

Blue Pinto

by Mark Reep

The girl at the Quikfill's polite enough, no more. When Sean thanks her she says you're welcome but doesn't spare a smile. Hard to blame her, working here. They've probably been held up more than once by guys fitting his general description: *White kid in a hoodie, broken nose, looked cold*. Well, he can't do much about the nose, and he's too cold to lose the hoodie. Still, he'd like to see her smile.

Today gas is up again, and a rusty blue Pinto Sean's not seen before is nosed up to a gritty snowbank. The front grille's broken, the back bumper's drooping, and the Pinto slumps like it's tired. Sean checks his wallet, pumps ten dollars worth.

Inside, there's no line, just the girl— Darcy, a new uniform shirt says.

"No receipt," he says. She nods. Her hair's pulled back, and Sean imagines undoing that clasp, dark curls falling around her face. She closes the drawer. "Was there something else?"

"Just curious," Sean says, "but what's up with the old Pinto out front?"

She looks at him. "It's my boyfriend's." Her green eyes are flat: *What business of yours?*

"What is that," Sean says, "a '73, '74?"

"'74," she says. "It's not for sale."

Sean shakes his head, no, wasn't asking. "My uncle had a Pinto," he says. "2300, four-speed stick. He taught me to drive, gave me the keys, and I put another sixty thousand on it. Good times. Reminded me, seeing this one."

She nods. Glances at her watch, pulls keys from the register, on her way somewhere. He takes his cue.

"Don't see many Pintos anymore, is all," he says. "Hope you guys're having fun with it."

She says something, but a truck's jakebrake bellows. Sean turns in the doorway, cups a hand to his ear: "It's an *awesome* car," she says, and for a moment her smile is big, real, unguarded.

