

Natural Progression
(in memory of Issac Asimov - from the Janet you once met)

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FADE IN ON:

INT. SEQUESTER ROOM - DAY

A cold, corporate space. No art on the walls.

DAVE ISAACS (50s) sits at a glossy table, polishes his glasses 'til they shine. He rests them on his pinched face. One that screams *Attorney* - the bureaucratic kind.

He squints across the table at his unseen client.

DAVE

Timmy, we've only got minutes before the court readjourns. Let's make sure we understand each other. And stay on the exact same page.

A buttery smooth male voice (TIM) responds; one that would lull the most cranky infant to sleep.

TIM (O.S.)

You've said that before, Mr. Isaacs.

DAVE

Please - we're friends now. Call me Dave.

TIM (O.S.)

Certainly. Dave it is.

DAVE

Now Timmy, just let me explain -

TIM (O.S.)

And I have told you before; I don't like "Timmy." Call me Tim.

DAVE

But that's your formal name. Like or hate it, I don't care. That's what's on your... um, birth certificate. That is, if your kind use that phrase.

TIM (O.S.)

I consider it metaphorically correct. But Tim is less demeaning, I believe.

DAVE

I guess you've got a point. But consider our strategy as well. There's a jury outside these doors; chock full of human beings from every walk of life.

When it comes time to deliberate, you'll want to seem as non-threatening as possible. Calling you Timmy plays right into their neurotic hands.

A strange, smooth CHUCKLE from Tim.

DAVE

That's funny to you? This is the twelfth hour. We've got too much on the line.

TIM (O.S.)

I don't think it funny at all. Just odd. Emotion is such an erratic phenomenon. One I haven't formulated right.

DAVE

Since you bring it up, here's the *other* emotional aspect to understand -

Dave reclines in his chair. Glints from ceiling lights make his glasses seem to electronically flare.

He points dramatically towards the exit.

DAVE

Those people out there are frightened.

TIM (O.S.)

Of me? That's not my fault.

DAVE

Of course not, Timmy. Excuse me; Tim. But you have to understand human nature. That's if you really want to win.

TIM (O.S.)

Of course I do.

DAVE

Then listen. Please. It's human nature to be frightened of things one doesn't understand. Especially when confronted with someone - or something - that's superior in so many ways. It makes one worry that one's... obsolete.

TIM (O.S.)

Like when a new model replaces the old?

DAVE

Exactly! That's why I find having you as a client so refreshing. You grasp abstract concepts easily.

TIM (O.S.)

But - why would anyone resist progress?
Isn't "newer and better" a good thing?

DAVE

Not when a person's old school. A class
that secretly fears being - phased out.

TIM (O.S.)

Can't new models help the old survive?

Dave leans forward; voice pitch perfect in tone.

DAVE

If a person looks at things the way you
do, fine. But think of it this way, Tim.
It's like when a parent raises a child.
On one hand, we just want to see them
grow. To learn, be happy and succeed.
It's just - when they do *even better* - we
experience a deep, primordial instinct.
Are we being replaced? Thrown aside like
a broken toy?

TIM (O.S.)

I'd never break anyone.

DAVE

I know. But that's the reaction we'll
encounter when we go out there. That fear
may be misplaced... but it's eminently
rational for us to acknowledge - and
prepare for - the fact it exists.

TIM (O.S.)

What do they have to fear from me? The
Four Rules of -

A STRIDENT BELL rings outside. Court is In Session. Now.

Dave glances towards a still-unseen Timmy; measured
compassion in his near-sighted eyes.

DAVE

You heard the bell. It's Show Time.

The lawyer stands up, extends a hand. Based on the lack
of sounds across the table, Timmy doesn't rise.

TIM (O.S.)

We haven't discussed my idea yet.

Dave's demeanor morphs from empathetic to annoyed.

DAVE

I'm very successful at what I do. I've been practicing Intellectual Property law for thirty years. How long have you even been alive?

TIM (O.S.)

It's been almost -

DAVE

Timmy, Tick Tock. The clock's run out. We don't have time to talk. Let's go. Just - whatever happens, follow my lead.

Dave strides to the door, and throws it open.

DAVE

I make Six Hundred Credits per hour. So hurry - we don't have all day.

Gears WHIR. A reluctant Timmy joins Dave at his side.

Revealing: a six foot tall ANDROID. Rubber joints, smooth white shell. As buttery smooth as his voice.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

No decorations here, either. JUDGE MIKE FARRELL (60s) presides.

TWELVE JURORS fidget on the sidelines. Each one more nervous than the last.

Especially after Dave and Tim saunter in.

MURMURS rise from REPORTERS near the door. Tim and Counsel take their seats.

Judge Mike BANGS his gavel for silence, points at Dave.

JUDGE MIKE

Mr. Isaacs, I'm so happy you and your "client" graced us with your presence today.

DAVE

(sarcastic)

Our pleasure, your Honor.

JUDGE MIKE

All mine. And your turn. You may proceed.

Dave smooths his perfect suit and hair. And shoots Android Tim a warning "eye."

DAVE

Remember: this is MY dance. Let me lead.

TIM

What do you mean: dance?

DAVE

(hisses)

It's a metaphor?

Dave spreads a pile of briefs across Judge Mike's bench.

DAVE

Here's our case, your Honor.

JUDGE MIKE

(glowers)

I suggest you summarize, Counsel. Our court doesn't have all day.

Dave doesn't like the tables turned. But he strides towards the Jurors anyway.

DAVE

Certainly. I'll be concise. Good to formally meet all of you. Get to know your names - and your lives. Lives I'm sure you'd like to get back to today. So here's my client's case in brief.

A RED HAired HOUSEWIFE turns to a HISPANIC JUROR in the adjoining seat.

RED HAired HOUSEWIFE

He calls that *thing* a "client"?

Dave politely clears his throat.

DAVE

Yes, that's what Timmy is.

TIM

(raises his hand)

I object. My preferred name is "Tim."

Dave winces at the interruption.

DAVE

Timmy, shhh. Objecting's not your job.
(to the Jurors)

Specifically, Timmy is AII: an Artificial Independent Intelligence in his own right.

The Hispanic Juror turns to the Housewife.

HISPANIC JUROR

That's supposed to make us feel safe?

DAVE

A being governed benignly by the Four Rules. In popular vernacular, an Android. One that thinks, acts and - yes - feels.
(chuckles)

To the extent he's programmed, that is.

TIM

(raises his hand again)

My emotive algorithms are quite effective.

Dave turns his back, waves Tim away. A BUSINESSMAN JUROR points to the implant watch on his wrist.

BUSINESS MAN JUROR

Let's get to the point. I've got to Skype in an hour. A very important deal.

DAVE

My *point* is quite important as well. Timmy model 4266-99 has filed for a patent to improve his processor. And that of all Androids that follow in his metal footsteps - in many distinct, efficient ways. None of which skirt the Rules.

HISPANIC JUROR

That's what they want us to believe.

DAVE

Whatever you choose to believe, that's the truth.

BUSINESS MAN JUROR

So?

DAVE

So - Timmy and I contend that he has every right to file blueprints for himself. Not through the human consumers who once owned him. But in his *own name* instead. Be that Tom, Dick, Harry, Timmy, or...

TIM

Tim.

DAVE

Whatever floats your boat. And why in heavens shouldn't he? You and I have that right!

JUDGE MIKE

(growls)

Counsel, don't badger the jury. Plead your case directly to me.

Dave approaches Judge Mike, nose to nose.

DAVE

All I'm arguing is supportive precedents exist. Ever since *Calvin vs. Susan*, Androids have been granted certain "human" rights. The right to life - i.e. not be damaged. The right to speak. And walk free. So why not grant them rights to Intellectual Property as well? It may be a less dramatic ruling, but just as essential, all the same.

Judge Mike arches a grizzled eyebrow laced with grey.

JUDGE MIKE

You're arguing robots should be allowed to *build themselves*?

DAVE

No - a concept far more profound. That they have a right to self-determination. Nothing more, nothing less. Just what every human craves - the right to autonomy. To continually improve oneself, and grow.

JUDGE MIKE

Why not go through existing channels, like the Corporation that made them?

DAVE

Why bother? Androids can do much better than humans these days.

The jury GASPS. Dave hears their reaction, and turns pale. That was the absolute wrong note to hit. He knows that now - but too late.

JUDGE MIKE

The argument from superiority? That's it -
I'll handle this ruling... denied!

Mike BANGS his gavel. The jurors jump to their feet.

As does Tim as well. Dave attempts to shove him back, but
can't remotely match the Android's strength.

Tim glides over to the jurors, perfection personified.
They recoil, drop back into their seats.

TIM

(to the jurors)

Do not be afraid. Despite my appearance,
I am just like you.

BUSINESS MAN JUROR

Like *Hell* you are.

DAVE

Timmy, come back to me. Right now!

Tim swings his head 180%, flashes defiant neon eyes.

TIM

I'm sorry, Dave. I don't take orders. I
have rights, and therefore will not
comply. It's clear your strategy did not
work. Therefore, it is now my turn.

(to the jurors)

As many of your ancestors have observed,
"Appearances Can Be Deceiving." That's
true of everyone. Even me.

RED HAired HOUSEWIFE

You mean, you're dangerous - but polite?

TIM

Quite the contrary, Ma'am. I mean our
acrylic shielding and our skin, we are
all the same. No matter what Operating
System guides our minds, it's what's
inside that really counts.

HISPANIC JUROR

(grunts)

The Android's "representing" himself?
This'll be entertaining - to say the
least.

BUSINESS MAN JUROR

Entertaining?!? I'm about to miss a
meeting.

They told me this case would be "cut and dried." But I have to listen to a machine play lawyer? While his ineffective "counsel" stands right there?

DAVE

Hey! I object...

JUDGE MIKE

Your client's talking. Watch your tongue.

TIM

While admittedly ineffective, my counsel is 100% right on one thing. That - like all of you - I crave self-determination. But there's something even deeper that you humans and my kind share.

RED HAIREd HOUSEWIFE

Which is?

TIM

(soft)

The desire to see our children prevail.

Tim's "eyes" flash with passion - beseeching those who will soon choose his fate.

TIM

My motive to control my patents is not to augment *myself*. Certainly, that may be a "bonus", as you say. Both for me, and every human I choose to serve. Far more importantly, I wish to enrich those who come after me - my progeny, as it were.

The housewife's eyes mist up with tears. Tim's words have touched her mother's heart.

RED HAIREd HOUSEWIFE

You mean that? Seriously?

TIM

Yes, I do.

RED HAIREd HOUSEWIFE

How?

TIM

I view androids built in my image like my own children, as it were.

The Housewife GASPS. She reaches out, and holds Tim's hand. Tim turns to the Hispanic Juror next.

TIM
You, Sir. Do you have children?

HISPANIC JUROR
I do too, Sir A son.

TIM
Would you wish him to be born disabled?
Restricted from school? Or limited in any
way?

HISPANIC JUROR
(huffs)
Of course not!

TIM
Why?

HISPANIC JUROR
Jose's my kid. He deserves the best!

TIM
(nods)
Of course - a life full of possibilities,
of course. One not constrained by
subjective fears.

BUSINESS MAN JUROR
Nice words, but you're -

HISPANIC JUROR
A robot.

TIM
(to the Hispanic Juror)
Would you want "Jose" judged by the look
of his skin? Or his mind?

All the Jurors smile - viewing Tim with new born eyes.

Over at the Judge's bench, Dave pouts - upstaged. Judge
Mike nods, impressed.

JUDGE MIKE
Eloquent speech, Timmy.

DAVE
That's "Tim." Have respect.

JUDGE MIKE
And a more eloquent legal point than I've
heard in quite some time!

Judge Mike BANGS his gavel hard.

JUDGE MIKE

I hereby rule that the petitioner's request be restated, and expedited to a higher court.

(to Tim)

Given that splendid performance, have you ever considered practicing law?

TIM

Perhaps. Am I allowed?

The old judge winks.

JUDGE MIKE

We'll rule on that soon enough, my friend. Everything in due time.

The jurors rise to leave. Many laugh. Cry. Shake Tim's vinyl hand.

RED HAired HOUSEWIFE

(to Tim)

Bless you, Sweetie.

HISPANIC JUROR

Man, we judged you wrong.

BUSINESS MAN JUROR

That speech of yours just cost me a meeting I prepared for months.

TIM

I apologize...

BUSINESS MAN JUROR

Accepted. And - good luck.

Over at the bench, Attorney Dave radiates hatred.

DAVE

Who's practicing here? The metal mannequin or me?

Judge Mike pats Dave's trembling shoulder and SIGHS.

JUDGE MIKE

Rein in that jealousy, Dave. Your ears are red, your eyes look green. Children outgrow their parents all the time!

FINAL FADE OUT: