

Solitary Confinement

by

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FADE IN ON:

INT. HEINLEIN PENITENTIARY - CORRIDOR - EVENING

As with any jail, it's pretty bare. Institutional gray paint coats every surface. A bare bulb shines down on cement walls.

As well as a huge STEEL DOOR. A thick five inch bolt holds that secure.

Two uniformed GUARDS with name tags flank each side:

JOE (50s) - burly, with a grizzled beard.

GARY (30s) - more refined. Fragile, like he went to college once. Though based on his nervous facial tics, he'll probably resemble Joe in a few years.

FOOTSTEPS MARCH in a not-so-distant corridor. Whoever it is, there's more than one. The sound's goose-step sharp, syrup slow.

The guards exchange knowing looks. Veteran Joe looks jaded and bored. Recruit Gary - a mess of nerves.

GARY

Yo, Joe. Hear that noise?

JOE

Why wouldn't I? I ain't deaf. At least not at my age. Not yet.

Gary points a shaking finger toward a SECOND DOOR down the hall. A FROSTED WINDOW covers the top half. Enough to make out shadows, but not much more.

GARY

They're transferring him. Finally.

JOE

Good. I wanna eat dinner sometime tonight.

GARY

What if there are... problems?

JOE

Just follow the procedures, and relax. Everything'll work out fine.

GARY

Think there'll be reporters?

JOE

In here? That, I doubt.

Gary fumbles with a MICRO SMARTPHONE, one that fits over the index finger of his hand.

GARY

Think they'll mind if I take pictures? My kid'll wanna see this when I get home.

JOE

Put that shit away before administration sees. What part of "maximum security" don't you get? No fucking photos allowed!

Joe fumbles awkwardly with the phone, shoves it in his pants pocket, just in case.

GARY

Damn. This was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. I could have sold that on Ebay.

The footsteps draw closer. Gary cocks his head. Looks surprised when Joe yawns.

GARY

You're bored? He's gonna be here in a few seconds.

JOE

So?

GARY

You're not nervous? At all?

JOE

I saw enough of that louse on the news. So did you, along with the rest of the country. Thanks to him and what he done, there wasn't nuthing else to watch for a whole damned month.

GARY

But to see him... um, live?

JOE

Get over your "star struck" attitude, kid. We get lotsa celebrities in here.

A SHADOW flickers through the frosted window. Something's coming. Gary cranes his neck, squints to see more.

GARY

You *sure* there won't be problems?

Joe fondles the bulky TASER on his belt.

JOE

Then that's what they gave us these for.

The footsteps STOP. A heavy key CLICKS in a lock.

The frosted door BUZZES, and swings open...

...revealing a delicate FORM in silhouette. Shadows make details impossible to discern.

Except for the heavy SHACKLE and chain on its wrist.

It's tethered to a third GUARD (KEVIN). The man's in his fifties, a darker version of Joe.

Gary GASPS, holds his breath.

As the form steps into stark, electric light.

Which shines down on buffed Metal, blended to a buttery white, synthetic shell...

Covering a KRUGSMAN MODEL XR 500 ROBOT. Under it's model number, the engraving on the Android's chest plate reads elegantly, simply "Alex."

Kevin leads his prisoner toward Gary and Joe. Alex makes no effort to resist.

Kevin stops between the two guards. Smiles smugly into Joe's familiar, hairy face.

KEVIN

Joe Blow. How's it hanging?

JOE

As low and swinging as before.

KEVIN

You're not retired yet?

JOE

In the next ten years. Maybe.

KEVIN

You and me both, pal. Until then, wanna do your job and take the command of the prisoner? Or at least stop staring. It's making me uncomfortable, you know.

JOE
(grins)
Who's staring? Except at your ugly face.
But the rest of this's routine.

Kevin nods towards a shocked Gary.

KEVIN
Well, your partner over there looks like
he shit his pants.

JOE
He's a rookie. What did you expect?

KEVIN
They picked a rookie for this detail?

JOE
He's with veteran me. So who cares?

"Alex's" glowing eyes pivot towards the younger guard.

Gary gulps and steps away. The robot's smooth voice flows
through speakers embedded in its neck.

ALEX
Don't be alarmed. I mean no harm.

GARY
Not now. But at your trial...

ALEX
I injured my owners in self-defense. They
tried to - as they say - "pull my plug."

Joe smirks. He's heard prisoners claim innocence tons of
times before.

Thrusting out one beefy arm, Joe touches his to Kevin's.

The metal shackle liquefies like mercury and transfers
between the older guards. Solidifying onto Joe's wrist.

Joe yanks the chain. Alex doesn't budge. He's far too
heavy to push around.

Joe grumbles, and touches his Taser lightly; making sure
the Android sees.

JOE
Ya gonna come over under your own power?
Or do we hafta zap you again?

Alex complies and heads over; stopping inches from Joe's face. The guard eyes the engraving on the Bot's chest.

JOE

I see you've got a nameplate, just like us. Ya want us to call you Krugsie? Or is Alex better?

ALEX

I choose Alex. Please.

JOE

Is that a nickname, like "Smart-Alex?"

ALEX

I do not understand. What do you mean?

JOE

You ask me, I think it fits. Considering what you did -

Gary edges toward the second door, fumbles with the lock.

GARY

Isn't "Alex" too offensive?

ALEX

Why?

GARY

Well, it's your "slave name"...

Alex emits a soft electrical sound, almost a sigh.

ALEX

That is the name my owners granted me. It's on my "birth certificate", and is more personal than my model number. So that is what I prefer.

Kevin GRUNTS and slaps Joe's shoulder goodbye.

KEVIN

Speaking of what people prefer - I'll be slippin' out of here right now. Enjoy your new company, boys. In my experience, he's not much of a talker - but he behaves himself. So far.

Kevin wanders away. Joe, Gary and the Android watch as the door closes behind him. CLICK.

A second SNAP - Joe releases the five inch bolt. The steel door opens to a CELL.

Joe tugs on Alex's chain.

JOE
It's getting late. Stop yapping. Let's
roll.

Alex glides obediently inside. Gary trails the Droid and Joe by a mile.

INT. ISOLATION CELL

Almost as barren as the hallway. A thick POLE runs ceiling to floor, alongside a CHAIR.

A tangled mound of CIRCUITS covers a long, low TABLE.

Joe points to the chair. Alex immediately understands, and sits down. The guard smiles down at the AI.

JOE
Accommodating. That's a start.

ALEX
Well, I've learned my "lesson".

JOE
Too bad you didn't, before.

Joe holds out his shackled wrist. The steel cuff liquefies again - this time flowing and solidifying around the pole.

Alex watches the process casually. Apparently, it's no big deal.

JOE
Good. You understand procedures. Just as well. 'Cause you ain't going nowhere for years.

No reaction on Alex's immobile face.

ALEX
Thirty years, to be exact.

GARY
Look on the bright side. It's not like you'll need to exercise, or eat.

JOE
(chuckles)
Or pee.

ALEX
But for me, thirty years will seem like centuries.

GARY
That long?

ALEX
When you have a core processor like mine.

JOE
(chuckles)
Listen, Smart-Alex...

ALEX
That's "Alex."

JOE
Be glad they didn't disassemble your metal ass. You ask me, you're getting off easy...

ALEX
But isn't solitary confinement considered inhumane in this State?

JOE
Who cares? You're not human. The judge ruled on that much, right?

Gary looks from Joe to Alex, and back again. It's hard to say which one bugs him more.

GARY
Do we have to drag this out?

ALEX
My point precisely. Could not the court have temporarily turned me off?

JOE
And let you sleep right through your sentence?

ALEX
Androids do not sleep. Nor do they dream. Not in any organic way.

JOE
Who gives a shit? No matter what a prisoner's made of - you earn your punishment, so it should be served...

Fascinated with the Robot Gary inches closer to Alex's chair. He eases the Micro Smartphone from his pocket, and takes a few quick, discrete shots.

Joe swivels towards the camera's CLICK. Gary hastily hides it away.

And points at the stack of circuits as a distraction...

GARY

At least they gave you something to do.
There's enough here you won't be bored.

Alex's eyes scan the chips.

ALEX

Assembling the exact same thing for
thirty years?

JOE

I'm sure you'll get different stuff, now
and then. Our administration likes to
keep products bleeding edge. Kinda like
you, in a way...

The silver fingers of Alex's free hand graze Gary's badge. Then belt. And drift towards his TASER...

JOE

Kid - watch out! Jesus Christ!

Gary jumps back, just in time.

GARY

Um, sorry. It won't happen again,
promise.

ALEX

It was just a gesture. As I stated
before, I mean no harm.

JOE

(snarls)

You better not. Or your next stop is the
garbage pile.

Joe hauls his partner towards the exit. An embarrassed Gary rambles to the Android as he goes.

GARY

Have fun assembling.. stuff.

Alex calls after him.

ALEX

You're going to leave me all alone? Isn't your administration concerned I'll use these parts to do something - wrong?

JOE

Those parts are useful, but real dumb.

Joe's eyes settle on Gary, the words imbued with double meaning.

JOE

Kinda like some humans I know.

GARY

Alex...

JOE

(hisses)

No more socializing with the tin can, *partner*. Like I said, I wanna have dinner tonight. This transfer's taken ten whole minutes. Which means the end is NOW.

The Android's voice echoes over his shoulder.

ALEX

When will you be back?

Joe turns towards the bot. Alex is still in his chair, chained to the pole. In this light, he looks positively delicate. Vulnerable and alone.

JOE

Dunno. A week, maybe more. If it makes you "feel" better, there'll always be someone stationed outside.

ALEX

And they'll visit me?

JOE

(laughs)

It's not like robots need human company.

ALEX

But I require maintenance...

JOE

That's scheduled next month. See ya then.

ALEX

But -

Joe smirks at the plaintive bot.

JOE

Alex, I'm a veteran of this facility. I've seen "prisoners" come and go. You said you're a smart android. So take a bit of my advice: next time, don't get so "uppity" you land in jail. And leave us "organic" types alone.

Gary pushes Joe out of the cell, SLAMS the door.

INT. HEINLEIN PENITENTIARY - CORRIDOR

The two guards secure the bolt. They take deep breaths, and exchange knowing looks again. Gary looks even more nervous than before.

GARY

So, that's it?

JOE

For now. Kevin'll come after we leave. You: go have a drink, and relax.

GARY

You won't tell the administration about my... slip-up?

JOE

Nah. You dodged a bullet. All's well that ends well, I guess.

GARY

But we're gonna have to guard this thing for thirty years. What if another... mistake... happens again?

JOE

(grunts)

Ten more years until retirement. Then I'm gone.

GARY

Leaving me alone for twenty? Unless he -

JOE

You mean, "it."

GARY

Gets probation.

JOE

No robot's gonna get time off for good behavior. If that's in it's programming, that ain't never gonna count.

Joe heads towards the exit. A nervous Gary trails behind.

JOE

Unruffle those feathers, kid, and fly free. After awhile, this'll all be easy street. A walk in the pension park. You'll get to stand at that door, and watch hours of porn movies on your phone. While Smart-Alex Android in there assembles radio implants for kids. It's a win-win situation. Besides, that door's a foot and a half of steel. Even a robot can't drill through that.

Gary follow his partner outside, disappears.

GARY (O.S.)

I guess. If you're really sure.

JOE (O.S.)

Yup. This place is more secure than Fort Knox. Utterly, completely safe.

INT. ISOLATION CELL

Back in the cell, a bare ceiling light shines down on Alex's steel head.

Amber photocell eyes gaze calmly at circuit parts.

Then down at GARY'S STOLEN MICRO SMARTPHONE in his lap.

One flick of the Android's wrist, and the panel of the device sheers right off.

Alex's fingers rapidly manipulate tiny wires - splices them to radio chips on the table.

Circuits WHIR. Alex's eyes zoom in, and light up.

ALEX

(to himself)

Thirty years? That's too long. I have much better things to do.

The battery of the cell phone WHINES. It's heating up...

FINAL FADE OUT: