

At Mile 144, I Tried to Fight a Seagull Over a Half-Eaten Stromboli

The gas station parking lot was fluorescent and humming like the inside of a dying star. The light was a kind of hum. A slow-flickering apology. A moth made soft collisions with the shopwindow—again and again and again. My hands forgot the shape of holding. The air inside was cold and sweet, like freezer breath. There were snacks arranged in rows like thoughts I didn't finish. The receipt printer stuttered, then went back to sleep. A man in front of me scratched his neck and left with an oversized Gatorade. The cashier's bracelet clinked softly against the register drawer. Her nails were chipped, red at the tips like bitten cherries. I lingered by the cooler longer than I needed to, pretending to weigh the difference between lemon-lime and lime-lemon. I imagined we were all ghosts, doing our midnight hauntings in gas station limbo. Outside, the sky had the texture of television static. The parking lot pulsed faintly—lights, engines, the ghost of a song from somewhere. A semi idled at the edge of the lot like a sleeping animal. The sandwich I picked was warm in its plastic, too warm. The steering wheel was smooth and indifferent. In the rearview mirror, I looked like someone halfway through becoming someone else. The building behind the glass kept humming its long electric sentence. Somewhere, beyond the pumps, something shifted—a plastic bag lifting once, then settling again like it had never moved.