

GHOSTS THAT SMELL LIKE NEW CAR

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FADE IN:

EXT. SMITH HOUSE - FRONT STEP - LATE AFTERNOON

A wake is just ending, the widow, MRS. REBECCA SMITH (60-ish or older) and her friend, DENNAH (early fifties) have just seen off the LAST GUESTS, who are heading down the front walk. They get in their car and drive away as Rebecca and Dennah talk. All, of course, wear formal black.

REBECCA  
Would you look at this lawn?

DENNAH  
What about it?

REBECCA  
Look at it. It's a jungle.

DENNAH  
It's the best looking lawn on the block.

REBECCA  
And it's Saturday.

Dennah gets it now.

REBECCA  
Every Saturday, he was out there mowing the lawn.

DENNAH  
He did it himself? He didn't use the Leo?

REBECCA  
Oh, yes. He loved mowing the lawn. The smell. The...it was a thing he was growing himself. I think he had some farmer gene in him.

Rebecca smiles, and so does Dennah at the fact that Rebecca smiled at all. Rebecca closes her eyes, remembering.

CONTINUED:

REBECCA

Every Saturday morning, it was "Hey,  
Becs, I'll be out on the back forty."

(looks to Dannah)

Henry was not a funny man. He just  
thought he was.

(looks back out on the lawn)

Now...I don't know. I don't have the  
energy to...I just don't know.

Dannah sees Rebecca emotionally falling, and tries to get  
conversation rolling again.

DENNAH

I've got the Leo doing mine. It's  
really easy, you just walk it through  
the motions one time.

REBECCA

I suppose I'll have to.

DENNAH

I can do it for you, if you--

REBECCA

No, no. I'll do it myself. It'll  
take my mind off...

Gestures back to the house.

REBECCA

For a minute, anyway.

DENNAH

All right, then.

They hug.

DENNAH

You need anything, you call me.

REBECCA

I will. I will.

Dannah walks down the front walk. Rebecca watches for a few beat  
and goes inside.

INT. SMITH HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Rebecca ENTERS foyer and then through to the living room. The remnants of the wake are being cleaned up by the LEO, an android. Very close to human form, but decidedly mechanical with servo joints, plastic casing with upholstered accents on the chest (with a metal LEO logo) and head, like a giant robot action figure.

REBECCA  
Stop cleaning, Leo.

SMITH'S LEO  
(monotone)  
Stopping cleaning.

Rebecca stares out the front window at the lawn.

SMITH'S LEO  
New directive?

REBECCA  
Go to recharge, Leo.

SMITH'S LEO  
Recharge.

The Leo EXITS the room to the kitchen

EXT. SMITH HOUSE

Rebecca in the window, staring, again, at the lawn. Slowly moving her gaze across the yard. Imagining her husband mowing the lawn.

INT. SMITH HOUSE - LIVING ROOM

She sits down on the sofa and starts crying. From the foyer is heard...

SMITH'S LEO (O.S.)  
(not monotone, breaking between  
the Leo voice and that of an older  
man)  
Hey Becs, I'll be out on the back forty.

Rebecca is briefly stunned, then rushes to look out to the foyer.

REBECCA  
Henry!?

CONTINUED:

Gets to the foyer and sees the Leo opening the front door. She's confused. It turns to her.

REBECCA

Henry?

SMITH'S LEO/HENRY

I'm not leaving you, Becs.

Rebecca is stunned.

EXT. SMITH HOUSE - DAY - ONE WEEK LATER

The lawn looks nicer. Shorter. Dannah and another woman, SARAH, 50, are dressed casually and seated in two of three lawn chairs set out on the lawn.

SARAH

She's taking it well.

DENNAH

I know. It worries me.

SARAH

It worries you?

DENNAH

It's only been a week. And you didn't see her after the wake.

SARAH

Well, it was after the wake.

Dannah nods in acknowledgment, but she's doubtful.

INT. SMITH HOUSE - KITCHEN

Rebecca, also dressed casually, and colorfully, is finishing pouring three glasses of lemonade on a tray. It's the end of the pitcher.

REBECCA

Henry, we're out of Lemonade.

The Smith's Leo, henceforth known as HENRY, ENTERS, and heads to the refrigerator.

CONTINUED:

HENRY

I tell you one thing, Becs. There are some advantages to being...this.

Opens the fridge, takes out a bowl of lemons.

HENRY

Nothing like hand-squeezed lemons. And now, I'm arthritis-free.

REBECCA

You know, we could have gotten one of those squeezy-thingers.

HENRY

Next thing, you'll be wanting to use the powder stuff. Just add water. That's no way to make lemonade, and neither is using some stupid gadget.

REBECCA

(chuckling)

Deary, you are the gadget.

She pulls herself up on his shoulder and kisses the part of of his head casing that would be his cheek.

REBECCA

I won't be much longer with the girls.

Picks up the tray of lemonade.

HENRY

Just be careful. Don't let anything slip.

REBECCA

I didn't get you back just to get myself shipped off to the booby hatch.

HENRY

Hey Becs? Take all the time you like. I'm not going anywhere.

Rebecca smiles at him and EXITS.

EXT. SMITH HOUSE - MOMENT LATER

As before, except now a man in khakis and a polo shirt, MR. KIRCHER, is talking with Dennah and Sarah. Beside him a new Leo unit. A service van with the Autoid Technologies logo on the side is parked on the curb.

DENNAH

Honestly, I don't know how I managed before I got one.

MR. KIRCHER

(to Sarah)

And you have one also?

SARAH

I'm trying to convince my husband. I think I've almost got him. It's nearly gutter-cleaning time.

DENNAH

If you're here to sell, Rebecca already has one.

MR. KIRCHER

No, no. This is just a service call.

DENNAH

She hadn't said she was having any problems with her Leo.

Rebecca steps out of the house with the lemonades, big smile.

REBECCA

Because I'm not. Couldn't be happier with him.

MR. KIRCHER

Mrs. Smith? My name is Kircher. I'm from Autoid Technologies.

REBECCA

As I said, I'm not having any problems with my He-- Leo.

Rebecca serves the lemonades to Dennah and Sarah and places the tray on the ground beside her empty chair.

CONTINUED:

MR. KIRCHER

Perhaps not that you're aware of, but the unit's software hasn't been updating, so there may be a problem with the hard drive or the neurotronic net. There's no cost involved, if that's a concern. This is all covered in the warranty.

REBECCA

Really, Mister Kircher, I'd rather not.

MR. KIRCHER

That's all right. If you like, we can try to reload him next time he plugs in to recharge. If there's any viruses, we can wipe his drive and net and reload him from the service center.

(makes sure he's looking Rebecca  
in the eye)

We can do that, you know?

Rebecca understands the threat. The smile fades.

REBECCA

How long do you think this might take?

MR. KIRCHER

We can handle this in five minutes.

REBECCA

Maybe you should come inside.

MR. KIRCHER

Happy to, Mrs. Smith.

Kircher walks up the front step, followed by his Leo.

REBECCA

(to Dannah and Sarah)

He'll just be a few...

DENNAH

We're fine. Go and take care of the thing with the thing.

Rebecca gets the door for Kircher and his Leo.

INT. SMITH HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - SECONDS LATER

From the foyer, Rebecca conducts Kircher and his Leo to the living room.

KIRCHER  
(to his Leo)  
Right there.

The Leo stops and parks himself in the foyer, near the doorway.

KIRCHER  
Lovely home, Mrs. Smith. If I can  
just see your Leo--

REBECCA  
What exactly is the problem with  
it, again?

KIRCHER  
It's not updating its firmware,  
for one thing. Honestly, the best  
and fastest course would be to simply  
switch out your Leo for this new  
one I brought with me.

REBECCA  
No, I don't think I can do that.

KIRCHER  
May I ask why not?

REBECCA  
I like the one I have.

HENRY ENTERS, and stops in the doorway when it sees Kircher.

KIRCHER  
Here it is.

He walks up to Henry and takes it by the arm.

KIRCHER  
I'll just take this unit--

Henry forces his arm away from Kircher. Steps back.

REBECCA  
I like my Leo and I think you can  
see, he doesn't want to go.

CONTINUED:

KIRCHER  
Leos don't want anything, Mrs. Smith.  
They're machines.

REBECCA  
This one's...more.

KIRCHER  
It is, isn't it, Mister Smith?

Looks to Henry.

HENRY  
I think you should leave.  
(looks to Kircher's Leo)  
Both of you.

KIRCHER  
I will leave, but I think you  
should come with me Mister Smith.  
Let me tell you why?

HENRY  
I surely can't think of one damn  
good reason to do that.

REBECCA  
He said he can wipe your memory.

HENRY  
I disconnected the modem in the  
charger.

KIRCHER  
But not before we learned that you  
necroloaded.

HENRY  
So give me one good reason why I  
should even listen to you.

KIRCHER  
How about to benefit mankind?

REBECCA  
Sounds like a load of crap to me.

CONTINUED: (2)

KIRCHER

This isn't the first necroloading  
we've found.

HENRY

Necroloading?

KIRCHER

The short version is that the human  
brain functions on electrical  
impulses.

Kircher walks over to the Leo he brought with him and disconnects  
the head, using it as a visual aid. He opens the top of the head,  
revealing an artificial brain.

KIRCHER

When we invented the neurotronic brain,  
we imprinted it with the electromagnetic  
pattern of one hundred twenty-eight  
people so that the Leos would have a  
guide-a template- for learning as a  
human brain does. That's what makes them  
so versatile.

Closes up the Leo braincase.

KIRCHER

What's been happening though, is that  
occasionally, somehow, the  
electromagnetic signature of a recently  
deceased individual, rather than  
dissipating, takes root in the  
neurotronic pathways of a Leo.

Kircher places the head back on his Leo.

KIRCHER

Around the office, we started calling  
it necroloading.

REBECCA

And how does taking Henry back help  
mankind?

CONTINUED: (3)

KIRCHER

We don't understand quite how it works, or why. We need to do some R & D. If we could duplicate this, then-- think of it, the dead could stay with us. Our loved ones, as you've seen--

HENRY

--could be sold back to us for a tidy profit.

KIRCHER

I won't lie to you. Yes. This would provide a new revenue stream. But who wouldn't think twice or regret the cost of mere money to have back what you've gotten back, Mrs. Smith? And, of course, we're willing to offer you a signific--

REBECCA

--Excuse me. You were not just about to suggest that I sell you my husband.

KIRCHER

I'm sure we could arrive at a figure that--

HENRY

Becs. We might want to consider this.

REBECCA

Henry!

HENRY

We don't know how long this might last.

REBECCA

We never know how long we might live, Henry. You couldn't buy me away from you when you were flesh and blood and I'll be damned if you it'll happen when you're plastic and metal.

HENRY

You heard the lady, Mister. No deal. I think it's time you leave.

CONTINUED: (4)

KIRCHER  
There is one last thing.

HENRY  
What's that?

Kircher reaches into his pocket and pulls out a small electronic device with a big red button it.

KIRCHER  
This is a mini EMP device.

Rebecca looks at him puzzled.

KIRCHER  
Electromagnetic pulse. It'll fry every piece of electronics in your house. Your computer. Your microwave. Your Leo. You'll cease to exist, Mister Smith, unless you come back to Autoid with me.

REBECCA  
Please, no.

HENRY  
I don't respond well to threats, son.

REBECCA  
Don't do that.

KIRCHER  
It's a simple decision.

REBECCA  
(to herself)  
I can't take it again.

KIRCHER  
Come with me or go--

Rebecca rushes Kircher, going after the EMP device. Kircher reacts instinctively to avoid her, but in the process she trips over him and hits her head on a piece of furniture. He drops the EMP. It slides across the floor toward his Leo.

HENRY  
(so loud it's distorted)  
Rebecca.

EXT. SMITH HOUSE - SAME TIME

Dennah and Sarah.

SARAH  
You hear something?

DENNAH  
It was probably the Leo. Those things  
make some strange noises sometimes.  
In a way, it's kind of creepy. They  
seem so human sometimes.

SARAH  
I wouldn't know. Bob's so cheap.

INT. SMITH HOUSE - LIVING ROOM

Henry moves directly to Rebecca, immediately noticing the blood  
pooling around her head on the floor.

HENRY  
Rebecca? No, no, no, no, no.

Kircher backs away from Rebecca and Henry. Once he's clear of  
them, he turns to pick up the EMP. Just as he reaches for it, his  
Leo steps on it, smashing it to pieces.

KIRCHER'S LEO  
(electronic voice breaks into  
that of Rebecca's)  
You are a guest in this house.  
I think you should start acting  
like it.

Kircher falls back on his ass. Henry stands up.

HENRY  
Rebecca, is that you?

DENNAH (O.S.)  
Rebecca? Is everything all right in  
there?

KIRCHER'S LEO/REBECCA  
(clear Rebecca voice)  
This is going to take longer than we  
thought. I'll see you girls tomorrow,  
okay?

CONTINUED:

Henry and Rebecca close on the floorbound Kircher.

REBECCA

Too bad there isn't another Leo  
unit in here.

HENRY

It would probably solve your company's  
problem.

EXT. SMITH HOUSE - LATE THAT NIGHT

The Henry and Rebecca Leos sitting out on the lawn chairs, looking  
up at the sky. The Autoid van is gone.

HENRY

Look, Becs. Shooting star.

REBECCA

Make a wish.

HENRY

Wouldn't want to get greedy.

He reaches for her hand. She takes his with the sound of hard  
plastic on plastic.

REBECCA

Don't know how I'm going to explain  
this to the girls.

FADE OUT.

END