Phil Lemos
Fiction

BMW SUPERMODEL

It's illegal to pump your own gas in Summitville, and I'm the reluctant enforcer. As the attendant of Summitville's only service station, I'm responsible for ensuring that Kwik-Mart complies with Town Ordinance 14-1989.

Every day Charlie, our station manager, yells at me for not wrestling the pump away from "rogue motorists." When I ask what happens if we get caught, he says nothing. Instead he points to the quarry across the street where he claims the police chief or fire marshal (it changes every time) watches us, and shudders. I've never seen anyone parked there.

The town can't be spying on us that closely. We have eight pumps and occasionally they're all occupied. People get impatient, swipe their cards and start pumping. Then they jump back into their cars, screech their tires and slide back onto Route 26, screaming "WOOHOO!" after successfully evading compliance. Charlie sprints out of the store, belly jiggling in his shirt while he shakes his fist and shouts, "Punks! Don't come back!!!"

Everything changes the day the silver BMW 135i convertible pulls into Pump 7. A beautiful woman with dark, flowing hair, clearly not from around here, is at the steering wheel. She's applying mascara as I pop open her fuel tank, hoping to make eye contact and flirt. I unscrew the cap and still haven't caught her attention because she's texting.

Finally, I rap at her passenger's side window.

"Fill it up," she says, with some sort of European accent.

"Cash or credit?" I ask.

“Cash,” she says, before popping out of her car. I admire her backside as she saunters into the convenience store in heels.

I punch the red button to notify Charlie to activate Pump 7. I pull the nozzle out of the pump and insert it in her car, then gently squeeze. While I’m pumping, I wonder if she’s a supermodel and think about how to start a conversation with her.

The nozzle clicks and I’m about to pull it out of her car when I get the scare of my life.

“What are you DOING?!?!?”

I turn around and it’s BMW Supermodel, waving her hands and racing toward me as if I smashed out her windows with a crowbar.

“What are you DOING?!?!? You put regular in my BMW!”

Shit. When someone says “fill it up,” 99 percent of the time they want regular grade gas. The one time I don’t ask….

“I wanted PREMIUM! This is a BMW! You don’t put regular in a BMW!” she says, emphasizing the W as if she were teaching me remedial English. I continue to stare. She probably expects me to siphon the common man’s gasoline out of her tank with a straw.

My paralysis leaves me just long enough to blurt out one thing.

“That’ll be $28, please.”

“What? I’m not paying!” she says. “You put regular in my car and I wanted premium.”

“Your car will still run. It’s not like I put diesel in your tank.”

Out of the corner of my eye, I see people observing my predicament. Gil Desjardins is chuckling at Pump 5. Inside, Charlie panics at the cash register as he reaches for the pump intercom microphone that always garbles his voice.

“Szzqzzh kzzszxzz shzzghzz,” the intercom says.

I shout at the pump. “I got it under control, Charlie.”

“I’m not paying!” BMW Supermodel says.

“Look, I’m sorry I put the wrong grade in your tank, but you saved money. It would’ve been more expensive for the Premium.”

“I’M NOT PAYING!”

She slams the door to her car and fumbles for her keys. If she gets away without paying for gas, Charlie might take it out of my paycheck. I pound my fist inside her driver’s side window and flash a look that would cause Charlie to piss his pants.

“Listen,” I say. “This can go one of two ways. You can pay me the $28 you owe. Or I can call the police with your license plate number and report you as a gas drive-off.”

At that precise moment I glance across the street and see, for the first time ever, a police cruiser stationed in the quarry. BMW Supermodel’s eyes follow mine. She reaches into her wallet, pulls out a $50 bill so crisp it looks like she minted it herself, and throws it at me. I look silly trying to catch it as it flutters around my head.

I think she curses me. I don’t know for sure because she’s speaking in another language, but the tone is venomous. I doubt it translates to, “I respect you! You stood up for yourself when I tried to bully you!”

I run inside to make change, but when I emerge she’s already burned rubber onto the road and left. I laugh as the customer from hell leaves me my biggest tip ever.

I walk over to pump Gil, but he’s also left the scene. Things get busy again and I forget the whole thing. Two days later, I’m punching out for the day when Charlie calls me into his office.

“What do you know about this?” Charlie says, shoving a letter at me.

From: Roland Dumont
Chairman, Summitville Board of Selectman

Charlie,

On Wednesday, Dec. 1, at 11:46 a.m., Police Chief Humphrey spotted your attendant allowing a resident, Gil Desjardins, to pump his own gas.

Please be reminded that because of the potential fire hazard, Town Ordinance 14-1989 prohibits non-employees from pumping gas at service stations. Station owners may be fined up to $25 per occurrence.

We hope this was an isolated incident. Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,
Roland Dumont

"I can't be getting nailed for $25 every time you get lazy and let someone pump their own gas," Charlie says. "If this happens again, you're fired."

"But…"

"That's it. Now go home. I'll see you tomorrow."

Things haven't been the same since. Charlie runs out of the store now every time there are more than two customers at the pumps because he thinks the selectmen are out to get him and doesn't want to write a $25 check to the town. At this rate he'll drop dead of a heart attack within two weeks. Meanwhile, I'm looking for another job, because even if Charlie doesn't fire me, I refuse to let him suck me into his world of panic.

Tonight after work I flip on the TV while surfing Craig's List when my jaw drops to the ground. There she is, the BMW Supermodel, hosting a reality TV show where potential models are judged on how much of a prima donna they can be.

That's what I need, I say to myself. I need a job where I can be self-absorbed like BMW Supermodel, and get paid obscene sums of money to bitch people out for no particular reason.