

CHRISTMAS DINNER

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INT. TRUCK STOP DINER - DAY

ROY, 50, sips coffee and stares out the window at the blowing snow. Baseball cap, camo vest, plaid shirt, scruffy beard, he looks like the long-haul trucker he is.

MOLLY (O.S.)

Last call.

He turns to MOLLY, 40, thick and trying to look younger in her too tight uniform. She waves a coffee carafe.

ROY

Last call? It's only four o'clock.

MOLLY

Christmas eve, Roy. We're shuttin' down early. You want a warm-up or not?

He grabs a thermos off the seat and uncaps it.

ROY

What the hell am I supposed to do now?

MOLLY

(filling thermos)

I don't know. Sleep in the cab, sing carols to the snowflakes. Whatever it is you guys do.

ROY

You'd think you'd be a little nicer on Christmas.

MOLLY

I'll be as nice as tinsel once I get his apron off.

She hands back the thermos and walks away. Roy turns back to the bleak weather outside.

INT. TRUCK CAB - DAY

Roy shifts into gear and watches the lights of the diner wink out. The truck rumbles away.

INT. TRUCK CAB - LATER

Roy turns onto an entrance ramp. Ahead, a YOUNG MAN, small duffle at his feet, holds out a thumb. Roy pulls to the side.

The Young Man grabs the duffle and runs to the truck, climbing inside and blowing on his hands as Roy starts onto the highway.

ROY

You want to freeze to death? No one hitches on Christmas eve. Ain't no one around.

YOUNG MAN

Thanks for stopping. I know it's odd, but I have a place to be.

ROY

We all got a place to be, but bein' out in the cold ain't the way to get there.

YOUNG MAN

If you want to be there for Christmas, you have to move.

ROY

Where is it you headin'?

YOUNG MAN

John Henry Road.

ROY

I'm goin' right by there. Make yourself at home.

INT. TRUCK CAB - LATER

The truck rolls through the snow flurries. A Christmas carol plays on the radio.

YOUNG MAN

Can I ask you a question?

ROY

As long as I get to choose to answer.

YOUNG MAN

I've got a problem.

ROY  
What's her name?

YOUNG MAN  
How do you know it's a girl?

ROY  
At your age, it's always a girl.

YOUNG MAN  
I'm going to meet her folks, and I was wondering what I should do if they don't like me.

ROY  
Does she like you?

YOUNG MAN  
She loves me.

ROY  
Of course, she loves you, but does she like you? Does she laugh at your jokes and want to discuss the news of the day? Because if she doesn't want to be around you, no amount of love will do.

YOUNG MAN  
And her parents?

ROY  
Parents are like nesting birds. They squawk and carry on when you enter their space, but after a while they get used to you.

YOUNG MAN  
Are you married?

ROY  
Was. Marriage and truckin' don't always mix.

YOUNG MAN  
So, you have no place to go for Christmas?

ROY  
Christmas, New Year's, Easter, I got the truck.

The Young Man stares out into the cold snow.

INT. TRUCK CAB - LATER

Roy comes to a stop at the end of an exit ramp.

ROY  
John Henry Road.

YOUNG MAN  
(grabbing duffle)  
Great, thanks.

ROY  
How far you got to go?

YOUNG MAN  
Mile, maybe two.

ROY  
(putting truck in gear)  
Too far to walk. And it ain't like  
I got someplace to be.

He turns onto the road.

YOUNG MAN  
Thank you, thank you very much.

INT. TRUCK CAB - LATER

Roy rolls along a lane. Ahead, perhaps 20 semis are parked in row.

ROY  
You know something I don't know?

YOUNG MAN  
This is great, great, thank you.

The Young Man opens the door even though the truck is not completely stopped.

ROY  
Hey, where you goin'?

The Young Man jumps out. Roy stops and watches the Young Man disappear between the trucks.

ROY  
Damn fool forgot his bag.

Roy puts on the brake and grabs the duffle. He handles it as if it's empty. Then, he puts on his gloves and gets out.

EXT. PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

Roy emerges from the between the trucks, duffle in hand.

Ahead, twenty TRUCKERS stand in front of several long tables laden with food, a pitch-in. Beyond the tables, fire burns in several barrels. Light snow coats the ground.

As Roy approaches, DWAYNE, 40, steps away from the others.

DWAYNE

I see you brought the kid.

Another Trucker smiles and takes the duffle from Roy.

ROY

Yeah, where is he?

DWAYNE

Around, I guess.

The Trucker takes the duffle to the first table, opens the bag, and takes out a hot, freshly baked ham. Roy stares.

ROY

That, that wasn't in there.

DWAYNE

It never is, and it always is. The boy brings the meat.

Roy watches the trucker pull out a turkey from the duffle.

ROY

That's impossible.

DWAYNE

I picked up the boy ten years ago. I've been coming back ever since.

ROY

How the hell--

DWAYNE

Some folks say it's a boy who was comin' back with Christmas dinner when he was attacked by thugs who killed him and stole his prize.

The Trucker pulls out several chickens. Roy is flabbergasted.

DWAYNE

Others say he was bringing a gift  
to his girlfriend's family when he  
got lost in a snow storm and died.

The other Truckers queue up to start eating.

DWAYNE

Doesn't matter. One of us always  
picks him up, and we all eat.

Dwayne wraps an arm around Roy.

DWAYNE

Every year. Right here. Let's  
eat.

Dwayne leads Roy to the head of the line and claps Roy on the  
back.

DWAYNE

You brought the boy. You eat  
first. Merry Christmas.

FADE OUT.