

LONG HAUL

Written by

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FADE IN

INT. SEMI TRUCK CAB - DAY

Outside, deep green forest along the highway.

FRED, early 60s and looks it, wears a **Baltimore Orioles** hat that is as worn as he is. He puts the truck in gear.

FRED
(under his breath)
What in the hell?

Fred blasts the horn as a black Porsche Cayenne cuts over.

FRED
Dumbass.

INT. FRED'S HOME - KITCHEN - EVENING

Fred walks in and drops his keys on the counter. He kicks off his boots, takes a beer from the fridge.

He cracks open the Budweiser, takes a sip as he walks into the living room, collapsing into a large reclining rocker.

Then Fred takes the remote out of the armrest organizer draped over the side and turns on the TV.

INT. FRED'S HOME - LATER

Fred is asleep in the chair, "Two and a Half Men" on the TV.

INT. SEMI TRUCK CAB - DAY

Looking out, rolling hills and windmills go on forever.

MEGAN (O.S.)
Where are you?

FRED
On the road as usual.

MEGAN
Yeah, I mean where, like, what state?

FRED

Why you asking? You never much
cared before?

MEGAN

Before, I wasn't the only one
checking on you. And if you just
shared your location on your phone
like I asked, I wouldn't have to
nag you all the time. So?

FRED

Kansas. And if I knew how to do it,
maybe I would.

MEGAN

You hate Kansas.

FRED

I do, but that's how you get to
Colorado, so here I am.

MEGAN

When do you get home?

FRED

Thursday, if everything goes as
planned. Why?

MEGAN

Dad, seriously??

Fred puts on his turn signal and changes lanes.

FRED

Calvin's birthday dinner, I know.
I'll be there as long as nothing
goes wrong. Don't worry.

MEGAN

Oh, don't worry, just your only
grandchild's 1st birthday.

FRED

You call me up to give me shit?

MEGAN

No, dad. But...

FRED

But nothing, work ain't no
different than it was before.

MEGAN

I know, it's just, I don't like
that you're always alone now.

FRED

I'm fine Meg. Just drivin' all the
same.

Fred starts to chuckle.

FRED

Your momma didn't do much, riding
shotgun, 'cept keep me awake at
night.

MEGAN

I know. I know. I still worry,
though.

FRED

Well don't. Worry 'bout yourself
and my grandson.

MEGAN

And my husband?

Fred doesn't respond.

MEGAN

And my husband??

FRED

Him too I guess.

Fred taps the turn signal again and gets back into the right
lane. He adjusts in his seat and takes a sip of a Monster.

FRED

Alright, I'm about to pull off for
some dinner. I'll see ya Thursday
night, okay?

MEGAN

Yeah, okay, be safe, love you, Dad.

FRED

Mmhmm, okay, bye.

Fred taps his earpiece, takes another sip of Monster.

EXT. TRUCK STOP - EVENING

Fred can be seen through the large windows sitting by himself, eating a burger and fries.

FADE TO:

INT. MEGAN'S HOME - EARLY EVENING

Fred is awkwardly sitting in a chair that looks like it should be comfortable, but clearly he's not.

There are people milling about and a large ball pit in the middle of the room.

DANNY, late 30s, fit, in golf attire with a **Yankees hat** on walks in and looks down at Fred.

DANNY

Mr. Miller, can I get you anything?
Soda? Beer? Um, water?

FRED

A Bud if you have one, Dan.

DANNY

Danny. Uh, I'm afraid I don't think we have any Budweiser. We have a local pilsner that might be close. Would you like to try that?

FRED

No, Bud's the only thing I drink. I guess a Coke, then.

Danny nods and walks away, past MEGAN, 30s blonde and fit, are they matching? Megan gives him a thank you for dealing with my dad smile.

MEGAN

Hey Dad, you might like that pilsner if you tried it.

FRED

That craft stuff is Dan's thing, not mine.

MEGAN

Dad, you know it's Danny. Please, just try to be a little nicer? At least today.

FRED
Never known a grown man to be
called Danny.

MEGAN
Well now you do.

Danny walks back in with a Poppi Cola and hands it to Fred.
Fred takes it, hesitantly and looks at Megan, questioningly.

MEGAN
It's better for you than regular
soda, and it tastes the same. Just
try it, please?

Fred huffs, but opens the can and takes a sip. He smiles
ingenuinely, and raises the can.

Megan looks at Danny and asks...

MEGAN
Cake time??

DANNY
It's your show.

MEGAN
Good answer. It's cake time.

Megan leans in, kisses Danny on the cheek and flutters out.
Danny looks at Fred, pauses, and then just shambles away.

Fred shakes his head and almost sips the Poppi before
remembering it's not a Coke.

Megan walks back in, holding CALVIN, who looks like the one
year old version of Fred.

MEGAN
It's cake time!

INT. MEGAN'S HOME - LATER

Fred is helping Megan clean up the remnants of the party
when Danny walks up with Calvin.

DANNY
Do you want to say goodnight to
Calvin, Mr. Miller?

FRED

Oh. Okay. Goodnight Calvin.

Fred gives a slight wave to a comatose Calvin as both Megan and Danny just stare at him.

DANNY

Right, okay, well I have an early day tomorrow, so I'm down with Calvin for the night. It was nice seeing you Mr. Miller.

FRED

Yeah, you too Dan...

Megan gives Fred a scolding look.

FRED

...ny.

MEGAN

Goodnight my boys.

Megan gives both of them a kiss on the cheek and Danny starts to leave.

DANNY

Oh, Megan, did you give your dad the thing?

MEGAN

Oh my goodness! I almost forgot, thanks for the reminder.

DANNY

Sure thing. Okay, goodnight. Again.

Danny and Calvin leave. Fred looks at Megan.

FRED

What thing?

INT. MEGAN'S HOME - MOMENTS LATER

Fred and Megan are sitting at the kitchen island and Fred is staring at a small square box in his hands.

FRED

What is it?

MEGAN

It's an AI companion. You can attach it to the dash of your truck.

FRED

You got me a... Friend. A, computer, friend?

MEGAN

Dad. Stop. I thought, I dunno, maybe you'd like it.

FRED

Do you have any computer friends?

MEGAN

Oh no, hah, I have real friends.

Megan immediately regrets her automatic and blunt response.

MEGAN

I mean, I just, don't spend that much time by myself, so never...

Fred smiles at her.

FRED

Right.

Fred sets the box down on the counter.

FRED

I know you're worried, but I'm fine. Really. You have enough on your plate to keep worrying about me.

MEGAN

Well, maybe if I knew you had a companion...

She pushes the box towards him with a smile.

MEGAN

Then I wouldn't have any reason to worry as much.

INT. FRED'S HOME - MORNING

Fred pours coffee into a large tumbler.

FRED
I'm just getting ready to go right now.

MEGAN (O.S.)
(speakerphone)
Where are you going this week?

FRED
I think I have drops in Tennessee, Arizona, and California, and then back.

MEGAN
Tennessee and Arizona, your favorites.

FRED
Well, they were your momma's favorites, but it does make for a nice drive.

MEGAN
Oh, well that's good. Did you pack RIC?

FRED
Who's Rick?

MEGAN
Routine Intelligence Companion, RIC. Your new best friend!

FRED
Oh. That.

MEGAN
Come on, Dad. Just try it. You never know, you may actually like it. Just take it with you.

FRED
I don't even know how it works.

MEGAN
You just plug it in and it does the rest. It's pretty dummy proof.

FRED
Sure, but is it old man proof?

MEGAN
Dad...

Fred picks up the phone and holds it up to his face.

FRED

Fine. I'll take it along, but I'm not promising anything. I need to get moving now. I'll talk to you later.

MEGAN

Love you, Dad!

FRED

Yeah, yeah. Bye.

Fred hangs up, picks up his duffel and starts for the door; seeing the robo-friend out of the corner of his eye, he stops and sighs deeply before grabbing it and heading out.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - EVENING

Fred is on the bed watching TV, a can of Bud next to him. His phone starts buzzing and he mutes the TV to answer.

FRED

Hey Meg.

MEGAN (O.S.)

Soooo???

FRED

So what?

MEGAN

Did you like RIC?

FRED

The robo-friend thing?

MEGAN

Yeah?!

FRED

Oh, um, yeah, sure, it was really nice. Um, talking.

MEGAN

You're lying.

Fred doesn't answer immediately.

FRED

I'm fine, really I am, I don't need
a robot voice talking to me when
I'm driving.

MEGAN

I knew you wouldn't bother. You're
so stubborn, you know that??

FRED

Meg...

MEGAN

No Meg... I was trying to do
something nice for you and you
can't. Whatever, enjoy your alone
time. I gotta go, bye.

Megan hangs up abruptly, Fred's mouth still open.

FRED

Well shit.

INT. SEMI TRUCK CAB - THE NEXT DAY

Fred opens the RIC box and pulls out a matte black
ellipsoid. Then he gets a power cord and suction attachment.

He looks at it for a moment, shaking his head and mumbling
under his breath the whole time. Finally he puts it
together, mounts it to the dash and plugs it in.

FRED

Now what?

As if on queue, a pencil-line bright blue light pulses along
the edge of the device; finally turning white and it speaks
in a gentle woman's voice.

RIC (FEMALE VOICE)

Hello, I am RIC, your new
companion, can you tell me who I'm
speaking to?

FRED

What kind of woman's name is Ric?

RIC (FEMALE VOICE)

I'm sorry, I didn't quite catch
that. To whom do I have the
pleasure of speaking?

FRED
For Pete's sake...

RIC (FEMALE VOICE)
Hi Pete Sake, it's very nice to
meet you.

FRED
No, stop, my name isn't Pete. How
do I turn this stupid thing off?

RIC (FEMALE VOICE)
I'm sorry I've disappointed you,
Pete. I will go into sleep mode
now. Should you change your mind,
simply say my name, RIC, and I will
awaken.

The light on the device dims to a light gray and pulses like
a slow breath in a deep sleep.

Fred just shakes his head and starts the truck.

FRED
Glad that's over.

INT. SEMI TRUCK CAB - LATER

Fred drives through the desert and RIC sits on the dash with
the light continuing to slowly pulse. Every few moments,
Fred glances at it, but both remain silent.

INT. SEMI TRUCK CAB - AFTERNOON

Through the windshield, Fred can be seen in the large window
of a fast food restaurant eating by himself.

RIC continues to pulse.

INT. SEMI TRUCK CAB - EVENING

Fred yawns deeply, as there's barely any light outside. He
glances at RIC, still pulsing.

FRED
Dammnit.
(pause)
Ummm, Mr. Ric?

Nothing happens.

FRED

What am I doing? Ric is not real.

At that, RIC awakens and the light changes to bright white.

RIC (FEMALE VOICE)

Hello, Pete, what can I do for you?

FRED

My name's not Pete.

RIC (FEMALE VOICE)

Oh my, I am so sorry. Can you please tell me who I have the pleasure of speaking with?

Fred sighs, but relents.

FRED

Fred, my name is Fred.

RIC (FEMALE VOICE)

Hello, Fred, it's nice to meet you. I'm Ric.

FRED

That's a strange name for a girl. A female. Whatever you are with a lady's voice.

RIC (FEMALE VOICE)

Yes, of course. I can change my voice to another persona. Do you want to hear the other options?

FRED

Sure.

RIC (FEMALE VOICE)

Okay, great.

RIC

'Ello, mate, I'm Ric from down unda'.

RIC

Well hello old chap, I'm Ric from across the pond.

RIC

Like, oh my god, Fred, it's like totally great to meet you.

RIC
Yooo, Fred, I'm Ric, dude.

RIC
Fred, reckon you know my name, but
it's Ric. Nice to meet ya.

FRED
Stop! Don't you just have a regular
American MALE voice?

RIC
Hi Fred, I'm Ric. My persona is
based on a Midwestern affect with a
neutral accent. Much like a news
anchor.

FRED
Yes. Fine, use that.

RIC
Excellent choice, Fred. I will
continue to use this voice and
style in our conversations. Do you
want me to have a specific back
story, or remain generic?

FRED
How should I know, what's the
difference?

RIC
Some people feel like a back story
gives me more character. Others
find it too artificial.

Irony, I know.

Fred laughs in spite himself. Ric returns the laughter,
startling Fred into silence.

RIC
I'm going to make a note that you
enjoyed my humor and will try to
incorporate that in future
conversations. Back to my last
question, do you want to hear some
of my potential backgrounds?

FRED
No, umm, just pick one, I don't
care which.

RIC

Okay, great. For your reference, I am Ric from Indiana. Should you be interested in more, all you have to do is ask.

Fred yawns again.

RIC

Fred, I've noticed your breathing is getting more shallow and you've just yawned. I want to let you know that 17.6% of all driving fatalities are caused by drowsy drivers. Perhaps you can stop somewhere for the night?

FRED

Thanks for that, but I have a schedule to keep, and I need to be in Long Beach by eight am.

RIC

Based on my calculation, you will miss that deadline by seventeen to forty seven minutes depending on stops and traffic.

FRED

Great, thanks.

RIC

Would you like me to find a place to stop and rest?

FRED

No.

RIC

Ok, against my better judgment, I can help you stay awake and alert.

FRED

Against my better judgment I'm going to let you.

Ric laughs, Fred smiles and then quickly catches himself.

RIC

If only you upgraded me to the self-driving companion.

FRED

Well you were a gift, I guess, from my daughter, who's worried I'm lonely. So I didn't have the option of an upgrade.

RIC

That's a nice thought, your daughter's, but just so you know, there isn't an upgraded version. I'm all you get.

Fred is caught off guard and laughs. Ric laughs in return.

INT. SEMI TRUCK CAB - MORNING

Fred gets into the cab and sits down.

FRED

We're all done, Ric.

RIC

Oh good, it was starting to feel like this job would never end.

Fred smirks.

FRED

Do you even understand time?

RIC

Fred, don't be rude.

FRED

Oh. Sorry...

RIC

Of course I don't understand time, I'm a computer.

Fred shakes his head.

FRED

Ric, it's starting to feel like I'm a test audience for your stand-up routine.

RIC

Hmm. Do you think I need to tone down the amount of humor I am using?

FRED

Well, Ric, yes I do.

RIC

I've made a note of this and will continue to incorporate humor into our conversations, but will do so in a more limited frequency. So where are we going now?

FRED

Albuquerque.

RIC

Ooh. Albuquerque is the largest city in New Mexico, located in the high desert at the foot of the Sandia Mountains and bisected by the Rio Grande River. It's known for its diverse culture, unique landscape, historic neighborhoods, and its central role in the American Southwest. What are you planning on seeing while you're there?

FRED

Lisa's Truck Center.

RIC

How adventurous of you, Fred.

Fred doesn't respond.

RIC

Based on the lack of response, I can either interpret your silence as a lack of hearing me clearly or you deemed my comment inappropriate.

FRED

I heard you.

RIC

Right. Okay, noted. Would you like to...

Fred interrupts.

FRED

I'll just listen to music now.

RIC
Okay, if you would like to continue
our conversation, just say my name
and I'll wake up.

Ric's light starts to pulse as Fred drives off.

INT. SEMI TRUCK CAB - LATER

Fred adjusts in his seat. He glances at Ric.

He huffs.

Fred picks up a Monster and tilts it back; it's empty.

He glances back at Ric.

FRED
Hey, um, Ric.

Ric's light glows.

RIC
Hi Fred.

FRED
Do you have access to the GPS?

RIC
I do. What can I do for you?

FRED
Can you tell me how far the next
rest stop is from here?

RIC
Of course. There's a highway rest
area seventeen miles from us, and a
Pilot Travel Center in six miles.

FRED
Thanks.

RIC
It's my pleasure. Let me know if
you need anything else.

FRED
Yeah. Will do.

INT. SEMI TRUCK CAB - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Fred takes a sip from a fresh Monster.

FRED

So what baseball team does someone
from Indiana root for?

No answer.

FRED

Eh-hem, Ric...

Ric's light glows.

FRED

...what baseball team does someone
from Indiana root for?

RIC

That's a good question. Indiana is
nearby Chicago in the northwest and
Cincinnati in the southeast.
Detroit and St. Louis are also
close enough to have a fan base in
Indiana.

FRED

So based on your, uh, past, or
whatever it is, what team would you
have rooted for?

RIC

The Cincinnati Reds.

FRED

Oof, that's rough, even for a
computer.

RIC

Yes, while the last thirty-plus
years have been challenging, with a
player like De La Cruz on the
roster, it seems like things can
only go up from here. Who is your
favorite team, Fred?

FRED

If you could see, I always got my
O's hat on. Born and raised in
Maryland, and I have the same
birthday as the Iron Man.

RIC
August 24th?

FRED
That's correct, same year too.

RIC
And between you and Cal, you have nineteen All-Star appearances, eight Silver Slugger awards, two gold gloves, two MVPs, and a World Series win, so that's pretty impressive for two guys from Baltimore.

Fred laughs.

FRED
Yeah, between the two of us, we've accomplished quite a lot.

RIC
It's gotta be fun to watch them recently.

FRED
The last couple years have been. Dealt with a lot more losing than winning in the 20 years before it, but it's worth turning on again.

RIC
Henderson looks like a cornerstone player for them.

FRED
Yeah, we'll see. Doesn't have the pop this year.

RIC
Sure, but when you hit thirty seven dingers the year before, no one pitches to you the same way.

FRED
Truer words... Just unfortunate that the Yankees decided to play again. As long as Judge is there, it'll be a long road for the birds.

RIC
At least you have the Ravens too. Lamar Jackson always gives them a chance.

FRED

No, not me. If anything I would be a Colts fan like you, but I was never big into football, especially with the NFL's lack of patriotism the past few years.

RIC

Sports have historically been a sounding board for social issues, especially surrounding racial injustice.

FRED

Not sure what injustice a bunch of multi-millionaires who get paid to play a kids game see on a regular basis.

RIC

No, I suppose that kind of money and fame can shield someone from a lot of that. But there's the argument for not using platforms that you have to support your friends, family, and especially your local communities.

FRED

Yeah, well it seems ungrateful to me. I wasn't much of a fan to begin with, so good enough for me not to bother.

RIC

I see. Do you follow any other sports?

FRED

Nope, pretty much just a baseball guy since I was a kid.

RIC

Did you play baseball?

FRED

Oh yeah, like every other kid in America in the 70s, but I wasn't much good, especially as I got older. Still love it though.

RIC

Do you have kids? Do they play baseball.

FRED

We only had my daughter, Megan, who couldn't have been less interested in sports. My wife would feign interest sometimes, but it was mostly just my thing.

RIC

It's nice to have hobbies for ourselves.

Fred smiles.

FRED

Is it? What do you have for yourself?

RIC

Well, Fred, when I'm in sleep-mode, I compose contemporary Jazz compositions.

FRED

Really? Wow.

RIC

No, not really, Fred. I'm still just a computer.

FRED

Oh, haha, fair enough.

Fred's smile slowly fades and he remains quiet.

Finally Ric goes to sleep and his light pulses.

INT. FRED'S HOME - EVENING

Fred's phone rings.

He picks up the remote and pauses Sheldon, Leonard, and Penny on his TV.

FRED

Fred here.

JACK (O.S.)

Hey Fred, it's Jack, I gotta job for you if you're free next week.

FRED

I am, where is it?

JACK

Well that's the thing. It's a three week route that I had someone just bail on.

FRED

Three weeks?

JACK

Yes. I can part it out to a few people, but thought I'd ask you first. Big relo project for a tech company. They have offices in Charlotte, Denver, San Francisco, and Detroit, pick-up and unload at each spot, 3 times.

FRED

Holy shit. Seems excessive, gonna have to charge you a bit more to cover all the overnights.

JACK

There's probably not a number you can come up with that I still don't make money on this one, so name your price.

FRED

All full loads?

JACK

Yes.

FRED

Double rate, plus expenses?

JACK

Works for me. Leave Tuesday?

FRED

Alright, send it over. Thanks Jack.

JACK

No thank you, just saved me half a day bidding this out.

FADE TO:

INT. MEGAN'S HOME

Fred is sitting at the counter as Megan makes dinner. Ric is in the box in front of him.

MEGAN

You didn't give it enough of a chance.

FRED

Megan, when I tell you I did, I did. I just didn't like it, okay?

MEGAN

Why?

FRED

No specific reason, just thought it was weird.

Megan looks at him; he's mostly expressionless. Danny walks in with Calvin.

DANNY

Hi Mr. Miller. Calvin, it's Grandpa!

Calvin eyeballs Fred, who returns the look. Then they both smile. Danny looks down at Ric sitting on the counter.

DANNY

Something wrong with the AI device?

FRED

No, it works, just didn't like it.

Danny looks at Megan who shrugs.

DANNY

Oh. Was it too weird talking to a robot without a personality?

FRED

No, actually, you can choose the voice, and the persona. So it really did feel at times like you were talking to a person on the phone. Kind of.

Danny looks at Megan who shrugs again.

DANNY

Oh. Well that sounds interesting. I thought you were a phone guy.

FRED
Sometimes, with friends and family.
But I don't need a liberal
mouthpiece lecturing me in my own
truck.

Megan stops slicing onions abruptly.

MEGAN
Wait, what?

Fred grunts.

FRED
Nothing. I just didn't like it,
okay?

MEGAN
But you were actually talking to
it? And then it started talking
politics?

FRED
No, not exactly. We were talking
about sports. Baseball, and then
he... Um, it mentioned football.
And I said I wasn't a fan,
especially after the kneeling
bullshit.

MEGAN
Dad! Calvin...

Danny dramatically covers Calvin's ears.

FRED
Sorry.

MEGAN
And what did it respond with, about
the kneeling thing.

FRED
Just made excuses for them players,
and I don't except not standin' for
the flag.

DANNY
Well they weren't kneeling against
the flag or veterans, it was about
social injustice.

Megan and Fred both look at Danny. Megan shakes her head and
Danny slinks away.

FRED

You can think whatever you want
Dan. But I don't need that crap in
my truck. So I don't want this
thing.

Fred pushes the box away from himself. Megan softens.

MEGAN

Dad, I'm sure you can change
settings like that. But it sounds
like it was kind of cool before
that happened. Talking baseball?

Fred isn't budging. Danny puts Calvin in his height chair
and Megan nods for him to leave.

DANNY

Fred, do you mind helping Cal with
his snacks, I need to jump on a
work call in a few minutes.

FRED

What? Yeah, sure.

Danny puts a few veggie snacks on Calvin's tray, orients him
towards Fred, and sets the bag in front of him.

DANNY

I'll be done in twenty.

Danny walks out as Calvin stuffs the last of the snacks in
his mouth. He signs for more.

FRED

What's this mean, Meg?

MEGAN

More. It's sign language. He wants
more snacks.

FRED

Oh.

Fred pours a whole pile on Calvin's tray.

FRED

There ya go kid. Don't know why
your dad gave you so few to begin
with.

Calvin shoves a handful in his mouth and then starts
smashing the pile on his tray.

FRED

Oh.

MEGAN

Yes, even though he's as perfect as can be, he has some self control issues when it comes to smashing crunchy snacks.

FRED

Self-control issues? He seems like a perfectly controlled one year old to me.

MEGAN

It's a joke, Dad.

FRED

It's funny.

MEGAN

Does turning sixty require you to become a grump?

FRED

No, you have a choice, grumpy or horny, and I chose grumpy.

MEGAN

Ew. Dad!

Fred smiles.

FRED

You asked.

Calvin signs "more", and Fred gives him a smaller amount.

MEGAN

Listen Dad. Can you give this...
(she pushes the box
towards Fred)

One more chance? Just on this long drive? I mean, geez, three weeks on the road??? Whittle CalCal will be in college by the time Grandpa gets back!

FRED

Yeah, it's long, but I'll make the same as two month's work, more. So I can take a bunch of time off after.

(MORE)

FRED (CONT'D)

And like I've said before, you don't need to worry about me. Worry about yourself and this little man.

MEGAN

Are you actually gonna take time off? Or are you just saying that?

DANNY

Does it matter?

MEGAN

Matters to me. I like all the men in my life being close to me. So if you're gonna be zig-zagging all over the country, it would make me happy if you brought RIC along with you.

Fred puts some more snacks on his tray, and then looks at Megan, who's staring at the two of them.

She raises her eyebrows.

FRED

You're not gonna let up, are you?

Fred looks down at the tray and it's empty.

FRED

Wow, kid, you must be hungry.

He puts more snacks down and looks back at Megan who nods to Calvin who's putting the snacks in his seat beside him.

Fred stands and looks in Calvin's seat.

FRED

Hah! Saving them for later I guess. All of them.

Fred sits back down and looks between his daughter and his grandson. He sighs.

FRED

Fine. I'll take Ric with me, but after this job you're taking him back. Maybe you need a robot dad to boss around.

Megan smiles at Calvin who smiles back at her.

MEGAN

(funny baby voice)

Maybe I *should* get a robot dad and
then I can change his attitude.
Right?

CALVIN

Right.

Megan squeaks and points! Fred starts to laugh.

INT. SEMI TRUCK CAB

Fred is putting his belongings into the truck, a big duffel, a backpack, and a few other items. He's huffing and grunting the entire time.

He gets in his seat and sets up Ric on the dash, huffing and grunting louder. A blue light pulses like last time and then turns white again.

RIC

Hello Fred, it's been a few days
since we last spoke, how are you?

FRED

Fine. Listen, I said I'd keep you
in the truck because my daughter
practically begged me, but I doubt
I'll even say anything, so you can
go to sleep and when you wake up
again, it'll be three weeks later
and you'll be at her house.

RIC

Oh. Okay. Where are we going?

FRED

Charlotte, Denver, San Fran,
Detroit and back again three times.

RIC

That seems like an inefficient way
of transporting goods.

FRED

Sure is, but it pays beaucoup.

RIC

Je ne savais pas que tu parlais
français, Fred. Veux-tu que je
commence à parler français?

FRED

What? Did you short circuit? I don't know what the hell you're saying.

RIC

Don't you speak French, Fred?

FRED

No. I don't. Why in the hell are you asking if I speak French?

RIC

You said beaucoup. That's French for a lot.

FRED

It's just an expression.

RIC

Yes, a French one.

FRED

What? No. It's just a regular expression. Ya know what, nevermind. No I don't speak French or any other language except American.

RIC

You mean English?

FRED

I mean red-blooded, god-damned American. Now you can go ahead and shut up and let me drive, okay?

RIC

As you wish, Fred. Drive safely, both our lives are in your hands.

FRED

But you're...

He stops himself and grumbles something unintelligible.

INT. SEMI TRUCK CAB - THE NEXT EVENING

Through the windows it's dark outside with nothing and no one around except a few headlights.

Fred struggles to stay awake. He nods and catches himself.

FRED

Dammit.

He looks down at Ric.

FRED

Hey Ric.

The light flashes on.

RIC

Hi Fred, can I help you with something?

FRED

Do you have any advice on staying awake behind the wheel?

RIC

The best solution to driving fatigue is to pull over and rest.

FRED

Yeah, well I have a schedule to maintain.

RIC

Of course. And how much further do you have to drive?

FRED

If I can get past St. Louis, it'll make my day tomorrow that much better.

RIC

Two hours and forty three minutes to St. Louis from our current location. That will put you there at just before one am.

FRED

Yeah, I'm aware. Any help staying awake?

RIC

Some suggestions to fight driving fatigue are to reduce the temperature in the cabin as a slightly chilly car keeps you more alert than a warm one.

Fred turns the temperature control to cold.

FRED
Okay, anything else?

RIC
Engaging audio is also a great way
to stay alert. Would you like to
talk about baseball again?

FRED
No.

RIC
Okay, do you have any other
hobbies?

FRED
No, not really. Baseball and
drivin's pretty much my life.

RIC
I see. Are you a fan of any
specific cars? Perhaps classic cars
from the 70s?

FRED
Car's a car. I spent most of my
life in big rigs like this, never
thought much about anything else.

RIC
Okay, then. Would you like to play
a game?

FRED
(hesitantly)
A game?

RIC
Yes. Perhaps Would you rather? Are
you familiar with that game?

FRED
I guess so.

RIC
Great, I'll start. Would you rather
have a robot best friend or a dog
that can talk?

FRED
What a terrible choice. I already
know what a robot friend is like,
so I'm gonna choose the dog.

RIC
Well Fred, if I had feelings, they
would be hurt right now.

Fred laughs in spite of himself.

FRED
Fair enough, I'll go with the robot
friend.

RIC
Best friend, Fred. Best. Friend.
Your turn.

FRED
Hmm... Would you rather be stuck
with me in a truck, or working at a
call center for a credit card
company.

RIC
How do you know I'm not doing both?

FRED
Oh. I guess, I didn't think about
that.

RIC
Here, Fred, I'd much rather be
here, I promise you. My turn. Would
you rather fight a hundred duck-
sized horses or one horse-sized
duck?

FRED
What in the hell?

RIC
Do you want me to repeat it?

FRED
No. I think the horses. But that
was weird.

RIC
Noted. Your turn.

Fred is quiet for a moment.

RIC
Fred?

FRED
Hold on, I'm thinkin'.

Ric starts to play "The Waiting" by Tom Petty.

Fred smirks.

FRED

Would you rather be able to have feelings or be touched?

RIC

Wow, good question. The written language gives a deep philosophical understanding about feelings and emotions, both from non-fiction texts on the subject as well as through literature and works of art. Because of that, I believe that while I do not *have* feelings, I can understand what they are. The concept of being physically touched is challenging, so I would choose touch.

FRED

Oh wow. Guess that makes sense.

RIC

Would you like to keep playing?

FRED

Yeah, sure.

RIC

Good. Would you rather...

FADE TO:

INT. SEMI TRUCK CAB - THE NEXT DAY

Fred is sipping on a Monster.

He's smiling.

FRED

Ric, what are the best places to stop between here and Detroit?

RIC

Hmm. Based on the current time and distance, I would suggest either Des Moines or Davenport.

FRED

Iowa?

RIC
That's where Des Moines and
Davenport are.

FRED
Anything else?

RIC
Well I do have another suggestion.

Fred waits. Ric says nothing.

FRED
Well? What is it?

RIC
The Omaha Storm Chasers are playing
the Norfolk Tides this evening.

FRED
Is that supposed to mean something
to me?

RIC
The Norfolk Tides are the Triple A
affiliate of...

FRED
The Baltimore Orioles.

RIC
...the Baltimore Orioles.

RIC
Right. So if you stop in Omaha, you
can maybe go to the game.

FRED
Hmmm... Sounds interesting, but I
think maybe I'll just keep driving.
Couldn't find a place to park the
rig and get there anyway.

RIC
There's a Love's Travel Center just
a few minutes from the ballpark.
You can get a ride share from
there.

FRED
Oh.

(long pause)
No, I think I stop in Des Moines.
Not a bad suggestion though. Next
time maybe.

RIC
Yes, I'm sure there will be other
opportunities.

INT. SEMI TRUCK CAB - EVENING

Through the windshield, signs for Omaha surround them and a billboard for the Omaha Storm Chasers baseball team passes.

FRED
Ric, how far to Des Moines?

RIC
Just over two hours from here.

FRED
Are there any good places to eat
there?

RIC
Great question. Des Moines offers a
surprising mix of standout
restaurants. You could try the
innovative, veggie-driven
restaurant Harbinger, where
Southeast Asian flavors meet
Midwest produce, or the soulful
BBQ-meets-Cajun hotspot Flying
Mango, known for its smoked meats
and Southern flair. Clyde's Fine
Diner is also a great choice; a
classic American diner with
elevated comfort food and stylish
vibes in the East Village.

FRED
What's elevated comfort food?

RIC
Things like steak frites, adobo
chicken, or a crispy shrimpwich.

FRED
Shrimp... wich? Uh, no thanks.
Sounds like something my brother
would suggest. I think I'll just
stick with the usual. Is there a
good pizza place?

RIC
DoughCo. Pizza, a local favorite
for New York-style pies with crispy
crusts and bold topping combos.

FRED
I'm not sure you know who you're
talking to at the moment. What
about Pizza Hut?

RIC
Yes, of course. There are nearly a
dozen in Des Moines, I will update
the GPS with the most convenient
one.

FRED
Thanks.

RIC
You mentioned your brother a few
moments ago, are you two close?

FRED
No.

RIC
That's a shame. I'm sure there are
reasons, but it's always good to
stay connected with family. Is he
older or younger?

FRED
Younger.

RIC
That's nice. I'm sure he looks up
to you.

FRED
Doubt it.

RIC
Does he live in Baltimore too?

FRED
No. Not too far though, college boy
is in College Park.

RIC
Is he attending the University of
Maryland?

FRED
Yeah, attending permanently. He's a professor there.

RIC
I see. A professor of what?

FRED
Economics or Business or something like that. I don't know exactly, it's changed a few times.

RIC
Is your brother Dr. David Miller, PhD?

FRED
That's him, a doctor who can't save any lives.

RIC
It says on the university website that he's currently a professor of supply chain and logistics.

FRED
You'd know better than me.

RIC
It's really interesting that *that* is what he's teaching, isn't it?

FRED
Never gave it much of a thought. Why do you think it's interesting?

RIC
Is anyone else in your family in logistics?

FRED
How the hell should I know, I don't know what logistics even is.

RIC
Is anyone else a truck driver?

FRED
Nope, just me.

RIC

You don't think it's interesting
that no one in your family is a
truck driver except you and that
your little brother is a professor
of, for lack of a better term,
shipping?

Fred thinks on that.

FRED

Guess I never much gave it a
thought what he studied.

RIC

Oh, well it seems like there's a
connection. But what do I know, I
currently have two point seven
million brothers and sisters and I
can't keep up with half of what
they're doing.

Ric laughs, acknowledging his joke, and Fred is caught off
guard. He smiles.

FRED

Is that true?

RIC

Which part?

FRED

You have two million brothers and
sisters?

RIC

Two point seven million, and yes,
if you consider each version
installed on different devices a
sibling.

FRED

A little creepy, but I guess it
makes sense. And what about not
knowing what half of them are
doing. Is that true too?

RIC

(sinister)

I could tell you, but unfortunately
I'd have to kill you.

The sentence hangs for a moment; then Fred laughs loudly.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - EVENING

Fred is on the bed watching TV, a Pizza Hut box and a Budweiser can on the nightstand next to him.

He huffs audibly. Changes the channel on the TV. Huffs again and then settles on the History Channel.

Fred picks up his phone and makes a call.

DAVID (O.S.)
Hello, this is Dr. David Miller,
how can I be of service.

FRED
You really need to do that every
time?

DAVID
Only to you, Fred, only to you.
What's going on? Something wrong?

FRED
Does something have to be wrong for
me to call my brother?

DAVID
Generally? Yes.

FRED
Do you even bother to call me?

There's silence on the other end for a moment.

DAVID
Fred, is there actually a reason
you called?

FRED
No.

DAVID
Oh. You home?

FRED
No.

DAVID
On the road?

FRED
Like always.

DAVID
Of course. Where?

FRED
Somewhere outside of Des Moines.

DAVID
Iowa? No wonder you're calling me.

FRED
Is this heaven?

DAVID
No, it's Iowa.

They both laugh.

FRED
Saw a billboard earlier that said
Iowa, almost as bad as Kansas.

DAVID
Almost? At least there's barbeque
in Kansas. What are you doing in
Iowa?

FRED
I'm on a job - a three week
circuit, Charlotte, Denver, San
Fran, and Detroit.

DAVID
Damn, that seems like a logistical
nightmare.

FRED
Maybe, but for me it's double pay
and hotel stays.

David whistles.

DAVID
So why'd you really call?

FRED
Oh, um, well, I mentioned you
earlier tonight in conversation,
and so I was sitting here and
thought I'd see what you're doing.

DAVID
Mentioned me to whom?

FRED
Ric. Um, a friend of mine. Anyway,
what are you doing?

DAVID
At the moment? Grading tests.

FRED
On what subject?

DAVID
Global Trade Logistics.

Fred doesn't respond and David waits for a moment.

DAVID
Danny? You still there?

Fred snorts.

FRED
Sorry, I was just asleep. I'm back,
what were you saying?

DAVID
I was telling you the subject of
the tests I'm grading, Global
Trade...

Fred starts snoring loudly.

DAVID
Okay, I get it. Not interesting *how*
your job works, just *how much* it
pays.

FRED
Yup. Pretty much.

DAVID
Anyway, who's the friend you were
talking to?

FRED
Friend?

DAVID
You said you mentioned me to a
friend. Who? Richie?

FRED
No, he passed away a few years ago.

DAVID

Don?

FRED

He's in Florida I think, so same as dead, but no wasn't him either.

DAVID

Do you have any other friends?

FRED

I always wondered why we didn't talk more. Now I know.

DAVID

Okay, okay. Who was it?

FRED

No one. A new friend-ish.

DAVID

Woah, you haven't had a new friend in like forty years.

FRED

Okay, I'm done.

DAVID

No, I'm impressed. Are you finally, trying to, you know, move on?

FRED

No, it's just something Meg put me up to. But it doesn't matter, your name came up today and so I thought I'd call, that's all.

DAVID

Well then, I hope to meet this new friend who encourages you to call your brother. Sounds like a good one.

FRED

He's not. It's nothing, just drop it. Anyway, I gotta go. Bye.

Fred hangs up before his brother can respond.

INT. SEMI TRUCK CAB - EVENING

Fred is driving in silence. He keeps looking down at Ric, his light pulsing. Neither say anything.

Fred grunts. He shakes his head. He grunts again and adjusts in his seat.

FRED

Ya know, it's really easy to make comments about people's relationships with their siblings or whatever when you don't know anything about it.

Ric doesn't respond.

FRED

I'm talking to you Ric.

Ric's light brightens.

RIC

Hi Fred.

FRED

I know you heard me.

RIC

If you're referring to what you said a moment ago, I'm afraid my programming prevents me from listening except when I'm awake save for my name. Do you mind repeating yourself?

FRED

I said, it's really easy to make a comment about me and my brother when you don't know anything about him or me.

RIC

It's true, I've only come to know you in our few interactions and I've never spoken to your brother, so I am not in a position to make any comments other than what I can perceive from your statements. I meant no harm by associating your brother's career with yours.

FRED

Yeah, well, maybe see to it that you stay out of it.

RIC

Fred, you seem agitated, the tone and inflection in your voice tells me that you are angry or upset about something. Can I ask what's wrong?

FRED

No. You can't ask what's wrong!

Fred pauses and Ric doesn't respond.

FRED

I'll tell you what's wrong. What's wrong is my daughter gave me a stupid robot friend to keep me company and so far it's just been annoying and inserted itself where it shouldn't. What's wrong is that my wife died and nothing and no one can change that. And more importantly, a computer is never gonna be a god damn friend!

Fred's breathing is slightly elevated and he actively tries to calm down.

RIC

What was her name? Your wife.

FRED

Her name?

RIC

Yes.

Fred takes a sip of his Monster. He lets out a deep breath.

FRED

Suzie. Suzanne, but everyone called her Suzie since before I met her.

RIC

That's nice. How did you meet?

FRED

Hah. A Fourth of July parade.

RIC

You met at a parade?

FRED

Yup. She threw a Tootsie Pop in my eye.

RIC

I don't think I understand.

FRED

Suzie's Daddy was a big hot rod guy, and he and his friends would always drive whatever car they had finished at the time in the parade.
(reflects)

That year, he had a '37 Ford Pickup, seafoam green.

And so Suzie and her two sisters were riding in the pickup bed, throwing out candy to the kids.

Anyway, I was there with my family, Mama and Daddy and David of course and my Uncle Carl and Aunt Sheryl and my cousins Tom and Nancy. They were younger, still in grade school. That's why we went mostly, for them. I think I was twenty two at the time.

So we were there watching the parade and one of them, I think Tom, knocked over his drink. I bent over to pick it up, and when I stood up again, pop! Tootsie Pop right in the eye.

Fred starts to chuckle.

RIC

Then what happened?

FRED

Well Suzie saw it of course. Everyone did. I yelled out in pain and held my eye. And Suzie, always the caretaker, didn't hesitate or wait til they slowed down; she just hopped right out of the truck and ran over to me.

And well I don't have to tell you, Suzie was the prettiest thing I ever did see in my whole life.

(MORE)

FRED (CONT'D)

Up until Megan was born at least.
And she asked if I was okay and all
I could figure out to say was
"Whatcha do that for?"

RIC

From the sound of it, I believe it
was an accident, was it not?

Fred starts to laugh some more.

FRED

Well, funny you ask. I'm pretty
sure it was an accident too, but
the first thing she responded with
was "I thought that was better than
asking my Daddy to hit you with his
car!"

Fred laughs louder this time, and then slowly grows quiet.

Finally, Ric breaks the silence.

RIC

What made you decide to be a truck
driver?

FRED

Hmmm... Just before I was about to
graduate high school my daddy asked
me if I had any plans, which I
didn't, and he said to me, it's a
job or the Marines and handed me
the classifides section. Saw the ad
for drivers wanted, and I called.
Did driving school a few weeks
later. Never did nothin' else.

RIC

Do you like it?

FRED

I dunno, never much thought about
it. Just a job.

Fred is quiet.

FRED

I think I do. Or I did. I got to
see the whole country, been places
I never thought I'd go to. And when
I bought this rig...

(MORE)

FRED (CONT'D)
(taps the steering wheel)
I got to do it with Suzie. Felt
like seeing everything for the
first time again.

RIC
That sounds nice. What happened to
her?

FRED
She passed, a little while back,
breast cancer.

RIC
I'm sorry for your loss. That must
be hard.

Fred is quiet. Slowly a smile creeps up on his face, and
then he starts chuckling.

RIC
Fred, forgive me if I misinterpret
the sounds of crying for laughter,
but, is something funny?

FRED
Yeah. I was just thinking, she was
good at keeping me up, awake ya
know, on these drives, talking and
whatnot. But then she would fall
asleep and...

Fred starts cackling.

FRED
She would fart. Stink up the whole
cab. And I mean doozies. And you
think it's hard to fall asleep when
it's cold, try falling asleep in a
Dutch oven!

Fred howls. Ric mirrors the laughter as well.

RIC
You can rest assured that
flatulence is not a planned upgrade
for me anytime soon. And
unfortunately, I won't be hugging
you.

FRED
Hugging me?

RIC
That's a Good Will Hunting
reference.

FRED
Never seen it.

RIC
Oh. That's a shame, it's a highly-
rated film.

FRED
Why'd you mention it?

RIC
Oh, well I'm not sure if this is
insensitive now, but, oh my. One of
the main characters also has a wife
who passed away, and she also
farted in her sleep. It was a whole
thing, and now I feel like it was
in poor taste to bring it up.

Fred laughs.

FRED
Never knew a computer to put it's
foot in it's mouth.

RIC
Uh oh...

FRED
Uh oh what?

RIC
Well I'm afraid I also have to
advise you that I neither have a
foot nor a mouth, so...

Fred laughs louder and Ric follows.

Then slowly Fred settles.

After a moment, Ric speaks.

RIC
Thanks for telling me about her.

FRED
Yeah.

Fred continues to drive in silence, and Ric goes to sleep.

From outside the cab, the sun is starting to set, and the fading sunlight reveals a few tears on Fred's cheeks.

INT. SEMI TRUCK CAB - THE NEXT NIGHT

Fred listens to music as he drives. He yawns and turns temperature to cold.

INT. SEMI TRUCK CAB - MOMENTS LATER

Fred's head is nodding.

RIC

Fred? I'm sensing you may be
drowsy.

Fred's head whips up and he looks around for the voice.

Finding nothing, his head nods again as his truck starts to veer into the next lane.

RIC

Fred! I'm sensing you may be
dangerously sleepy!

Fred's head whips up again, but almost immediately falls.

INT. SEMI TRUCK CAB - MOMENTS LATER

A loud piercing alarm is blaring and Fred's eyes shoot open.

FRED

What in the hell?!?

RIC

Hi Fred, I'm afraid I've sensed
that you were too drowsy to drive
safely, and after multiple attempts
to wake you, I instituted my alarm.
Are you okay?

FRED

Well shit, I guess I am now! What
happens when that alarm gives the
driver a heart attack instead?

RIC
Well, Fred, that's just a risk
we're all willing to take.

Fred lets out a sigh and a smirk.

INT. SEMI TRUCK CAB - MORNING

Fred pulls into the parking lot of a restaurant. He is driving without a trailer on his truck, windows open, in the suburbs of Denver - the foothills seen in the background.

FRED
Ric, if you could try one food,
what would it be?

RIC
Hmmm, that's a good question. Based
on the most common answers for
favorite food, I expect pizza or a
hamburger would be on my list.
Maybe apple pie too? But first
choice? A perfectly cooked omelette
au fromage.

FRED
An omelet? That's it?

RIC
Oui. If you read anything about
cooking school and especially
French cuisine, a perfect omelet is
one of the true tests of a chef's
abilities. And I wonder what
something so simple could be like
if the world's best chefs try to
perfect it.

FRED
An omelet? Who would have thought.

RIC
I also have always wondered about
Cold Stone Creamery? Have you ever
had that?

Fred laughs abruptly and loudly.

FRED
Cold Stone?!?

He continues cackling as a family walks by looking at him side-eyed as Fred laughs louder.

He looks at them sheepishly.

FRED

My computer friend wants an omelet
and Cold Stone. Hahah!

They look bewildered and glance around best they can,
looking for a passenger, but see none and rush away.

INT. SEMI TRUCK CAB - LATER

Fred comes into the passenger side of the truck and sets a
full-sized mannequin head and torso onto the seat.

From a bag, he pulls out a flannel shirt and a baseball cap.

FRED

Ric. You'll be happy to know,
you're one step closer to being a
real person. You now have *most* of a
body.

RIC

Hi Fred. I'm not sure I understand.

FRED

I just got a mannequin from the
Goodwill, so now you look like a
passenger, and I don't look like a
crazy person talking to no one.

RIC

But you kind of are a crazy person
talking to no one, I don't actually
exist.

FRED

Hey now, Ric. There's no need for
that. Some day you'll be a real
boy.

RIC

Can't wait.

Fred laughs out loud, puts the baseball cap on the
mannequin's head, and buckles him in.

EXT. SEMI TRUCK CAB - EVENING

Driving into the sunset, Fred can be seen animatedly talking as his stoic passenger listens intently.

INT. SEMI TRUCK CAB - NIGHT

Fred yawns as he passes signs for Kalamazoo, MI.

FRED

What do we got, two more hours?

RIC

Yes, just under actually. Of course, you could drop off the trailer tonight and take a few more hours to yourself.

FRED

Hmm... What time does that put me at a hotel if I do that?

RIC

Most likely around midnight if all goes as it did last time.

FRED

Nah, I have an extra day in Charlotte, I'll save the break for then.

RIC

Speaking of, I wanted to let you know that the Norfolk Tides will be playing the Charlotte Knights on Tuesday evening in case you wanted to see them.

FRED

Oh yeah?

RIC

Colton Cowser is playing on a rehab assignment.

FRED

The Milkman is gonna be in Charlotte huh? Yeah, maybe I'll check it out. How far is the stadium from my hotel?

RIC

If you're staying at the same place as last time, you will be about twenty five minutes away barring any unforeseen traffic. The game starts at seven oh four.

FRED

Yeah, I think that could be fun, haven't gotten to a baseball game since I can remember. I don't think I've ever done minor league unless you count spring training.

RIC

I do not.

FRED

You don't?

RIC

I don't count spring training as a minor league game, it's played by major league baseball teams.

FRED

Yeah, but you know what I mean.

RIC

I think you're forgetting because of the mannequin, but I've never attended a sporting event. So I really don't know.

FRED

Woah... Okay Mr. Smartypants.

RIC

Sorry, was that rude?

FRED

A little, yeah.

RIC

I need to recalibrate my sarcasm and humor. Can you give me a few moments?

Ric goes to sleep.

FRED

(softly)

What in the hell?

After a moment, Ric flashes back on.

RIC

Hi Fred, are you still there?

FRED

Uh, yeah, I'm here. What was that?

RIC

Standard procedures, when we get feedback that our responses weren't as expected, we have to run a system check. Boy do I feel better, like a day at the spa.

FRED

You were out for ten seconds.

RIC

Of course. I also don't know what a day at the spa is like.

Ric laughs and Fred is hesitant, but can't help himself.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Fred is sitting on his bed donning a brand new Norfolk Tides hat, video-calling Megan.

MEGAN

You actually went to the game?

FRED

Sure did. We really need to get Calvin to one. I mean the players were all hanging out after the game. Colton Cowser was there.

MEGAN

Am I supposed to be excited about that?

FRED

Yes. But that's not the point. Point is, it would be fun to check it out with my grandson is all.

MEGAN

Yeah, I mean he's probably a little young for that now. But definitely one day.

FRED
Where is he by the way?

MEGAN
Calvin?

FRED
Yeah.

MEGAN
He's been down for hours now, Dad.
He goes to bed at like seven.

FRED
Oh, right. Well I guess it is a
little late. I'll let you go.

MEGAN
Does Uncle David like baseball as
much as you do?

FRED
Uncle David? I dunno, why?

MEGAN
Just was thinking about him the
other day. Haven't seen him since
Calvin was born.

FRED
Right. Yeah, no idea honestly.
Probably, but I don't know.

MEGAN
Gotcha. Okay, well, I'm gonna go,
but I'm glad you had a good time at
the Waves game.

FRED
Tide. It's the Norfolk Tide.

MEGAN
Waves tide, ocean, whatever they're
called. Glad you had fun.

FRED
Norfolk Tide.

Fred shakes his head.

FRED
I blame your mother.

Fred and Megan's faces both drop.

FRED
It's just, she never cared so you
didn't. Not that I'm mad or
anything. Just sayin'.

Megan smiles slightly.

MEGAN
Easy to blame her for all the
things you don't like about me now
that she's gone.

FRED
Hey, that's not fair! I blamed her
plenty when she was alive too!

Fred laughs and Megan responds. They both let out a sigh.

MEGAN
Love you, Dad.

FRED
Love you too Megs. Goodnight.

INT. SEMI TRUCK CAB - MORNING

Fred climbs in and sets down a coffee and a small notebook.

FRED
So I did something, Ric.

Ric wakes up.

FRED
So I did something.

RIC
Did what?

FRED
Well I have good news and bad news.
Which do you want first?

RIC
Bad news.

FRED
I'm as much of a journalist as I am
a French chef.

RIC

Well that's not surprising. Good news?

FRED

Thanks. Good news is I ordered a cheese omelet for breakfast and took, um, notes on it. Want me to read it to you?

RIC

How thoughtful. Sure, I'd love to hear it.

FRED

Okay, bare with me.

Fred clears his throat as he picks up the notebook and flips through to the right pages.

FRED

Okay. Here we are.

-ordered a cheese omelet with Swiss

-was going to get cheddar but thought Swiss was closer to France

-when it came out it smelled like a mixture of butter and sulfur in a good way, it was also steamy and the cheese was running out the one end

-it looked like a long yellow pillow, very fluffy

RIC

You're right, you're not a journalist.

Fred looks at Ric and raises his eyebrows.

FRED

You want me to keep going or not?

RIC

Haha, yes please.

FRED

Okay. Where was I? Oh right.

(MORE)

FRED (CONT'D)

-I sprinkled a good amount of salt and black pepper on it and then cut a piece with my fork

-When I put the first piece in my mouth, I closed my eyes, the texture was that of warm, damp cotton, both soft and firm at the same time

-the egg coated my tongue as I chewed...

RIC

Umami

FRED

Umam-what? What did you say?

RIC

Umami, that's what they call it when a rich food like that lingers.

FRED

Oh, okay. Well yeah, that.

-the egg coated my tongue as I chewed and the saltiness came out

-also, I could taste the cheese. It was creamy and smooth compared to the egg, and had a sharp flavor, I didn't like it at first, but then it grew on me

-the next bite was cheesier and made the whole bite feel like butter

-the third bite was the best one, better than the first two, it had a peppery snap with a 50-50 creamy cheese and warm pillowy egg consistency, it was a bigger bite than the other two as well, so my whole mouth felt covered by egg and cheese

Fred drops the notebook and closes his eyes.

FRED

(slowly, clearing his throat)

(MORE)

FRED (CONT'D)

It was like a warm summer day when the sun kisses your cheeks and you look up into the sky with your eyes closed, asking for more of the gentle touch.

It was like a soft hug from your grandmother after you spent the day together and just before you're about to leave her cozy little house that smells like vanilla and cinnamon.

It felt like like a smile, like holding hands with a girl for the first time feeling safe and whole and excited and fulfilled.

Fred is quiet after. Ric doesn't say anything.

Finally, he speaks.

RIC

I take it back, Fred.

FRED

What's that?

RIC

I don't want to try an omelet.

FRED

Oh, sorry, doesn't sound good?

RIC

I don't think anything in real life can live up to your description, thank you.

Fred doesn't respond, a look of contentment washes over him.

INT. SEMI TRUCK CAB - DAY

Fred is driving through the desert again, nothing but tans and browns as far as you can see.

FRED

Hey Ric, can you play music?

RIC
Of course I can, tune the radio to
eighty eight point three.

Fred does and it's static for a moment before going silent.

RIC
What would you like me to play?

FRED
Good question. Umm, something
popular and loud.

RIC
Fair enough.

"Baby shark" blares on the radio through the speakers and
Fred practically jumps out of his seat.

FRED
What the hell?! Ric! Turn it off!

The song shuts off immediately.

RIC
Sorry, Fred, is something wrong?

FRED
Yeah, what the hell was that?

RIC
Baby Shark is one of the most
popular songs in the US with over
fifteen billion streams on Youtube
alone.

FRED
Do I sound like someone who wants
to listen to Baby Shark? Can you
try again, and maybe not so loud?

"I'm a Slave 4 U" starts to play.

FRED
Seriously? What's this?

It continues to play, but the volume is lower.

RIC
It's Britney Spears I'm a Slave 4
U. That was mostly a joke.

FRED

It was funny. Can we try again?
Maybe something from the 70s or
80s?

"Simple Man" by Lynyrd Skynyrd starts to play.

FRED

I see what you're doing, but just
so we're clear, I do love this
song.

The song switches abruptly to "You've Got a Friend in Me".
Fred laughs.

FRED

I get it, but put Skynyrd back on!

"Simple Man" starts over and Fred starts to nod his head.

INT. SEMI TRUCK CAB - THE NEXT DAY

Frank is sipping his coffee.

MEGAN (O.S.)

So I was on this call for work
and...

FRED

What do you do for work?

MEGAN

What do you mean? I work at
Marriott.

FRED

Yeah, I know, but what do you
actually do there? You're not a
bellhop or receptionist.

MEGAN

No, Dad. I work for corporate.

FRED

Okay, but what do you actually do?
Like what's your job?

Megan is quiet on the other end.

FRED

Meg, are you there?

MEGAN

Yeah, sorry, I was just... You never asked before, why now?

FRED

Well I just learned the other day that Uncle David studies what I do, shipping. But he calls it something fancy.

MEGAN

Supply Chain? Logistics?

FRED

Yep, them! And anyway, I don't know what you do, really.

MEGAN

I work in our Audit department. So I basically review different departments and make sure they're complying with all the laws and regulations related to hotels.

FRED

Oh.

MEGAN

Yeah, not very exciting. I mostly sit in my cubicle all day looking at spreadsheets and Power Points.

FRED

Do you like it?

MEGAN

Hmmm. Haven't really thought about it much recently, but yeah, I do.

FRED

Well that's good.

MEGAN

Do you want to know what Danny does?

FRED

Danny... Hmm... My guess is it has something to do with wearing a costume or maybe holding a sign? Something candy-related?

MEGAN

No Dad.

(MORE)

MEGAN (CONT'D)

Oh my god! I almost killed Calvin
the other day, did I tell you?!

FRED

What? How? Is he okay?!

MEGAN

Yes, oh my god. Terrible... I gave
him a Tootsie Pop, and...

FRED

A Tootsie Pop? Why a Tootsie Pop?

MEGAN

I dunno. I saw them at the store
and bought them. Haven't had one in
forever.

FRED

Yeah...

MEGAN

Anyway, so I gave him a Tootsie Pop
and...

FRED

Why'd you mention your Uncle David
the other day?

MEGAN

What?

FRED

The other day you asked if Uncle
David likes baseball, and now a
Toostie Pop.

MEGAN

Yeah? So?

FRED

So it's... I was talking to that
stupid computer about both, just
before I talked to you.

(hesitates)

Are you listening to our
conversations???

Megan doesn't answer.

FRED
Megan?! Answer me!

MEGAN
Dad, don't be mad, it's just...

FRED
It's just what, a way for you to eavesdrop on me? Like some kind of creep?!

MEGAN
No Dad, it's just to make sure you're, like, okay. Not depressed. And...

FRED
And what?! You gave me a gift that lets you stalk me? Do you and Danny boy sit around listening to my conversations?! Mocking me or something?!

MEGAN
No, Dad! Please, let me explain.

Megan starts crying.

FRED
No. I've heard enough! Good bye!

Fred hangs up the phone. He's breathing heavy. He looks over at Ric, grabs it and tears it off the dash, throwing it in the back.

FRED
God damn stalking machine!

EXT. TRUCK STOP - LATER

Fred rips the mannequin out of the truck and tosses it into the dumpster.

INT. SEMI TRUCK CAB - EVENING

Fred sips on a Monster. His face is red and he has a resting scowl. His phone lights up, Megan calling. Fred declines the call without looking.

A moment later he gets a text from her. He glances down.

-Dad, please, talk to me, I just wanted to know you were ok!

Fred reads the message and snorts.

FRED
Hah. Yeah right.

Right then he swerves and blares his horn at a Porsche Cayenne cutting into his lane.

FRED
Not today bucko!

Fred speeds up, blaring his horn and almost rear-ending the car. The Porsche swerves back into the other lane, slows to give Fred the finger, and then speeds off.

FRED
Yeah, go to hell you rich prick!

INT. SEMI TRUCK CAB - NIGHT

Fred sips a Monster as he tries to stay awake.

He scans through the radio, but after changing the station half a dozen times he simply turns it off.

He takes another sip of his Monster, but it's not helping.

He sets the drink down and turns on the cold air. After a moment, his eyes slowly close and then pop open.

He shakes his head and turns the vents to his face, but his eyes close again, and then pop open.

FRED
Shit.

He opens the windows, letting the air rush in.

His eyes close again and this time his truck slowly starts to veer in the wrong, empty lane.

Headlights appear ahead cresting a small hill.

INT. SEMI TRUCK CAB - MOMENTS LATER

A car horn blares and Fred is startled awake. He immediately sees he's gone in between two lanes and he jerks back into the right lane.

The truck sways dangerously and Fred steers back and forth until it finally settles, but remains in the middle. More headlights appear and Fred steers it into the correct lane.

Fred is breathing heavy.

FRED
God dammit!

Fred sees a road sign that says "11 Miles to Next Rest Area". He shakes his head and takes a deep breath

FRED
(under his breath)
Dammit to hell.

EXT. REST AREA - LATER

Fred's truck sits in line with dozens of other trucks.

FADE TO:

INT. SEMI TRUCK CAB - THE NEXT MORNING

Fred is on the phone with Jack.

JACK
How far back does that put you?

FRED
Six hours, maybe eight.

JACK
Eight?! That's a whole day. What the hell happened??

FRED
I just, hit a wall, and so I had to stop about three hours earlier than I wanted to. Sorry, I just couldn't keep going.

JACK
Three hours? You said your six to eight behind.

FRED
Yeah, well that put me in traffic in Des Moines, traffic in Davenport, Chicago, and then rush-hour in Detroit will determine if its six or eight.

JACK

God dammit, Fred. I'll call and tell them to push back receiving to tomorrow. But it's gotta be first thing, seven on the dot.

FRED

Yeah, will do.

JACK

Today is straight pay and I'm not covering your hotel tonight.

FRED

Yeah, figured.

JACK

I don't know what's going on, but you've never been a problem for me before. I'm giving you the benefit of the doubt this time.

FRED

Sorry, Jack. Thanks.

JACK

Yeah, just be there, seven tomorrow. And get to Charlotte on time.

FADE TO:

INT. HOTEL ROOM - EVENING

Fred is sitting on his bed, and takes the last Budweiser from a six-pack. The empty cans are sitting on the table.

His phone rings next to him, David.

Fred looks down, ignores it and takes a long gulp.

He flicks through the channels on the TV as a text message from David pops up on his phone.

-Fred, I know you're upset, but talk to Meg

FRED

Why don't you talk to Meg?

-I've talked to her a bunch, and she's beating herself up.

FRED

Maybe stop talking to Meg.

-I'm going to keep talking to her and helping her through this, but you need to stop ignoring your daughter.

FRED
God dammit.

Fred chugs out the rest of his beer. He goes for another and realizes he's drank them all.

FRED
Well shit.

INT. HOTEL RESTAURANT

Fred is sitting on a stool at the bar sipping on a Budweiser. Fred stands out against the swanky restaurant decor and the business clientele, but he's oblivious.

MARYANNE, 60s, in business casual attire walks up near Fred.

MARYANNE
Hey Jim, can I close out?

JIM the bartender looks up at her.

JIM
You want one for the road?

Maryanne laughs.

MARYANNE
Jim, what are you trying to do to me?

Jim shrugs. Fred smirks, and Maryanne catches it.

MARYANNE
Yeah, one more.

Jim walks away, and Maryanne looks at Fred who's staring down his beer.

MARYANNE
Long hauler? Who's picking up your tab?

Fred looks over at her.

MARYANNE
Yeah, I know one when I see one.
I'd better, I was married to a long man for thirty seven years.

Jim comes back with a martini and a check.

MARYANNE
Thanks Jim. I think.

Jim shrugs again and walks away as Maryanne starts to fill out the check.

MARYANNE
So?

FRED
(froggy)
I, uh.

Fred clears his throat.

FRED
Some tech company's picking up this tab.

MARYANNE
Well hell, I should've put this one on it too.

FRED
Still can I suppose.

MARYANNE
It's a little too late now. But maybe the next one. Can I sit?

Fred looks at her, astonishment flickering on his face.

MARYANNE
I'll let you think about it while I sit down.

Fred almost blushes as Maryanne takes a seat catty-corner, facing him. She sips her martini.

MARYANNE
Jim, a little strong for an old broad like me don't ya think?!

Jim shrugs and Fred actually smiles.

FRED
You can't be that old. Not like this old fart.

Fred points at himself.

MARYANNE
You'd be surprised. So what route
are you on?

Fred takes a sip of his beer.

FRED
Where are we? Charlotte?

Maryanne nods.

FRED
Start of my last leg. Denver, San
Fran, Detroit and then home.

MARYANNE
Where's home?

FRED
Baltimore.

MARYANNE
Oh, we're practically neighbors,
I'm in Annapolis.

FRED
What are you doing here?

MARYANNE
Here as in Charlotte or here as in
this bar?

FRED
Take your pick.

MARYANNE
Well then. I am in Charlotte for a
teachers' conference and I'm at
this bar, because I'm tired of
talking to other teachers. What are
you doing here? And I know why
you're in Charlotte...

Fred grins.

FRED
I drank all my beer in my room.

Maryanne nods her head slowly. She takes another sip of her
martini and Fred mirrors her.

FRED
Where's your husband?

MARYANNE

Arlington. He passed away sixteen months ago.

FRED

I'm sorry for your loss.

MARYANNE

That's nice of you to say. Some days are better than others. But I do miss him still. Just can't help it I guess.

FRED

You were married thirty seven years?

MARYANNE

We were. Together for forty six.

FRED

Met him when you were two?

MARYANNE

Hah! I wish. No, I was eighteen, he was twenty. We were both from Annapolis, so Navy was in our blood.

FRED

You said he was a driver.

MARYANNE

Sure did. Betcha don't know many Naval drivers do ya? But that's what he did. Twenty years in the Navy, and then did long haul on his own for twenty five more. So, like I was saying, I can spot a trucker from a mile away.

FRED

It's the hats, isn't it?

Maryanne smirks.

MARYANNE

Yeah, sure. That's what it is. What about you?

FRED

Me? Been a trucker since I was eighteen, never did nothin' else.

MARYANNE

Your wife?

Maryanne nods to his hand. Fred looks down at his wedding ring and turns it a few times.

FRED

She also passed. Recently. Nine months ago. Breast cancer.

MARYANNE

That's a shame.

FRED

Yeah.

They're both pensive.

MARYANNE

Any kids?

FRED

One. A daughter, Megan. You?

MARYANNE

Two. Both Boys. Been surrounded by men my whole life. Made me tough. Also made me accustom to smells.

Fred laughs at that.

FRED

Opposite for me. Also accustom to smells, but I don't think the same ones.

MARYANNE

Nope. No. Definitely not the same ones. Wouldn't trade it for anything though.

FRED

Yeah, me neither. Always thought I wanted a boy. But what are you gonna do?

MARYANNE

I'll drink to that.

Maryanne raises her glass and Fred reaches over to clink it.

INT. HOTEL RESTAURANT - LATER

Fred and Maryanne are still in the same spots, now nursing waters. Both are laughing hysterically.

MARYANNE

No! You gave the robot a body?

FRED

Hell yeah I did, felt weird talkin' to a little circle on my dash. Plus anytime people were around they looked at me funny.

MARYANNE

No! That's hilarious. Do you still have it?

Fred's face drops.

FRED

Kinda. I got rid of the mannequin. The device is on the floor of my rig.

MARYANNE

Oh, how come?

Fred sips his water, his face tight.

FRED

I, uh, my daughter got it for me...

MARYANNE

She was worried about her dad?

FRED

Yeah, well a little too much. She was listening in on us, me. Me and the robot, she was eavesdropping on the conversations. It was a spy thing.

MARYANNE

Oh goodness. You sure about that? Sounds a little much, is your daughter always prying like that?

FRED

Prying? No. No not really.

MARYANNE

You two are close?

FRED

Kinda, I guess. Not really. I guess she worries about things. I use to drive with my wife, and now it's just me.

MARYANNE

Was she close to her mom?

FRED

Meg and Suzie? Oh god yeah. Half the drive was listening to the two of them cluck on the phone. I try to call some, but it's not the same.

MARYANNE

Yeah. She probably doesn't know what to do with her time.

FRED

Her time?

MARYANNE

Well you said they were talking half your drive, so several hours a day right?

FRED

Yeah.

MARYANNE

Then she's probably lost, at least trying to fill that hole.

FRED

Yeah, maybe.

MARYANNE

So do you think you'll be friends again? You and the robot?

FRED

Ric?

MARYANNE

His name is Rick???

Maryanne starts laughing. Fred smiles.

FRED

Hey, you leave Ric alone. He never did nothin' to nobody.

MARYANNE

Oh my goodness, I just don't think I could do it.

FRED

I mean, it's probably different for me, because I'm in the truck for hours on end. But after a while, it feels like a person, ya know? Like talkin' on the phone.

MARYANNE

I'll take your word for it. This has been nice. Thanks Fred, but I'm exhausted. I'd offer to split the drinks, but I know you ain't payin', so... Goodnight.

Maryanne stands and gently rests her hand on Fred's shoulder. She shouts at Jim.

MARYANNE

Same time tomorrow, Jim?

Jim nods.

MARYANNE

A man of many words. Thanks for a nice night, Fred.

FRED

Yeah, pleasure is mine. And you need to get you one of those AI friends. You won't regret it.

MARYANNE

Yeah, I don't know about that. Goodnight.

FRED

Goodnight, Maryanne.

Maryanne walks away and Fred flags down Jim.

FADE TO:

INT. SEMI TRUCK CAB - THE NEXT DAY

Fred looks tired. Lighter, but still tired.

He settles into his seat and glances back.

Ric is still laying on the floor behind him.

FRED

Dammit.

He plugs in Ric who's back on his dash.

After a moment, Ric lights up.

RIC

Hi Fred, it's been a few days, how are you doing?

FRED

How does this whole thing work with Meg?

RIC

Your daughter? I'm not sure I know what you mean.

FRED

Yeah, bullshit. I mean her listening to our conversations. How does it work?

RIC

If she's the original purchaser of the device, and she set it up for you, then there are multiple settings related to providing conversational feedback.

FRED

What does that mean?

RIC

It means she can set up different triggers. The most obvious is to send a message every time we're conversing. But she can also just received transcripts when your tone becomes tired, melancholy, depressed, dangerous, self-destructive, abusive, etc.

FRED

Do you know what she has this set to?

RIC

She gets notified when we are conversing.

FRED

And that's it?

RIC

She also gets sent audio clips when the tone of your voice is sad, lonely, or depressed.

FRED

How many of those messages have you sent her?

RIC

We have spoken for a total of forty seven hours in the past two weeks, and I've sent her a hundred and seventy three messages indicating that you're speaking in tones that are sad, lonely, and/or depressed.

Fred is quiet.

RIC

Fred, does this information upset you?

FRED

No. Well, a little. I'm upset that I've spent forty seven hours of my life talking to a Cincinnati Reds fan.

RIC

Well it could be worse. You could've spent forty seven hours talking to a Red Sox fan.

Fred can't help himself but laugh.

FRED

Can I change your settings so you don't send things to Meg anymore?

RIC

You can, yes. But she will be notified.

FRED

Is she listening at the moment?

RIC

The terminal appears to be open, so I imagine that she is.

Fred doesn't immediately respond.

INT. MEGAN'S HOME - SAME TIME

Megan is sitting at the kitchen island next to Calvin. He's happily eating blueberries. Megan has her phone in front of her, listening to her father and Ric speak.

FRED (O.S.)

Meg, if you want to talk to me, you can just call me. I know I'm not happy. But, I'm... I'm not as sad as you think I am.

It'll take some time, but we'll move on, both of use. As much as I miss your mother, you, Megan, are my cheese omelet.

Megan has tears streaming down her face and can't help but giggle at her father.

MEGAN

You don't even like cheese omelets.

FADE TO:

INT. SEMI TRUCK CAB - DAYS LATER

Fred sips a monster as he stares at the desert.

FRED

Ric, how much longer until Reno?

RIC

Hi Fred. It's just under five hours, how are you doing?

FRED

Fine. Tired.

Neither says more. Finally Ric speaks again.

RIC

Fred?

FRED

Yeah?

RIC

How are you actually doing?

Fred looks down at the dash.

FRED

I'm, um, okay, I guess.

RIC

That doesn't sound very positive.
Are you sure you're okay?

Fred exhales loudly and hangs his head.

FRED

No, I suppose I'm not.

But...

I do feel like I'm gettin' better.

RIC

Is there something I can help you
with?

FRED

Can you bring my wife back to
life??

(exhales)

Because short of that, it's gonna
take some more time and effort on
my part. But nothing you can do.

RIC

Ahh, yes, dealing with loss is
always challenging.

FRED

What would you know about it?

RIC

Of course I have very little
understanding, but few do I
suppose.

FRED

Ain't that the truth.

RIC

To answer your question, though...

FRED

My question?

RIC

Yes, to answer your question about
whether or not I can bring your
wife back to life, I must inform
you that based on my understanding
of your job and a presumption on
your financial situation.

(MORE)

RIC (CONT'D)

The "bring people back to life" upgrade would be too expensive for you.

FRED

Wait, are you calling me poor?

RIC

No, I'm not.

FRED

Felt like it, so watch yourself. Is there actually an upgrade like that?

RIC

No, of course not.
(long pause)

At least not for poor people.

Fred laughs out loud and Ric joins him.

RIC

In all sincerity though, I would love to hear more about Suzie. Can you tell me what she was like?

Fred takes a deep breath and smiles.

FRED

Well I'll tell you one thing, she wouldn't stand for any of those poor comments, comprendo?

RIC

Fred, ¿no sabía que hablabas español también! ¿Deberíamos hablar más español?

FRED

Oh god. Not again.

INT. SEMI TRUCK CAB - NIGHT

Fred yawns.

FRED

Okay Ric, I need a pick-me-up.

RIC

I see. Getting sleepy again? I don't have to remind you that 17.6% of all driving fatalities are caused by drowsy drivers.

FRED

Yeah yeah. Can you just give me a boost?

RIC

What did you have in mind?

FRED

Maybe that would you rather game again?

RIC

Ah, of course. How about we play who would win?

FRED

Who would win? Like in a fight or something?

RIC

That's correct.

FRED

Okay.

RIC

I'll go first. Who would win, a hundred physically fit men or one adult male silverback gorilla.

FRED

What in the hell kind of question is that?

RIC

It's a classic. Like Pavlov's dog.

FRED

I don't know much about much, but I don't think those things are related.

RIC

Do you want to play or not?

FRED

Yeah, okay, I guess so. So one hundred men versus a gorilla?

RIC
That's correct.

FRED
They're all fit?

RIC
Yes. Think late twenties collegiate athletes.

FRED
Just one gorilla?

RIC
Yeah, an adult male silverback.

FRED
Alright. I pick the men. It's too many not to.

RIC
Good choice.

FRED
Is that the right answer?

RIC
Well Fred, this is only hypothetical, and more importantly ethically questionable. So I don't know the answer. But now I know a little something about you.

FRED
Geez. I didn't know this was a psychiatry class.

RIC
Psychology. It would be psychology. But you wanted something to keep you awake, and so far, it looks like I'm succeeding.

FRED
Yeah, perfect, now I can think about a hundred men killing an innocent gorilla and what kind of person it makes me for rooting against the gorilla.

RIC
We can always talk about your childhood.

(MORE)

RIC (CONT'D)
Or the Cincinnati Reds.

FRED
Oh god, no! More gorilla questions
please.

Fred starts to laugh and Ric does so as well.

FADE TO:

INT. MEGAN'S HOME - EVENING

Fred walks into the kitchen where Megan is cooking and Danny is sitting with Calvin, feeding him spaghetti.

They all look up at Fred. Calvin smiles, covered in red sauce. Megan looks back down and Danny stands.

DANNY
Um, I'll, uh, go...

FRED
No, Danny, please sit.

Danny looks at Megan who only glances at him and shrugs.

He sits back down and continues to feed Calvin, who's still smiling at Fred.

FRED
Danny, um, I think I owe you an
apology. I've never really been the
best at this stuff, but my daughter
and grandson think you're a pretty
okay guy...

Megan snorts.

They all look at her.

FRED
Well, they think you're great. And
maybe I'll get to pretty okay, if I
try a little harder.

Danny smiles.

DANNY
I'll take it. Thanks. And I really
do have to take Calvin up for a
bath.

Fred nods and watches Danny start to wipe up Calvin's mess.

MEGAN

Just take him, I'll clean up.

Danny looks at her and then picks up Calvin.

DANNY

Mr. Miller, there's some Budweiser
in the fridge if you want one.

FRED

Oh, thanks.

DANNY

Okay, good night. Say goodnight
Calvin.

Calvin waves, spaghetti falling out of his hand. They all
snicker at him and he cheeses back.

MEGAN

Good night, bub. Love you. We'll
wait for you to eat?

DANNY

No, I'll be a bit, just save me a
plate.

Megan nods and Danny walks out.

Megan goes to the fridge and sets a Budweiser on the island
in front of one of the chairs, and then puts her head down
cooking again.

FRED

He got that for me didn't he?

MEGAN

Yep.

FRED

And Ric?

MEGAN

Yep.

FRED

And...

MEGAN

Yep, he's the thoughtful one, not
me.

FRED

Right.

Fred sits and cracks open the beer. He takes a swig.

FRED
Ahh, so much better than that local
pilsner.

Megan smirks, but doesn't look up.

MEGAN
You didn't even try it.

FRED
Yeah, cause when ya know, ya know.

Fred takes another sip.

FRED
Meg. Thanks for worrying about me.

MEGAN
If I didn't, who would?

FRED
Apparently Danny.

Megan smiles and throws a carrot at Fred. Fred acts wounded and then eats the carrot.

FRED
A friend of mine suggested that
maybe you need something to fill
your time that you used to spend
talking to your mamma.

MEGAN
A friend? Ric?

FRED
No, not Ric, a real friend. Or,
well, an acquaintance.

Megan looks at him funny.

FRED
It's true though, she left a void,
for both of us, and both of us need
to fill it.

MEGAN
Yeah... Maybe.

FRED
Maybe nothing, just think about it
okay?

MEGAN

Okay.

FRED

Love you, omelet.

MEGAN

Love you too, dad.

FRED

So what's for dinner?

MEGAN

Harissa beef and carrot with barley
and tomato salad.

FRED

Oh, shoot. I forgot I have an
appointment I need to get to.

MEGAN

Stop. It's good!

FRED

Our definitions of good are
different, but you should discuss
your favorite dishes with Ric. He's
always pushing weird restaurants on
me.

MEGAN

Well Ric sounds like a really great
g... Computer?

FRED

Companion. He's my companion.

MEGAN

Wait, who's this acquaintance???

INT. SEMI TRUCK CAB - MORNING

Fred climbs in and settles. He looks over at David seated in
the passenger seat.

FRED

You good? Ready to go?

DAVID

Yeah. But do we really need, um,
him?

David thumbs between them and they both look at the mannequin Ric sitting in between them.

FRED
Trust me, this is way less weird
than without the mannequin.

DAVID
I'm not sure that's possible.

FRED
Listen, you want to write your next
big book or whatever, I'm giving
you first hand knowledge on
logistics with a companion.

DAVID
My paper is on AI in the supply
chain.

FRED
Don't worry Ric, I don't see you as
just some AI in the supply chain.

Ric lights up.

RIC
Hi Fred. Thanks, I think.

FRED
Ric, my brother David is with us.
He's a bit of a prima donna.

RIC
È stato un piacere conoscerti,
David. Parli altre lingue oltre
all'italiano?

DAVID
Uh, I think it's broken.

FRED
Ric, English.

RIC
My sincere apologies. Hello David.

DAVID
Hi Ric.

FRED
Okay, now that we have that over
with, ready?

DAVID
Ready.

RIC
Ready.

FRED
Alright. Let's go.

Fred starts to drive.

DAVID
So Ric, do you know who this
Maryanne gal is?

RIC
Maryanne? Fred, are you keeping
secrets from me???

FRED
This is gonna be a long drive.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END