

What the Blogger Saw

A Special Report on Dot's Diner

Pennyshadowreport.com

Dot's Diner opens its doors at 7 every day, rain or shine. Even for most holidays.

Sandra Reyes, the OHR's top field agent, has a Sunday morning ritual. I stumbled onto it a month ago, and I make it a point to be close by just in... well, never mind that. Suffice to say I know about Reyes and her various rituals because, as the writer of the most popular blog in the Unveiled world, I've made it my business to know.

For all her considerable gifts, Sandra is a creature of habit when she's off the clock. Every Sunday, without fail, Dot's Diner. City Market. Corner booth if she can get it. Coffee before anything else.

She slumped into Dot's at about 6:55. They open the doors a little early on Sundays. Maybe specifically for her.

I found a lamppost across the street and a coffee from the cart on the corner and settled in. This is what I do. I watch. I wait. I write.

Most Sunday mornings, Sandra is in and out by eight. Coffee, whatever passes for breakfast when you've been awake since Thursday, a few minutes of staring at nothing in particular. Then gone.

Today is different. Like most Unveiled, I can feel disturbances close by. Today... I felt a sudden absence. A vacuum of some sort.

At 7:02, the sign flipped to Closed.

Interesting.

I pulled out my phone and started a new draft. Possible edge event at Dot's Diner, City Market. OHR on scene. Cause unknown. I'd fill in the rest later. I always did.

At 7:14, I felt him before I saw him.

That surprised me.

The director of the Office of Hidden Realms had been, by all accounts, professionally inert for the better part of a decade. But you hear things, in my line of work. The word was that Nathan Quipp had married an anchorborn, which is either the best or worst thing that can happen to an agent, depending on your perspective. She'd dampened him like a wet blanket on a fire.

Anchorborn doesn't just anchor the bad things. She anchors everything.

And then, a month ago, she died.

I've drafted a report on it that I haven't published yet. Maybe I never will. Depends. The Unveiled world doesn't need to know everything I know.

I should know.

But here he was, walking up the block toward Dot's. Toward me. And I could feel the edges of something returning to him. Faint. Unsteady. Like a signal finding its frequency after a long silence.

He was scanning faces. Of course he was. Old habits.

I kept my eyes on my phone.

The trick with agents—real agents, not the ones playing at it—is that they read body language before they read faces. Look too quickly and you're a threat. Look too long and you're suspicious. The sweet spot is exactly what I was doing: a woman with a coffee and a phone, vaguely present, deeply uninterested.

Of course, I was neither of those things.

But he saw me anyway. Not a glance. A look. The kind that takes inventory.

I know that look. Sandra gave me the same one at the Oregon fire. She cornered me before I could get away.

Why are you here? What do you know? What are you?

I told her the truth, which is always the most disorienting thing you can tell a field agent.

Blogger. Teller of truths. Someone who pays attention to the things the OHR would prefer went unnoticed.

She didn't like that answer. Still doesn't.

Director Quipp's look was different. Sandra's was territorial. His was analytical. Sorting. I watched him run through the possibilities—Unveiled local, obvious. Known contact, no. Old case, nothing. The faint furrow between his brows said he'd come up empty, which meant I wasn't in any file he'd read. Not yet.

Good.

I looked back down at my phone. He held a moment longer than he should have, which told me his instincts were coming back. Fast.

Then he lifted his credentials and cleared the crowd with two words and a look that brooked exactly zero argument.

I stayed where I was.

If I were less disciplined, I might have raised my coffee. A salute. A small acknowledgment of the strange morning we were both having. But discipline is the difference between a source and a story, and I had no intention of becoming either.

I watched him go inside.

Director Nathan Quipp, I typed. First week back. Widower. Dangerous.

I paused.

He noticed me.

Three words. Significant ones. Sandra had taken four encounters before she made me as something other than a civilian. Quipp made me on the first look.

I deleted the last line. Some things weren't for the blog.

I finished my coffee and tucked my phone away.

Whatever had happened in that diner—whatever had the OHR closing down a Sunday morning institution and sending for the director on his first week back—was bigger than a routine edge event. Ley lines had been restless for weeks. Quipp was back. And something, somewhere, had finally decided now was the time.

I dropped my empty cup in the trash and walked east.

I had a post to write.