

Obelisk

Nothing compared to the number four special from Hal's Pit Stop. Double cheeseburger with tater tots, ice cold cola and a chocolate malt all for half a sawbuck. Hal's was the first right off Highway 28 after the old wooden 'Welcome to Cobbleton' sign. Aptly named a Pit Stop as the diner's primary customers were weary eyed drivers on their way south into the big city. There's no better meal for hours down 28, and it'd be double the dime up that way. The diner stood as a confident beacon of flashing neon among a flat plane of wheat farms. The snazzy cherry red sign may have been outdated by a number of decades, but it cycled back to in-style these days. City-bound and locals alike flock to Hal's for lunch no matter the day. Inside were rows of white faux leather booths with a red trim. Matching stools lined a bar peninsula through the center of the diner. Brenda, a bold red head woman worked the bar spouting her endearing sass at any unsuspecting patrons lucky enough to be seated in her section. Hayley, a darling blonde girl darted from booth to table taking and returning orders. The diner bustled with a late afternoon crowd only typical when a local sports team is playing an away game. Early dinner meant dodging the overpriced frozen meals at the concession stand.

Contributing to the bustle was Danny and Jen, a pair of high school sweethearts picking at the remains of their number four specials. Danny dipped one of his remaining tater tots into a messy glob of ketchup with a slight flourish. He tossed the fried spud into his mouth and shot a smile to his darling. His smile was crooked and there was a sizable gap between his front teeth, but Jen found it lovable. He had a head of shallow dirty blonde hair that would never be tamed by any brush. His long nose was home to a number of freckles, and bits of stubble were beginning to sprout around his chin. Jen was a doll. Her smile could brighten a room, and her brown hair hung long over her shoulders on the rare occasion she wore it down. Instead she kept it neatly folded with a silky pink ribbon. She was tall, almost the same height as Danny. She had once tried to wear heels to a dance with him. She quickly made the switch to flats after seeing the first polaroid pictures had her towering comically over her sweetheart.

“Okay, what’s the *weirdest* thing you’ve ever seen? Like supernatural weird?” Jen was prodding Danny’s mind with her usual curiosity. Unlike most of the patrons the couple wasn’t traveling to Fowville for the baseball game that evening, so while others began filtering out to make first pitch, they remained.

“Uh, I once saw an emu out by the bridge near George’s place.” Danny answered. With a smile Jen nailed his nose with a greasy tot. “Hey! What’d you do that for?”

“That’s not supernatural you dweeb!” She loosed another tot. Danny scooted quickly to the left easily catching the food in between his teeth.

“I dunno I guess weird things don’t really happen to me.” Danny managed while chewing on Jen’s thrown tater.

“I saw a ghost once.” Jen declared confidently.

“That’s a lie if I’ve ever heard one.” Danny smirked while he signed the recently delivered ticket. \$10.76 for two number four specials. He penned a \$6.00 tip for Hayley with a lopsided smiley under his signature he returned the bill.

“No, really! I was camping with my cousins out at Sawdust Lake!” Sawdust Lake was a small lake near Cobbleton with a few old docks. It’s remote enough to make a great camping location, but also near enough to walk home if there’s trouble. It’s named because a match factory used to operate on the west end of the lake and they’d dump their sawdust into the water without a care for the ecosystem. Ultimately, when the area was depowered the factory relocated leaving behind only a few docks that local teens now use for swimming and fishing. “It was in the middle of the night and I got up to... you know... do my business, and I heard some strange noise. When I turned around I saw a five-foot tall spook swaying back and forth with a whistling sound!”

“Oh sure. No way you saw some of that white moss and heard the wind whistling, huh?” Danny had verbally cornered her with a smile. She let out a sigh of pseudo frustration while they shimmied out of their booths. Danny drove his father’s old truck. The bed was pockmarked from hard and heavy use over decades. The hunk of metal barely managed to sputter around town, but Danny was happy to have it anyway. He was one of the few guys at school who actually had his own ride in the first place. He wasn’t about to complain about its functionality. Though,

truthfully nobody should be inside that death machine. Rust alone made it a death-trap. The poor junker managed its way through down to the southern end where Danny's family farm was. He pulled the truck into its spot on the side of the road in a lane of matted grass from frequent parking. Danny's papa wouldn't let him park in the driveway because it often took a few tries to get the poor thing started, especially in the winter. The couple emerges into the cool autumn air and survey the area. Not another person in sight, but Kelso, the farm dog veers around the corner of the house to greet them. With countless 'good boy's' and even more puppy kisses, they headed for the house. However, instead of heading to the front door, Danny braced himself on the wall beside the front porch. With a jump Jen used his knee as a step to reach the ledge of their roof. She kicked her left leg up onto the roof and scooted the rest of the way. Danny, in a show off fashion, lifted onto the hand rail of his porch and pulled himself up behind her with only his arms. Together they made the short hike to the crest of the roof and sat down facing the now descending sun.

Sitting peacefully atop the roof they looked out across the ocean of wheat before them at admired the simplicity they'd come to love. Danny withdrew a pack of cigarettes from his pocket. He'd swiped them from his father. Danny suspected his dad knew and just didn't say anything. After all he was 17 and turning 18 in only a few months. It seemed like a moot point to contest a habit that'd be perfectly legal soon. Danny pulled out two slid one between his lips and passed another to Jen. She took it in between her fingers and waited for a light. After servicing his own, he pressed the tip against hers igniting it. Together they sat calmly lowering their life expectancy without a care in the world. It was nice.

Until the roof began to tremor. At first it swayed slightly. This caused Jen to drop her cigarette. It went rolling down the sloped roof. Luckily Danny was able to stop it with his boot before it found its way into a gutter full of dry kindling. With a look of determination he gripped Jen's hand and guided her safely back to the ground before the real shaking began. Just as soon as her soles hit the dirt, the earth started shifting. Danny jogged out passed his dirt driveway and into the yard. He watched with amazement as waves of wheat shook in morbid unison with the earth itself. Jen followed Danny but stopped in her tracks as her eye caught what he was watching. In the horizon an obsidian spire grew taller by the second. Penetrated the otherwise

stark flat land that surrounded them piercing high into the orange of the sky. The quakes continued for a number of moments as the shape grew to unbelievable proportions before them. Sometime during the calamity Danny's father had emerged from the house and watched the event take place.

The tremors, and subsequently, the growing shape ceased. Danny turned around with jaw agape in amazement. Jen was speechless. With a laugh Danny addressed his father.

"Papa, I... Did you... What is it?!" His heart was racing with possibility, confusion, disbelief. His father felt none of those. His father felt only dread.

"It's an Obelisk." Resigned to the reality of the obsidian spire before him, he began to turn around. With a final look he watched as glowing white lines began to shine from the surface of the massive spire on the horizon. Beginning at the base and drawing cryptic shapes upward the pylon lit up contrasting the orange and pink sunset with pitch black and glowing white geometry.

With the appearance of the ninth Obelisk, Cobbleton would be shaken to its core.