

Rockwell, a once strategically insignificant rust bucket of a town nestled in the woodlands of the Pacific Northwest. A town tucked deep in lush gold foliage and bordered by cold Pacific waters. A town that until a few months ago meant nobody to anybody of import. Then the giant came, a blazing beacon of life that brought something special with it. The giant, unfortunately, was a candle that burned too bright, and due to unfortunate circumstances, the innocent metal man gave its newfound life to save the town. It was an incident that touched those who saw it, a shining beacon of selflessness. For some it was but a strange day, something they'd remember and think on. For others, though, it shaped their lives, setting them on a new course. One such group were the ones closest to the giant: Hogarth, the boy who found the giant; his mother Annie and a local artist named Dean. The trio had become inexorably drawn to each other, through no small effort by Hogarth.

It was another chilly morning in the junkyard; the rising sun filtered through the trees and hit the rusted pile of Studebakers just right. The light reflected off the mirrors, sending a singular ray through Dean's window. The ray hit one of his sculptures in just the right way to wake him from his slumber. The raven-haired artist tried his best to hide from the ray, but every way he tossed and turned only brought it closer to his eyes. He groaned, tossing his blankets to the side and exclaiming to the world itself.

"I get it, I'm up!" Dean sat on the side of his bed, trying to shake his sleep.

A cool draft blew through the cracks in his run-down shack; the old girl had seen better days and would likely see worse, but it was his. Dean draped himself in his orange lounging robe; the faded zen print on the back crackled from age. Everything around him had age, had character; his surroundings were the perfect vintage to create his art. Art was his life, it's what he lived and breathed: when people looked at his junkyard, they saw trash, but he saw potential. The discarded, the refuse, all of it could be given a second life through his hands; that was the philosophy he took. Things had changed, though; the way the giant came into their lives, it brought a new source of inspiration. Dean's art was being put together to commemorate the giant; it was evidence of the misunderstood behemoth and how it touched their lives.

He shuffled his way to the kitchen, shuffling past the strewn papers and sketches to his morning salvation, the coffee maker. It was a quaint little thing he'd put together with salvage and junk, not the best looking, but you'd never find a better cup of espresso. Now if it were a standard cup of coffee, his machine wouldn't hold a candle to the Chat n' Chew; Annie worked a special magic with those machines. While he sipped his amped-up coffee, he remembered the first time he visited. He wasn't sure if it was the atmosphere or the company, but the place was comforting; the triple-stacked pancakes certainly helped. Those fluffy little pads of heaven were so nostalgic and light, it brought him back to childhood. He walked over to the window, staring out across that amber expanse. In the center of his yard sat his latest project and potentially greatest, a collection or scrap assembled into a memorial.

It was a statue of the giant who had visited him that clandestine week; it was a facsimile made of iron and wires. The eyes were assembled from leftover jeep lamps, the chassis was pounded out from flattened sheet iron. The whole thing was held together with railroad joints and machinery bolts. It was a small memorial, nowhere near the scale of the original, but you could only work in your scope. Dean took another sip of coffee, trying to think of what the next addition he would make was. Today might be dedicated to cleanup and aesthetics; it was hard to capture the rugged yet complete nature of the giant.

Bbrrriirnrng

Dean heard the ring of his phone, not something he often answered; usually his phone rang with bill collectors or annoying rich yuppies. People always were visiting him, people who had money but no creative sense. The kind of people that wanted his art to suit them, instead of taking his art at face value. Dean just continued sipping his coffee; usually those people gave up on three rings. Three rings passed and the phone was still going; the rattling bell was drilling into his mind and grating his nerves. He gripped the handle tightly between his fingers, the heat of his cup searing against his finger. The ringing wouldn't stop; it was eight in the morning, and someone wouldn't stop calling him. Dean finally relented, setting the cup down with a sigh: he walked over to the receiver and pulled it up.

"Mccopin's." Dean answered with the energy of a man who didn't get to finish his coffee.

"Dean? Your last name is Mccopin." The familiar voice of Hogarth came from the other end of the line.

"Yeah. They not teaching you to read in school? It's on the statue in the center of town." Dean rolled his eyes, leaning against the adjacent wall.

"They taught us to read. I just don't read your plaque." Hogarth had a bit of snark in his voice.

"Well, you should; there's some choice words on that thing. What's up, squirt?" Dean's body language relaxed; he was saved from another talk about money.

"Well... um. I was wondering if you could come over for breakfast today. Mom's making pancakes." There was an awkward hesitance in Hogarth's voice.

"Really. Well, she does make some good pancakes; feels kinda weird. Coming over to your house to eat breakfast." Dean had a certain slyness to his voice, like he was trying to pick at some greater meaning.

"It wouldn't be weird, and besides, you aren't eating anything nice." There was a smugness in Hogarth's voice.

“Oh yeah? I’ll have you know I’m making my own pancakes right now.” Dean didn’t want to admit he’d been called out by a child.

“Sure you are. What do you have in them?” Hogarth’s confidence was only boosted

“Well they have, um. Flour and milk and.” Dean trailed off as he looked around his shack for ingredients. “And wheat germ.”

“Come on. All that sounds nasty. Just come over for breakfast. You won’t regret it.” Hogarth snapped down the receiver before Dean could object.

Dean sighed; guess his morning music session could wait. It wasn’t that he didn’t like Annie; in fact they got along really well: it was just kind of awkward. Anytime they’d spent time together that wasn’t a city-ending crisis, he stumbled over his words. That cool and detached persona he’d cultivated would just melt away, and he’d babble like a fool. It all came down to their first meeting, that time with Hogarth and his dang squirrel. How are you supposed to be suave when a rodent’s using your pant leg as a nest?

Dean shook his head, discarding his robe and the last remnants of a comfy morning with it. He donned his signature black sweater and jeans, making sure it was clean. He took his last swig of espresso and made his way out the door. Giving a small nod of approval towards the giant as he left.

It was a quaint house, the kind of place you’d expect a full family to be living. White paint, red roof, two stories, and a small car park attached to it. It was an awfully spacious place for a working mother to maintain all on her lonesome, but sometimes, that’s the hand life deals you. She was making most of it, working her hump off for an inquisitive grade schooler. Then there was big ol’ Dean, the loner artist from out of the scrapheap.

Dean imagined himself as a misunderstood misanthrope, a man who lived for his art. In reality, that was only partially him, especially when he smelled those pancakes. The smell of a good breakfast can turn a wild man tame, and he wasn’t that wild. Dean adjusted the collar of his turtleneck, yanking it to the side, giving it that cool unkempt look. A quick glance in the window reflection to make sure his black hair was acceptably scruffy. His eyes met with the snarky glance of Hogarth looking back at him. Dean rolled his eyes with a sigh before rapping his fist against the door.

It was a good bit before someone answered; Dean was expecting the little pipsqueak when the door opened. His eyes were lowered toward Hogarth level, but when the door opened, he was greeted by the shapely curves of a woman. Dean’s gaze jumped up in a start, doing his best to avoid being caught looking at Annie’s chest.

Annie cocked her hip, bracing a hand against the door, her eyes filled with happy surprise. “Well, Dean. Good morning.”

“Hey, Ann. Long time no see.” Dean placed his hand on his hip, cocking his legs to a nonchalant pose.

“It hasn’t been that long: could be shorter if you’d stop by more often.” Annie had a sardonic tone to her response.

“Yeah, sorry, I’ve just been wrapped up in my project. Trying to get the giant all finished.” Dean’s demeanor deflated.

“That why you’re not answering your phone?” Annie smirked.

“What? I answer my phone!” Dean felt like he was punched in the gut.

“Those art patrons would beg to differ.” Annie backed away from the door, leaving a space for Dean to enter. “Come on in, no reason to talk in the door when we can talk over pancakes.”

Once again, Dean had lost this battle of wills; Annie was a bit too determined. Dean simply shrugged, walking his way through the living room to the kitchen. He caught Hogarth sitting on the couch, snickering at the whole exchange.

“Hey, kid. Next time warn me before I walk into the doghouse.” Dean whispered through gritted teeth, hopefully too quiet for Anne to notice.

“What was that, Dean?” Annie glanced back.

“Was just saying you have a lovely house.” Dean gave Hogarth another biting glance before walking into the kitchen.

The house was alight with the scent of vanilla and cinnamon, but when you walked in the kitchen, it was enchanting. Dean was caught off guard; he felt like he’d just stepped foot in a bakery. Except, instead of trays of freshly baked pastries, it was a stack of buttery pancakes. The table was already set for three places; this was a premeditated trap: Annie already knew he was coming before Hogarth called. Dean collapsed into a chair, draping his arm over the back, his eyes zoning in on the spread in front of him. Tall glasses of orange juice, a spread of jams, syrups and a fresh stick of butter. Dean waited for Annie to take her seat before taking his serving of pancakes.

“So um... Annie. How did you know about the art patrons?” Dean took a sip of orange juice after posing his question.

“They come to the diner; somehow they got it in their heads that you and I are an item.” Annie fluttered her eyelashes as she said that last part.

“I’m sorry they’re bugging you; guess I should answer that phone more. What do they want so badly?” Dean took his serving of pancakes, slicing a pad of butter on the top.

“They keep talking about your statue in the center of town. It was featured on the news last month, and they want their own.” Annie took a pancake of her own.

“I didn’t know we made it on the news.” Dean chuckled to himself.

“You talked about it last week; you had the paper in your shack.” Hogarth blurted out his exclamation.

Dean rolled his eyes, trying to play off the newly unveiled fact. “I just read the funny papers, kid.”

“So what’s got you so scared? Why are you dodging these investors?” Annie looked Dean dead in the eyes.

“I don’t like people telling me how to do my art and when you get those moneybags involved, they always muddy the vision.” Dean responded in earnest.

“Have you ever actually met with one of them? You might be surprised at how hands-off they can be.” Annie’s retort was snappy.

“I guess I could give it a chance. I just don’t like people knowing where I make my art. People would be knocking down my door.” Dean took another bite of pancakes.

“Why don’t you meet them here?” Hogarth once again blurted out an idea.

“Yeah, Dean, meet them here. They already bother me night and day; what’s a little more?” Annie seemed surprisingly receptive to the idea.

“Alright then. I guess I’ll meet them tomorrow or something.” Dean begrudgingly accepted the deal.

The trio ate the rest of their breakfast with a much cheerier demeanor, the serious tone of business dissolving into something more genial. They talked about the weather, Dean’s art, and Hogarth’s school. The whole time, Dean was unconsciously wolfing down pancakes, eating a few more than he had really expected. Dean didn’t know what came over him; he never really indulged so heavily before, but there was something about Annie’s pancakes. Having an unlimited supply of them would be a dangerous thing indeed. He was just glad his sweater had

a bit of bagginess to it; the black cloth concealed the food baby he was currently sporting. He stayed and conversed a bit more, chatting up Annie while he let the mass of batter digest.