**Tank**

Hannah Butcher, Kendall Clarke, and Matt Forsythe

Beverly hated gas stations, and this one was no exception. A concrete knoll in the middle of nowhere, Florida, inhabited solely by gnats and moths and a surly attendant with a grey-eyed stare.

The humidity was a breeding ground for acrid smells: sour notes of overstuffed trash bins and leakage from the bathrooms, leftovers from tourists racing to empty their bladders. The scattered debris reminded her that, somewhere, fast-food chains other than White Castle and McDonald’s existed.

Rainbows drifted in the sheen of an oil spot at her feet.  As the nozzle slipped into her sorry excuse for a car—*a real lemon*, her brother would say—she cursed herself for not filling the tank earlier.

Above her, a massive sign declared itself to the vehicular universe. The logo, market-tested and board-approved, glowed in the night, stripped of all nuance and meaning.

A rhapsody of cicadas surrounded the fluorescent oasis.

Out west, at least the Sinclair stations had character—literally. The small green brontosaurus on the sign was bolstered by a three-dimensional counterpart: either a giant beast that straddled the entire station, or a more practical copy for family photo-ops. No matter its size, a terrible lizard smirked down at you, judging your choice of DINOCARE™ gasoline.

Beverly swore that one had winked at her in New Mexico. Her brother insisted it was paranoia, an unfortunate side-effect of hot-boxing the car on their way to the Grand Canyon.

She admired their blunt approach: *The thing that became the thing you’re pumping into your car? Yeah, we’re going to use it to advertise what you’re pumping*. It was the opposite of Chick-fil-A’s cowardice, aligning itself with the animal it *wasn't* slaughtering. Slap a photo of an overcrowded chicken truck on your billboards, birds molting into the slipstream, and see how many people tape feathers to themselves on “Chicken Appreciation Day.”

The rubber tube pulsed with fermented dinosaur juice.

What actually happened within the earth? Did a monstrous clamshell crush the Jurassic parade, squeezing out gasoline like a winepress?

 A commercial from the seventies, petroleum propaganda, featured a team of diggers uncovering a layer of dinosaurs. The ancient beasts stepped into a strange new world, marching happily to their doom only moments after their miraculous resurrection.

But it wasn’t an ad she remembered. No, it was the animated short in the welcome center of *Jurassic Park*, explaining how scientists mined for amber and extracted blood from the mosquitos that conveniently bit a marketable beast before drowning in sap.

Was she not a mosquito herself, only reversed? Her proboscis vomited into the car rather than sucking it dry. At least that’s what she believed. Pumping gas was one of the few acts of faith left in her day-to-day life, this liquid she never saw leaving an underground reservoir she never saw for a tank she never saw. The movement of the car and the gauge on her dashboard testified to their existence, but seeing the actual evidence—that would spark disaster.

She slapped at her leg.

Sure, all creatures fed on the bodies of others, but did mosquitoes have to be so fucking annoying about it? They bit and sucked, draining the blood of friends and family and strangers. And their swollen bellies weren’t even the end of it; a mosquito left scars, an insatiable itch, a reminder of what was taken.

A lingering potential for apology. Or at least gratitude.

Like mosquitoes, cicadas lack jaws and cannot *technically* bite. But they can pierce. If one lingered on her skin, mistaking leg for tree, it would needle the flesh, searching for sap, believing that she could sustain it. She felt bad that she couldn’t.

The cicadas were screaming now. In paper-thin armor, they wore an oxymoron. Yet even the thinnest shell brought comfort, enough protection to face the world. Just enough to feel the rawness when it flaked away.

It was the same angry chorus from outside the hospital, her fingers trembling around a cigarette. Inside lay her brother, drained.

What could they see through those skeletal eyes?

Tracks along his arms. Marks that reminded her of camping in the woods, faces and limbs devoured, grinning in spite of it.

Did they remember that long sleep beneath the ground, their climb from the cool, dark earth?

He had smiled when she burst into the room of monitors and nurses. Rubber tubes jolting with intravenous fluids.

Grinning in spite of it.

She threw her cigarette on the ground and crushed its spark. She couldn’t have done anything. She could have done more.

And she wept.

Beverly didn’t notice when the pump clicked off.