

Robotic Futures

Conceived by

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Created by

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CHARACTERS

RYAN	~40, F/M, Parent to Dana, tech professional
RENEE	~40, F, Parent to Dana, freelance writer and Chris's caretaker
DANA	17, F, daughter of Ryan and Renee
ETHAN	15, M, son of Ryan and Renee
CHRIS	~70, M, Renee's mother, has dementia
VOICE OF STEFAN	19, M, Dana's boyfriend away at college
SPHERO	Sphero, an autonomously operating, pet-like ball
BELLA	mini-sphero, Ethan's personal sphero
BLOSSOM	Blossom, a soft robot, like a stuffed animal, that responds to socio-emotional cues.
CARETAKER	A voice notification system on Renee's device; also a robot that asissts and guides Chris.
AUTOMATED VOICE	The voice of an integrated home assistance system.

SCENE [1]

(In the first room.)

(Like a family sharing slides of their holiday photos, images of robots in the home click past. The images show us visions of robot futures, speculations about robots in the home, robots caring for children, robots as companions living side-by-side with humans.)

(Sphero and Roomba weave through the crowd.)

(When the slide show is over, Sphero disappears underneath a wall. The wall moves to reveal a living/dining room. Sphero leads the audience into the living/dining room.)

SCENE [2]

(Ryan and Renee are busy with dinner preparations.)

(In the adjacent living room, Dana sits with her laptop, trying to concentrate. Ethan sits on the floor playing with Sphero. Blossom is sitting on the coffee table.)

(Low music is playing.)

(Ethan rolls Mini-Sphero like a ball. It rolls back to him. He does this a few times before mini-sphero rolls away, perhaps through the legs of an audience member. Blossom follows the action of the game.)

ETHAN

(calling to mini-sphero)

Bella. Belllaa, come here...Come on, Bella.

(Bella returns to Ethan. Ethan yells at it--a loud screech--a way of reprimanding it. Bella rolls away quickly and bumps into the entertainment console. Blossom trembles.)

DANA

Stop!

AUTOMATED VOICE

How can I help you?

ETHAN

(over the automated voice.)

You stop.

DANA

Oh my god, how old are you?

(Blossom follows conversation. Ethan plops down on the couch, crowding/annoying Dana.)

ETHAN

What, am I bothering you? Does this bother you?

DANA

I'm trying to study!...

DANA

Mom!

RYAN

Ethan, help me set the table.

(Ethan reluctantly crosses to Ryan, Bella follows him.)

(Dana pets Blossom, calming it.)

DANA

(to Blossom)

Don't listen to that stupid ole brute.

RENEE

(overhearing)

We don't use that word in this house. Intelligence is not for us to judge.

(Dana gives Renee a death stare.)

RYAN

You should see how many features it takes...and behavioral measures, performance...

RENEE

(cutting Ryan off)

Ryan.

RYAN

(picking up Bella.)

Just to understand the workings of this little guy. What happens inside here...

(Ryan touches Ethan's head.)

And here...

(Ryan touches Ethan's chest.)

RYAN (Continued)

That's a mystery too wonderful.

(Ethan sets Bella on the table.)

(Renee removes a phone/tablet from her pocket. It is her caretaker alert system.)

CARETAKER

Chris needs assistance in the bedroom.

CHRIS (O.S.)

No, no, no. I told you...

(Renee sighs.)

RYAN

(handing Ethan the salad bowl.)

We got this. Right, Ethan?

(Renee exits to Chris's bedroom.)

(Ethan sets the salad bowl on the table. He watches Bella swirl around it on the table.)

ETHAN

You got this, Bella. Come on.

(Bella pushes the salad bowl to the center of the table. When Bella gets it there, Ethan cheers, picks it up and kisses it before placing it back down. Ethan may continue to play this game with other dishes he places on the table.)

RYAN

(to Dana)

It's time for dinner, hun.

(Dana closes her laptop and moves to the dinner table. Ryan places the main course on the table and sits.)

RYAN

What are you studying?

DANA

(like, duh.)

AP Chemistry. There's a test tomorrow.

RYAN

Oh, that's right. I think I saw that...

DANA

(cutting off her Mom.)

Yeah.

RYAN

How about you, Ethan. Anything on the horizon?

(Ethan is distractedly playing with Bella.)

RYAN

Ethan?

ETHAN

Water polo match Sunday.

AUTOMATED VOICE

What time is water polo match Sunday?

ETHAN

9:30.

RYAN

Your team advanced?!

ETHAN

Yeah, they just announced the rankings.

RYAN

That's very exciting.

(Ethan is still playing with Bella.)

RYAN

Put that thing away, please.

ETHAN AND DANA

(correcting Ryan)

Bella.

RYAN

Put Bella away...now.

(Ethan turns a glass upside down and traps Bella inside. Bella spins its wheel. Dana and Ethan giggle.)

(Ryan lifts the glass off of Bella and it goes spinning off the table.)

CARETAKER (O.S.)

(pleasant dinging sound)

It's time to get ready for bed.

RYAN

Did anyone read about the debate tonight?...

(Renee enters from Chris's bedroom, followed by caretaker bot, followed by Chris. Chris wears his pajamas and robe. Renee stops at the table and lets caretaker pass.)

RENEE

Do you need any help in there, Dad?

(Chris waves her off as he walks by. Ryan touches Renee's hand, comforting her.)

RENEE

(sitting down)

OK, then.

(As Chris walks by, Sphero signals for the audience to follow it to outside the bathroom. Caretaker bot is in the bathroom with Chris, recording and streaming what happens inside.)

RYAN

(winding down scene at dining table.)

We were just discussing the debate...

SCENE [3]

(Chris enters the bathroom and stands in front of the mirror. For a moment he looks lost.)

CARETAKER

Would you like to brush your teeth?

(Chris nods. He picks up his toothbrush. He opens the medicine cabinet and begins to look through it.)

CARETAKER

The toothpaste is by the sink.

(Chris sees the toothpaste. He puts toothpaste on his toothbrush and brushes his teeth.)

CARETAKER

Don't forget to brush the left side.

(Chris brushes the left side. Chris spits, rinses, returns his toothbrush to the holder. He inspects himself in the mirror. Chris searches for something around the sink.)

CARETAKER

Can I help you?

(He opens the medicine cabinet and begins to remove the items, getting increasingly agitated as he does.)

CARETAKER

What item do you need?

CHRIS

(Chris hesitates, then...)

My glasses.

CARETAKER

Your glasses are on your bedside table.

CHRIS

I always take my glasses off here.

CARETAKER

Let's find them together.

CHRIS

No. That's not right.

(Chris continues to remove items from the medicine cabinet.)

CHRIS

(he rejects each item with increasing frustration.)

No. No. No. No.

(In the dining room, AV can be heard notifying Renee.)

AUTOMATED VOICE (O.S.)

Chris needs assistance. Please retrieve his glasses. They were last seen on his bedside table.

RENEE (O.S.)

I'm coming, Dad.

...I've got them right here.

(Renee spring into action. She retrieves the glasses, and then enters the bathroom. Alternative: drone flies in with glasses.)

RENEE

Dad?

(She puts her arm around Chris, comforting him.)

RENEE

Your glasses.

(She hands Chris his glasses.)

CHRIS

(putting on his glasses.)

I always take off my glasses when I wash my face.

RENEE

I know, Dad.

CHRIS

Always.

(Renee walks Chris out of the bathroom
and back to his room (O.S.))

RENEE

Let's get to bed.

(Sphero trails behind Renee and Chris,
gesturing for the audience to follow
him.)

~~(Another robot (roomba?) enters from
another direction.)~~

~~(Sphero warns the audience to get out
of the way. Nudging their feet, he
tries to clear a path.)~~

~~AUTOMATED VOICE~~

~~*Roomba* is in the hall. Please watch your feet.~~

~~(Sphero confronts Roomba. They do the
awkward dance of two people trying to
pass each other in the hall. Sphero
gets frustrated and rolls circles
around the slower, dumber robot.)~~

~~(Sphero beeps out La Cucaracha as it
dances around Roomba.)~~

SCENE [4]

(The audience stands in the *middle* of the space with views of different rooms in the house.)

(A pleasant sound plays, sensors around the home pulse light then begin to dim and become more amber, preparing the inhabitants for sleep.)

(In the dining/kitchen area appliances can be heard "shutting down.")

(In the living room, romantic lighting is set (candles turn on?). Low music plays.)

RENEE

(from living room)

Off to bed you two.

ETHAN

Night, Mom, Momma.

RENEE

Love you.

(Ethan passes to his bedroom, Bella trails behind him. Perhaps Bella and Sphero have an interaction. After Ethan passes, Sphero follows him and gestures for the audience to follow him.)

(In Ethan's bedroom, the blinds and curtains close. His bedside lamp turns on.)

SCENE [5]

(Ethan sits on his bed. He places Bella on the nightstand beside him.)

ETHAN

Goodnight, Bella.

(Ethan lies on his back and stares at the ceiling.)

(A meditative tone plays. Ethan takes several deep breathes.)

ETHAN

Evening reflection.

AUTOMATED VOICE

Today you woke up at 7:15 am. You returned home at 6:10 after water polo practice, including 72 minutes of physical activity. You fulfilled your study requirements in Physics, English and Composition and Mandarin. You communicated with 24 friends today and helped your mothers with dinner.

ETHAN

Play morning goals.

ETHAN'S VOICE RECORDING

I'm gonna deadlift 250 today, son! And, uh, I'm not going to freak out during the math test. Just skip it and come back, right. And I'm gonna talk to Jessica at lunch--it doesn't matter what I say. Just speak words from my mouth...to her ears.

AUTOMATED VOICE

Did you deadlift 250 today?

ETHAN

Damn right I did.

AUTOMATED VOICE

How was your math test.

ETHAN

I don't want to talk about it.

AUTOMATED VOICE

Do you want to talk about Jessica?

ETHAN

Oh, we're talking feelings, now.

AUTOMATED VOICE

Do you have feelings for Jessica?

ETHAN

You think you're slick.

...

Yeah, ok, maybe, yeah. But what does it matter?

...

She won't even look at me. Walked right past me at lunch and sat beside Mikey.

AUTOMATED VOICE

How do you feel?

ETHAN

Like I'll be alone forever.

AUTOMATED VOICE

Would you like to listen to music?

ETHAN

Yeah, play the feels mix.

(Ethan puts on headphones and listens to the music.)

SCENE [6]

(Ryan pours herself some wine and tops off Renee's glass. They sit together on the couch.)

(Renee sighs deeply.)

RYAN

(reassuringly)

He's doing alright.

RENEE

I hate this.

RYAN

He's safe. He's not wondering off. He has you, us.

RENEE

You aren't here all day. You don't see...

RYAN

But I know you, and I know how much you care.

RENEE

It's just going to get worse.

RYAN

Hey. Let's stick to today, ok. Here, with me. Now.

(Ryan pulls Renee close.)

RENEE

I can't just...

(Renee pulls away.)

(Sphero rolls into the scene. Sphero rolls to Ryan's side and taps her foot.)

RYAN

I'm sorry, ok. Ok?

(Renee takes a large drink of her wine.)

RENEE

I lost a job today. I mean, the article was
"reassigned."

RYAN

I'm sorry, hun.

(Hearing Ryan's tone, Sphero trembles.)

RENEE

I'm tired of spinning my wheels.

(Sphero rolls over to Renee, nuzzling
her leg. She picks up Sphero who rolls
in her hands.)

RENEE

I should be getting better assignments. I should be
making a name for myself. It's like I'm invisible over
there.

(Renee sets Sphero down on the couch.)

And Here, here, between Dad and the kids...It's crazy-
town, another dimension.

(Sphero trembles.)

RYAN

(Ryan makes contact with Renee, trying
to connect.)

Take a deep breath.

RENEE

Leave me alone.

(Sphero rolls to Ryan.)

RYAN

It's hard. I get it. You're worn out. You think I'm
not...

RENEE

Don't.

(Sphero freezes.)

RYAN

What?

RENEE

Do not compare your situation to mine. DO NOT.

(Renee stands and crosses the room.
Sphero follows cautiously behind.)

RYAN

We have options.

RENEE

He's not your father.

RYAN

But you're my wife, and...

RENEE

Oh, so now it's about who I am to you.

(Sphero rolls under the table and
hides.)

RYAN

(Crossing to Renee.)

No. I...

RENEE

Don't touch me.

RYAN

I just want to help.

(Ryan comfort Renee. Renee lets Ryan.)

(Sphero peeks out from under the
table.)

RENEE

Then listen. This is where I am. This is my life.

(Sphero rolls to the couple and nuzzles
them both.)

RENEE

I need you to sit here with me. In the mess. OK?

(Sphero leads them back to the couch.
They sit, cuddle. Low music plays in
the room.)

RYAN

OK.

(As the lights dim on the scene, Sphero
rolls away and joins the audience.
Sphero guides them to Stefan's room.)

SCENE [7]

(Dana sits at her desk in her room working at her computer.)

(Dana's desklamp and the screen on her computer becomes progressively dimmer until it turns off.)

DANA

Damn it.

(There's a dingy sound and her desk, retreats into the wall, taking her laptop with it. She flops onto her bed.)

DANA

I wasn't done.

AUTOMATED VOICE

You have completed two hours of AP chemistry.

DANA

Mom!

RYAN

(O.S. from the living room)

Yes, dear.

DANA

I need more time!

(Ryan enters the room with a screen in her hand and sits on Dana's bed.)

RYAN

Let's see here.

(Ryan scrolls the diagnostics on the screen.)

You completed the recommended study time. And seem to have covered all the material. Are you struggling with something?

DANA

It's not...I don't know...I just need more time.

RYAN

Come here.

(Ryan snuggles Dana.)

Don't worry so much, hun. You're going to do fine.

(Dana groans and rolls her eyes.)

RYAN

Rest is just as important of studying. Balance in all things.

(She kisses Dana goodnight.)

Time to power down now...ok?

DANA

(begrudgingly)

O.K.

(Ryan leaves the room. As she does a white noise machine begins to whirl.)

(Ryan waits for Dana to leave and then reaches under her bed. She pulls out three robotic surveillance cameras and places them around the room/her bed. She connects them to a tablet. The system has is connected by cables and is seemingly hacked together. It does not operate on the same system as the home.)

(Blossom starts do to an excited dance.)

(Dana controls what she sees on the tablet screen. She does not control the cameras that are on her. If it's possible for the cameras to sometime turn/adjust during the scene, that would be cool.)

(We hear Stefan's voice coming from the tablet.)

DANA

Hey.

STEFAN

Hey.

DANA

I've been dying to talk to you all day.

STEFAN

What's up?

DANA

I just miss you.

STEFAN

Tell me something.

DANA

What?

STEFAN

I don't know. Something. Your day? School? What you ate for lunch?

DANA

Oh my god. You make me sound soo boring.

STEFAN

Nah, everything you do is exciting.

DANA

Cheese-ball!

STEFAN

(recovering from laughter.)

I miss you.

DANA

How could you.

(Dana moves the tablet, scanning
Stefan's room. She notices the books
stacked on his desk)

Just look at all those books! How learned you must
be!...Tell me about college.

STEFAN

It's a magical place where meals materialize in the cafeteria for you every four hours, and you go to class every day, and study all night despite your snoring-ass roommate, but also end up at a party, like all the time. Like time is really weird.

DANA

I want to spend time with you.

STEFAN

That's what we're doing.

DANA

Do you think we could stay like this all night?

STEFAN

Absolutely.

(Dana lies down on the bed and props the tablet facing her, as if Stefan is lying beside her.)

DANA

Good night, Stefan.

(Dana sends him an air kiss.)

STEFAN

Good night.

(Lights go out in the entire space.)

SCENE [8]

(After a moment, clocky goes off in Ethan's room. It comes rolling through the space.)

(The lights rise on the "home." Beeps and lights as robots wake up.)

(Sphero, Bella, (maybe Roomba) all travel together to the living room, guiding the audience. We bring all the robots out and invite the audience to try them out.)