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The Wife of Sisyphus

Chance O'Neal

The Dinner Bucket was Scranton's biggest eyesore. Linard Cooper first founded the original diner by selling his wife's car, a 1984 Toyota Pickup, and renovating the old dollar store next to the Valero Station on 5th Street. It did well enough during its grand opening, but a kitchen fire burned it to the ground only four months after Linard cut the ribbon. With no insurance and almost all of the Cooper's financial assets burnt to nothing, many thought that that would be the end of the Dinner Bucket.

But Linard begged and pleaded with his wife until she finally agreed to sign the papers for another mortgage on their small one-story house and set up shop on the other side of town half a year later. This diner lasted almost two full years before Mark Laurence suffered a heart attack driving towards the diner's parking lot and crashed hood first into the front window, killing himself and three other people.

Scranton wasn't very sympathetic to Linard after that. People suspected that the Dinner Bucket was a bad omen of sorts. Soon superstition had such a hold over the town that Linard couldn't find an investor or landowner for miles who was willing to give him a chance.

Linard's next opportunity wouldn't come until four years later when Mrs. Cooper's mother passed away in the night, leaving quite a large settlement behind for her daughter for what, in her will, she called escape money. With more than enough funds to rekindle his dream, Linard's biggest dilemma was that he couldn't find anyone willing to sell him property.

So how did it happen?

It is the general consensus of the people of Scranton that the mayor finally caved in and sold him the property right outside of town to keep the impending collateral damage as isolated as possible. That, or just to stop Linard from coming by his office every Tuesday and Thursday at noon sharp to bother him with coffee and a story about his grandkids before finally getting around to asking if any new prospects had opened up around town. Either way, it didn't matter. Linard had his diner, and either from curiosity or just the noise of their own stomachs, he knew people would come eventually. As much as the town denied it, Scranton was just too small to ignore a story as big as the Dinner Bucket.

Nowadays it's not too surprising to see old Chevy trucks with faded paint and specks of dried earth still clutching to the sides from midding the night before starting to turn into the wet graveled parking lot, waiting, ready to dash out at the turn of a lock and fill the old wooden restaurant with a combination of button down-shirts and polished dress shoes and camo jackets and waterproof boots.

But not before Mrs. Cooper finished making the teas, stocking the salad bar, and counting the register from the night before. She would smile, listening to her husband whistle contently as he breaded the fish and started the fryer, and collect herself for a moment before flipping the diner's sign from Closed to Open and greeting customers with a timeworn smile that had made a man's wildest dream come true.