke in his hands spilling over at the edges as he tried to catch up with his other chubby, little friends.

“You should’ve told him the truth.” Cynthia snapped at the mother angrily. The mother kept walking. Frank could tell she was trying to avoid conflict.

“Honey,” he whispered angrily at her. “Leave the nice lady alone.” He put his hand on her shoulder which she immediately shoved off, whispering back:

“There are only fat people here. I’m surrounded by *fatties*.” She then looked at her husband with a newfound disgust. “Did you know you disgust me? Because you do; you disgust the living hell out of me.” She then shoved past the people in the crowd until she got to the little boy where she then, with the back of her shoe, shoved him to the ground where she then yelled into his ear:

“**FATTY!**” Frank quickly shoved his way to the front where he helped the boy up. The child was hysterically crying. The mother was quickly at the child’s side, snapping at Francis saying:

“*Don’t touch him!*” Before Frank knew it, they had disappeared behind a corner. Cynthia was nowhere to be found either. Why did she do that? She’s never done something so awful before! It caught Francis totally off-guard.

“Was that your wife that just did that to the child?” The tour guide asked as she was already on the phone with someone whispering something that Francis couldn’t catch.

“I- *umm*, I- I don’t ...” Frank felt like his world was swirling into a dense fog.

“Because I think we’re going to have to get you and your wife to leave.” Two security guards were already at her side. She pointed to him and whispered something into one of their ears. They, then each grabbed one of his shoulders and pushed him away from the tour group and past hallways etched with different Coca-Cola logos, facts about different parts in the company’s history. They brought him into a little set-up of what was supposed to be a store from way back in the day. There were mannequins standing around the counter with glass bottles of Coke.

“What are you doing bringing me in here?” Frank asked. Neither of the security guards answered. Instead, they kicked him in the butt having him stumble down a flight of stairs that were off to the side inside the little store. They laughed at him as he landed at the bottom one of them yelling out:

“That’s what you get for kicking a little kid, you fat freak!” One of them then quickly rushed down the stairs and shoved him with his foot into the room that Frank quickly realized must’ve been some type of cellar. The security guard swung his arm back and landed his fist square on Frank’s jaw. He flew to the ground feeling the cement ground hit him hard as he came in contact with it.

“What the...” But he didn’t have time to say anything else. The other security guard was already on top of him landing blow after blow to his head. He felt blood rushing from his nose and swishing around inside his mouth. They began taking turns. One would stay standing laying kick after kick into his gut while the other turned his jawline into a mound of red putty.

Minutes past and Frank came to with the two security guards standing over him while he lay in a tiny pool of his blood.

“Crazy what a crowd will do to you for just kicking a little, helpless kid.” One of the security guards said. The other one nodded in agreement replying.

“You’re lucky we saved you, guy. The cops will be here shortly. Good thing we know them. We’ll tell them the whole story. Don’t worry.”

“Yeah,” The other one agreed. “Your mouth will be wired shut from the damage they did to you so try not to talk, we’ll let them know what really happened.” They silently laughed to themselves as they left the room, closing the door behind them. After they left he went back to sleep.

His eyes opened up to see that the pool of blood had since been cleaned up. His face had been cleaned, his head wrapped in a bandage along with his rib cage being given plenty of stitches of where they were needed most. His body lay facing the one thing to be found in the tiny, dark, dank room. It was a soda machine. Francis tried to sit up but found it hard being that every part of his body seemed to cry out in protest.

“Help... he-“ *cough cough cough* A puddle of blood spurted from his mouth as he tried to retrieve his inner words. He began to look around wildly at the small, dark room. A piece of paper was taped to the back of the door. He tried to read it, but it was hard being so dark in the tiny, tight, cramped space. His eyes soon adjusted after some time, and he read it out to himself. He then read it again feeling confused by what it meant. Then the words sunk in as he registered what they were telling him here at the World of Coca-Cola.

The world behind this door will no longer be yours anymore. He read the piece of paper an eighth time to be fully sure. But it all made so much sense to him. They planned to kill him. But just because his wife kicked a little kid and called him fat? It made no sense. But then... as he looked down at what they did to him. They didn’t seem like the Mother Theresa of sodas either.

“Someone?” he was able to barely whisper out. But it was no use. He did his best to stand up but wavered and faltered to where he landed against the soda machine with a thud, dropping to his knees. Francis whimpered out his newfound hatred toward everything Coke. From Coke Zero to Diet Coke. To Vanilla Coke to Cherry Coke. He even began to hate the classic Coca-Cola. The beverage that he

thought of as his mascot to everything life-related. Now... now he was a Pepsi man. He vowed to never go back to Coke and always and forever more would he drink Pepsi. He knew it couldn't be that bad. Pepsi wasn't *that* bad... but it wasn't Coke. He let out a tear as he realized how scared he was going into a world that only consisted of Pepsi products. It just wouldn't ever be the same. His whole life would change. Everything he loved and cared about. His dreams, his ambitions, nevermore. Nevermore would he walk down a street with a Coke in his hand and see how people look at you differently. Because it's true. People look at you differently when you're a Coke man. But when you're a Pepsi man... things just aren't the same. Oh, the ridicule, the laughing, the taunting.

Pepsi man, Pepsi man, look at the Pepsi man. It was all just too much! He couldn't think of it a second more.

The tears then began to flow as he sobbed out:

"I can't! I just can't! I just *can't* be a Pepsi man!" He then opened his eyes for a second to rub away his tear-drenched face. And that's when he saw it. A nickel. It looked so small laying on the floor of the ground. He picked it up and examined it. He bit down on it and laughed as he realized it was a sure thing. It was real. "Do you want to be my friend?" he asked it. He laughed to himself as he cupped it in the palm of his hand. "I promise I won't ever lose you. I'll hold onto you forever and ever and ever." But he realized that he spoke too soon. For as he held it up to get a better look, the soda machine focused into his vision and the little silver piece of metal focused out. It was old. Older than him. Maybe even twice his age. Who knows, maybe even three times his age. And all it needed was five cents.

Frank struggled to his feet as he looked at the vintage Coca-Cola machine. The rust and the logo barely able to be visible showed the age on the archaic artifact.

"Do you work?" Francis asked it. But he quickly stopped himself. He can't. He vowed to never have another Coke ever again. Frank smiled at the thought of actually trying to make himself drink a Pepsi and thought of it as the most absurd thought he ever conjured up in the existence of his whole entire life. "I'm a Coke man," he said to himself. "And I always will be." The nickel slid its way into the slot. He listened to the chink and clang and finally the clunk as the glass bottle of Coke dropped down looking so pristine and clean. But with it, suddenly his vision changed.

"Francis? Francis! Francis, my boy!" A young boy that could've been no older than seven looked up from his glass bottle of Coca-Cola.

"Gee, Mr. Wilicker I just had a strange dream! I must've been in the future or something!" Mr. Wilicker smiled at the young lad as he replied:

"Coca-Cola will do that to *ya'*! It's got magical powers, Francis! *Magical powers!* It'll take you right out of 1932 and bring you right back like nothing ever happened! Now get a move on it before I have to go and let your mamma know you been *time-travelin'!*" Francis smiled as Mr. Wilicker ruffled his hair and headed back up into the upstairs store. Before Mr. Wilicker closed the door on the cellar he got one last look at the Coke machine.

"Dag-flabbit demon machine!" He spat at it before shutting the door closed.