

Another Trucker Story

by Robert Edward Sullivan

"Breaker 1-9, can I get a radio check?" some ankle biter says. Don't know why I'm on the Sesame Street channel, just am.

"Radio's fine, kid," I say.

I don't take my eyes off of the blue Camry that's now about two truck-lengths ahead of me. Even if there aren't any bears in the air, or in the woods, I can't just gun it. I'm pushing 75 mph, and I think the girl in that Camry is topless, maybe.

I'm driving one of these Major's Yard and Lumber trucks. The ones with massive logos everywhere. There's a multi-racial family and some guy in a Major's apron helping them build a house on both sides of my rig. And it's *huge*. And perfect. Too perfect. Add all that to the 800 number on the back for these four-wheel turds to call if they don't like the way I drive on my roads, so I have to go slow.

Anyway, if I get to my Thursday Major's too quick, they always expect my backslide to the warehouse to be that much quicker. I want to see Loraine for a bit, if I can. She's usually working Thursdays. Sometimes, she won't take her break until I get there. She's a cashier supervisor or something. Used to be the receiving check-in clerk. That's where I met her.

"Breaker 1-9. Can I get a radio check," the same kid says.

"Hey little man, you're coming in loud and proud. Check's in the mail. Now check the off switch."

I can no longer see the Camry. She probably wasn't topless. It's easy to see things that aren't there, sometimes.

"Breaker..." Static. Fuzz.

"Hey little man, I'm talking to you," I say. "I'm replying to your radio check. It's good. Now keep the channel clear, squirt."

One time I delivered to that store on a Wednesday and Loraine wasn't all done up or anything. Don't know if she noticed I wasn't freshly shaved. Our mid-day donuts and chats are the same though, regardless.

She tells me about her prick of a husband.

I end up telling her some shit about my ex.

She tells me about dealing with the "public."

I tell her about my daughter.

She almost always says it's sad I don't see her that much.

And I usually reply, what's sad is I have to deal with my ex to see my daughter.

"Hello?" the same kid squeaks. "I'm looking for my dad. Larry. Over?" Jesus Christ. "No Larry here, little man."

"Are you a trucker?"

"I drive a truck."

"Like a semi-truck? A big one? Over."

"Yes, indeed," I say.

"Do you know Larry?"

I laugh, but not into the CB. "Look, little man, I don't know any Larrys. Sorry."

"He's my dad. He's coming today. Soon. From Atlanta. Over."

Once in a while, one of use will say we should go get drinks sometime. We both know what it means. We switch the topic to weather or something.

There's been a couple of times that Loraine and I will be sitting up in the cafeteria in the front of the store, and she'll say she needs to check the time, so she'll turn her head and give me a little show, sticking her chest out.

I often say that she should jump in the truck with me and we should drive off somewhere.

She laughs each time I say it. Kind of a sad laugh, though.

Once in a while, one of us will say we should go get drinks sometime. We both know what it means. We switch the topic to the weather or something.

"He's got a big mustache," the kid says.

I got about a half hour until I get to Major's. I'm going to be out of range of this kid soon. Surprised I'm not already.

"What's he haulin'?" I ask.

"I don't know. I'm using the CB he gave me, like he showed me. Over."

I've imagined the scene quite a few times, though. Drinks and...after. She'll tell me how her husband hasn't touched her in months, and when he does, she'll say she's repulsed. I'll say something about how she should be treated like a queen. We'd go to some chain motel. We'd play out the cliché as best we could. All because we just want to fuck each other. But maybe a

little more than that. Perhaps it's the "little more" we're avoiding.

"His truck is bright red. Sometimes he plays the harmonica. He likes salt and vinegar chips."

You gotta be shitting me. I feel bad for the kid. I know he's hoping his little list of details is going to suddenly make someone go, "oh *that* Larry."

"Hey, little man. When's the last time you saw your pops?"

What do a hundred or so half hour talks over a few years add up to? Can I produce a little list of details about her? What kind of chips does she like? It's not like she's going to just leave her husband. I don't even know if she should.

"I saw him two months ago. At my birthday party." The voice is getting weaker.

"How old did you turn, little man?"

"Seven!"

She's got a couple of kids but they're both in high school. It's not like a divorce would totally fuck them up. I mean, it could work.

"He surprised me," kid says through a lot of crackling. "He surprised me on my birthday. I didn't know he was going to be there."

I never had the kind of talks me and Loraine have with my ex. I can tell Loraine things. It's not impossible. There's something there between us.

"Hello...?" The kid says. There's a lot of static. Too much. "Dad? Was that you, Dad? Are you foolin' me?... That was you, wasn't it? You almost here? It's me, little man...Dad?...Breaker 1-9...*Dad?*"

I respond, but there's no answer, just dead air. I call out to the kid a few more times. Still no answer. I switch the channel trying to find him, but I'm out of his range. The rest of the route was silence.

Loraine isn't even working today. She's on vacation, someone says. I ask if there's an empty trailer for me to take back to the warehouse. They say no. Have to wait until the truck's unloaded. Should take an hour or so. I go up to the cafeteria in the store and drink my coffee, eat my donut, and stare out the window the whole God damn time.