

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.

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.

On the table next to him, a few empty beer cans surround a picture of a younger Fred, and his wife SUZIE, blonde hair and blue eyes - both smiling broadly.

INT. SEMI TRUCK CAB - DAY

Fred drives, rolling hills and windmills go on forever, talking to his phone mounted on the dash.

MEGAN (O.S.)
Where are you?

FRED
On the road as usual.

MEGAN (O.S.)
You just got home yesterday.

FRED
And today is a new day.

Megan is quiet for a moment.

MEGAN (O.S.)
Where are you, like, what state?

FRED
Why you asking? You never much
cared before?

MEGAN (O.S.)
If you just shared your location on
your phone like I asked, I wouldn't
have to nag you all the time.

Fred doesn't respond.

MEGAN (O.S.)
So...?

FRED
If I knew how to do the locate
thing, maybe I would. But if you
must know, I'm in Kansas.

MEGAN (O.S.)
You hate Kansas.

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

MEGAN (O.S.)
When do you get home?

FRED
Thursday, if everything goes as
planned. Why?

MEGAN (O.S.)
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 (O.S.)
Oh, don't worry, just your only
grandson's 1st birthday.

FRED
You call me up to give me shit?

MEGAN (O.S.)
No, dad. But...

FRED
But nothing. The highways didn't
change none.

MEGAN (O.S.)
I know, it's just, I don't like
that you're...

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 (O.S.)
(quietly)
Okay.

FRED
Worry 'bout yourself and my
grandson, would ya.

MEGAN (O.S.)
And my husband?

Fred doesn't respond.

MEGAN (O.S.)
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 (O.S.)
 Yeah, okay, be safe, love you, Dad.

FRED
 Mmhmm, okay, bye.

Fred leans forward and taps his phone. He sits back and 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
 (hesitantly)
 Danny.
 (clears his throat)
 Uh, I'm afraid I don't think we have any Budweiser. We have a local pilsner that might be close. Would you like the 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 bumbles 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 looks at Danny and then at Calvin.

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,
Mr. Miller.

Danny pauses, waiting for a response. Fred doesn't.

Danny looks at Megan who shrugs.

He walks out slightly disappointed with Calvin.

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.

MEGAN

Pluss it has GPS and like tracking stuff.

FRED

Tracking?

MEGAN

Like to know where you're going or whatever.

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.

Fred look at the box, huffs, and slowly pulls it towards himself. He turns it over in his hands.

FRED

A companion...

Fred looks at Megan and rolls his eyes.

INT. FRED'S HOME - NIGHT

Fred sits in his recliner and stares at a blank TV.

After a moment, he stands, gathers his Budweiser cans, and lingers on the picture of he and Suzie.

He takes a long breath and exhales.

FRED

G'night Suzie.

FADE TO:

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 (O.S.)

Tennessee and Arizona, your favorites.

FRED

Well, they were your momma's favorites...

Fred trails off for a moment. Catches himself.

FRED

...but it does make for a nice drive.

MEGAN (O.S.)

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

FRED

Who's Rick?

MEGAN (O.S.)

Routine Intelligence Companion, RIC. Your new best friend!

FRED

Oh. That.

MEGAN (O.S.)

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 (O.S.)
You just plug it in and it does the rest. It's pretty dummy proof.

FRED
Sure, but is it old man proof?

MEGAN (O.S.)
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 (O.S.)
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 (O.S.)
Did you like RIC?

FRED
The robo-friend thing?

MEGAN (O.S.)

Yeah?!

FRED

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

Megan is quiet on the other end. Finally...

MEGAN (O.S.)

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 (O.S.)

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

FRED

Meg...

MEGAN (O.S.)

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 out of the box.

He stares for a moment, finally shaking his head and mumbling under his breath. He attaches the pieces, mounts it to the dash and plugs it in.

FRED

Now what?

As if on cue, 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.

Fred pulls out of the parking lot and onto the highway.

INT. SEMI TRUCK CAB - LATER

Fred drives through the desert and RIC sits on the dash with the light continuing to slowly pulse.

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., uh Miss Ric?

Nothing happens.

FRED

What am I doing? Ric is not a real person.

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

RIC (FEMALE VOICE)

Hello, Pete, what can I do for you?

FRED

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 voice? A MAN's 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.

Ironic, 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 background stories?

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 knowing 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 starts the truck.

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
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.

(MORE)

RIC (CONT'D)

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 don't believe their intention was...

FRED

I don't much care about their intention. So let's just drop it.

RIC

I see.

(pause)

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 nice? What hobbies do you have for yourself? Composing Jazz songs while you're sleeping?

RIC

Oh, yes, how did you know I love contemporary jazz, Fred?

FRED

Really? Wow. Just a guess.

RIC

No, Fred, not really. 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 (O.S.)

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

FRED

Three weeks?

JACK (O.S.)

Yes. I can part it out to a few people, but thought I'd ask you first.

(MORE)

JACK (CONT'D)

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 (O.S.)

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 (O.S.)

Yes.

FRED

Double rate, plus expenses?

JACK (O.S.)

Works for me. Leave Tuesday?

FRED

Alright, send it over. Thanks Jack.

JACK (O.S.)

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

Fred hangs up and turns the show back on. After a moment he pauses it again and dials Megan.

MEGAN (O.S.)

Hey dad, what's up?

FRED

Hi Megan, how are you?

MEGAN (O.S.)

Good, why are you calling?

FRED

A man can't call his daughter to say hello?

MEGAN (O.S.)
Sure a man can. But you don't,
so...

FRED
Just wanted to let you know I took
a job, for the next three weeks.

MEGAN (O.S.)
In a row?

FRED
Yeah. Pays double.

MEGAN (O.S.)
When?

FRED
Monday.

MEGAN (O.S.)
Monday? Oh. Do you want to come
over for dinner this weekend before
you leave? See Calvin?

FRED
Oh, uh, sure.

MEGAN (O.S.)
Okay. Saturday or Sunday, either
works, just let me know.

FRED
Sunday would be nice.

MEGAN (O.S.)
Okay, Sunday it is. See you then...

FADE TO:

INT. MEGAN'S HOME - EVENING

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

MEGAN
You didn't even give it a chance.

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

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, um, person.

Fred pauses. Megan continues to look at him. Danny looks at him as he puts Calvin in his seat.

FRED

It did feel at times like you were talking to a person on the phone.
(hesitates)
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.
(frustrated)
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 actually say, about
the kneeling thing?

FRED
Just made excuses for them players,
and I don't accept 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 gives Calvin a few snacks and Megan nods for him to leave.

DANNY

Fred, um, Mr. Miller, 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 orients Calvin towards Fred.

DANNY

Just a few at a time, Mr. Miller. Thanks. 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

Oh. Right. Funny.

MEGAN

Does turning sixty require you to become a grump?

FRED

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

Fred looks at Calvin and raises his eyebrows.

MEGAN

Ew. Dad!

Fred smirks.

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?

Fred looks disinterested.

MEGAN

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.

(MORE)

FRED (CONT'D)

So I can take a bunch of time off after.

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 similar to Fred's expression.

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 gets in his seat and sets up Ric on the dash, huffing and
grunting. 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

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

Fred drives in the dark with nothing and no one around except a few sporadic 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 plan 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

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 then. Just for you, pal.

RIC

Best friend, Fred. Robot. 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, there's no place I'd rather be.

Fred grins.

RIC

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.

Ric pauses.

FRED
Ric?

RIC
I'm thinking too... Is this what
I'm like?

Fred starts to speak.

RIC
Don't answer that, Fred. I believe
that's what you call a rhetorical
question.

Fred smiles.

RIC
The concept of being physically
touched is challenging for a
computer to comprehend. I choose
touch.

Fred's smile fades.

FRED
Guess that makes sense.

RIC
Would you like to keep playing?

FRED
Yeah, sure.

RIC
Good. Would you rather...

EXT. SEMI TRUCK CAB - MOMENTS LATER

Fred is crying laughing.

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.

RIC

Would you like me to adjust the GPS?

FRED

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

(long pause)

No, I think I stop in Des Moines.

(another pause)

Not a bad suggestion though.

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 doesn't respond.

FRED
Ric?

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 watches TV on the bed, 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 (O.S.)
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 (O.S.)
Generally? Yes.

FRED
Do you even bother to call me?

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

DAVID (O.S.)
Fred, is there actually a reason
you called?

FRED
No.

DAVID (O.S.)
Oh.

David pauses.

DAVID (O.S.)
You at home?

FRED
No.

DAVID (O.S.)
On the road?

FRED
Like always.

DAVID (O.S.)
Of course. Where?

FRED
Somewhere outside of Des Moines.

DAVID (O.S.)
Iowa? No wonder you're calling me.

FRED
Is this heaven?

DAVID (O.S.)
No, it's Iowa.

They both laugh.

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

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

FRED
Three week circuit, Charlotte,
Denver, San Fran, and Detroit.

DAVID (O.S.)
Damn, that seems like a logistical
nightmare.

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

David whistles.

DAVID (O.S.)
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 up to.

DAVID (O.S.)
Mentioned me to whom?

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

DAVID (O.S.)
At the moment? Grading tests.

FRED
On what subject?

DAVID (O.S.)
Global Trade Logistics.

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

DAVID (O.S.)
Still there, Fred? You have a heart
attack or something?

Fred makes snoring sound.

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

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

Fred starts snoring loudly.

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

FRED
Yup. Pretty much.

DAVID (O.S.)
Anyway, who's the friend you were
talking to?

FRED
Friend?

DAVID (O.S.)
You said you mentioned me to a
friend. Who? Richie?

FRED
No, he passed away a few years ago.

DAVID (O.S.)
Don?

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

DAVID (O.S.)
Do you have any other friends?

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

DAVID (O.S.)
Okay, okay. Who was it?

FRED
No one. A new friend-ish.

DAVID (O.S.)
Woah, you haven't had a new friend
in like forty years.

FRED
Okay, I'm done.

DAVID (O.S.)
No, I'm impressed. Are you finally,
trying to, you know, move...

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 (O.S.)
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. What was your wife's name?

Fred takes a sip of Monster and adjusts in his seat. He lets out a breath, continuing to try to calm himself. Finally...

FRED

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

RIC

That's nice. How did you meet?

Fred looks down at Ric. Hesitates. Looks up and smiles slightly. After pauses for a another moment.

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, even with one eye. 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 classifieds 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...

(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 nods his head. Catches himself. Nods again.

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 your drowsiness may be at a dangerous level!

Fred's head whips up again, but almost immediately falls. The truck slowly veers to the side.

FADE OUT.

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. He shakes his head and rubs his eyes.

FRED
Alright, Ric. Find me a place to stop.

RIC
Good idea, there is a rest stop three miles ahead.

Fred nods. Takes a deep breath and lets it out. They continue to drive in silence.

FRED
Thanks Ric. How'd you know I was tired?

RIC
My software allows me to ensure the vehicle is moving safely and that the driver can operate effectively.

FRED
Wow. Sophisticated, Ric. But let's keep this incident between friends, okay? No need to alert the authorities.

RIC
I can't promise anything. But I'm glad you consider us friends.

FRED
Not the headline, Ric. Not the headline.

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.

(MORE)

RIC (CONT'D)

Maybe apple pie too? But my 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.

RIC (V.O.)

Well Fred, I certainly hope that was a once-time decision...

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 what you mean.

FRED

Woah... Okay Mr. Smarty pants.

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.

EXT. CHARLOTTE KNIGHTS STADIUM - THE NEXT EVENING

Fred looks around at the small crowd and smiles. He walks to
the empty ticket window.

TICKET CASHIER
Hi sir, what can I do for you?

FRED
Do you have any tickets available?

TICKET CASHIER
Yes, how many do you need?

FRED
Just one.

The TICKET CASHIER looks at him softly.

TICKET CASHIER
The only thing we have left is the
outfield lawn...

Fred looks at her hesitantly.

TICKET CASHIER
Ya know what? My husband was
supposed to come tonight, and can't
make it.

She leans back and pulls an envelop off the desk. She
slides it to Fred.

TICKET CASHIER
Here. You can have his ticket. Free
of charge. On me.

Fred looks around.

FRED
No, let me know what I owe ya.

TICKET CASHIER
Nothing, I mean it. Enjoy the game.

Fred smiles. Tips his Orioles cap.

TICKET CASHIER

Only rule is ya gotta root for the
Knights!

Fred looks at her and after a moment she breaks out into a
smile. Fred returns the smile.

TICKET CASHIER

Get out of here, before I lose my
job for gifting a ticket to the
enemy.

Fred chuckles, adjusts his hat purposefully, and walks away.

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 around 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

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.

FRED

You, uh, doing okay?

Megan is caught off guard.

MEGAN

Me? Um, I guess so, why?

FRED

Just askin'. She was your mom too.

MEGAN

Yeah...

She starts to choke up a bit. Catches herself. Takes a breath and lets it out.

MEGAN

Yeah, I'm okay, Dad.

FRED

Good. Okay, well I'll let you go now.

MEGAN

K. Love you.

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

I don't think that constitutes as
news, Fred. What's the good news?

FRED

Fair enough. 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.

-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
Nothing, please continue.

FRED
Okay. Umm...
-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

(MORE)

FRED (CONT'D)

-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

RIC

Very nice.

Fred drops the notebook and closes his eyes.

FRED

(slowly, clearing his throat)

The taste... The feeling...
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 softly.

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.

Fred smiles as Ric goes to sleep.

INT. SEMI TRUCK CAB - THE NEXT DAY

Fred is sipping his coffee.

MEGAN (O.S.)

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

FRED

What do you do...? For work?

MEGAN (O.S.)

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 (O.S.)

No, Dad. I work for corporate.

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

Megan is quiet on the other end.

FRED
Meg, are you there?

MEGAN (O.S.)
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 (O.S.)
Supply Chain? Logistics?

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

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

FRED
Do you like it?

MEGAN (O.S.)
Hmmm. Haven't really thought about
it much recently, but yeah, I guess
I do.

FRED
Well that's good.

MEGAN (O.S.)

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 (O.S.)

No Dad.

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

FRED

What? How? Is he okay?!

MEGAN (O.S.)

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

FRED

A Tootsie Pop? Why a Tootsie Pop?

MEGAN (O.S.)

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

Fred is quiet.

MEGAN (O.S.)

Anyway, so I gave him a Tootsie Pop and... Dad, are you still there?

FRED

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

MEGAN (O.S.)

What?

FRED

The other day you asked if Uncle David likes baseball, and now you're talking about Toostie Pops.

MEGAN (O.S.)

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?

Megan is quiet.

FRED

Megan!

MEGAN (O.S.)

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 (O.S.)

No Dad, it's just to make sure you're, like, okay. Not, um, depressed or whatever. 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 (O.S.)

No, Dad! Please, let me explain.

Megan starts to cry.

FRED

No. I've heard enough! Goodbye!

Fred hangs up the phone. He's breathing heavy. He adjusts his hat, takes it off and looks at it and tosses it. He looks around and sees his Orioles cap and puts it on.

He sits there for another long moment.

Finally, 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
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.

The dashboard where Ric once sat is empty.

FADE OUT.

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 - LATER

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
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 points at him.

MARYANNE

Clever! 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 he 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 looks at him, puzzled.

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...

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. I suppose so.

MARYANNE

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

FRED

Yeah, maybe.

MARYANNE

After my husband died, I would call my sons three, four times a day, maybe more. They all stopped answering after a while.

FRED

Sounds rude.

MARYANNE

Oh gosh no. They went from getting a call a week to multiple a day. And I didn't really have anything to talk about. I did get mad at first.

FRED

You? Mad?

MARYANNE

Hate to break it to you, but I sometimes, on occasion, have been know to very infrequently, have a very very small temper.

Fred looks at her, raises his eyebrows. She nods.

They're quiet for a moment.

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.

They pause.

MARYANNE

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

FRED

Do what?

MARYANNE

Talk to a... Robot.

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.

Maryanne yawns.

MARYANNE

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 again... 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 think so.

(hesitates)

I guess never say never, though, right? Well, goodnight, Fred.

FRED

Goodnight, Maryanne.

Maryanne walks away and Fred flags down Jim.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - THE NEXT MORNING

Fred stands at the desk. The ATTENDANT in front of him.

ATTENDANT

Ok, Mr. Miller, you're all set.

FRED

Thank you.

Fred turns and Maryanne is standing behind him smiling.

FRED

Oh. Um. Hi again.

MARYANNE

Good morning, Fred. How'd you sleep?

FRED

Me? Oh, I could sleep just about anywhere.

MARYANNE

So good then?

Fred smiles awkwardly.

FRED

Yes, good. All the extra beers helped as well.

MARYANNE

Yes, they'll do that.

FRED

Okay, well. Um. Have a good one.

Fred starts to walk away. Maryanne turns.

MARYANNE

Fred?

Fred turns abruptly.

MARYANNE

Maybe this is forward of me, but...

Maryanna takes a pen from the desk and scribbles something down. She hands Fred a small piece of paper.

MARYANNE

We're practically neighbors, right?
At some point, maybe you'll be
ready for another barside chat?

Fred looks down to see Maryanne's phone number.

FRED

Oh. Oh... Um.

Fred nods, smiles slightly.

MARYANNE

Alright, go on. Don't make this
linger, you're probably gonna be
late to your next stop if you don't
get moving...

Fred nods. Looks at her for a moment, and then turns.

FADE TO:

INT. SEMI TRUCK CAB - LATER

Fred looks tired. Lighter, but still tired.

FRED

Hey Ric...

He looks at the empty dash.

He settles into his seat and glances back.

Ric is still laying on the floor behind him.

FRED

Dammit.

INT. SEMI TRUCK CAB - MOMENTS LATER

Fred picks up Ric plugs it in and sets it back on his dash.

He sits back down in his seat and waits.

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

You sent her the conversations
about my brother and me meeting her
mother.

RIC

I did.

FRED

What about the omelet?

RIC

Yes.

Fred doesn't immediately respond.

INT. MEGAN'S HOME - SAME TIME

Megan is standing at the kitchen island across from Calvin.
He's happily eating blueberries.

Megan is cutting vegetables and has her phone sitting on the
counter, 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.

Megan stops cutting and looks down.

FRED (O.S.)

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)

(MORE)

FRED (CONT'D)

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. 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% ...

FRED

...of all driving fatalities are caused by drowsy drivers. Yeah 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.

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, Mr. Miller. 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
Megan?

Megan doesn't look up.

FRED

Hey.

She looks at him.

FRED

Thanks for worrying about me, Megs.

Megan wipes a tear quickly.

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.

They're quiet for a moment.

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 the middle.

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