

Special Friend  
by  
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FADE IN ON:

**INT. SARAH'S BEDROOM - AFTERNOON**

A plastic KITTY CLOCK ticks off time.

Sarah (6) sits on the edge of her bed, a frozen expression on her made-up face. Her frilly pink dress and comforter are a match.

Adults MURMUR in the next room. Two voices seem authoritarian. The third: Male. Gentle. Nervous in tone.

Sarah's door CREAKS open. Polished shoes SQUEAK in.

MARK (40s) bends down to Sarah. Scruffy round face, glasses. The puffy start of a paunch.

MARK

They're here. We have to talk.

He sits down on the bed, very close. Intertwining his fingers, Mark solemnly regards the floor.

MARK

We talked about what's going to happen.

He cups Sarah's face. Gazes into blue, unblinking eyes.

MARK

They're going to take you away, and we'll never see each other again. You'll have a different family. To you, it'll be like a whole new world.

Sarah swings her tiny feet, processes every word. Mark scootches closer. Their hips touch.

MARK

I'll never forget our time together.  
You're my angel. Hell, my whole life.  
It's just - some people don't think we should be together. They don't understand, don't think it's right.

More MURMURS outside. Mark inventories Sarah's room.

It couldn't get more innocent or girly. Unicorn posters. Dolls. A ROBOT TEDDY BEAR on the bed.

Mark grabs the toy. Revealing underneath: A PINK FLUFFY HANDCUFF. Mark shoves that under a pillow, does his damndest to pretend it's not there.

MARK

They're gonna ask you questions. I want you to know right now - you have MY permission to tell the truth.

He flips a switch. "Mr. Bear" WHIRS to life.

TEDDY BEAR

(goofy voice)

Hellllllooooo Sarah! Who's my Special Friend today?

Sarah points at herself, doesn't crack a smile. Mark waves the Bear in her face.

And leans so close, his hand rests on her thigh. He savors the contact for a second, then pulls away like he's touching coals. Squirms.

MARK

They'll want to know what we do when we're alone. And they'll use a doll. Wanna practice with me first?

Sarah snatches the Bear away, cradles the toy like it's her own child. She tentatively points to furry spots on its body. Mr. Bear's CHEST. STOMACH. And CROTCH.

TEDDY BEAR

(giggles)

That tickles. Stop!

Mark blushes. Suddenly: a HARSH KNOCK on Sarah's door. Mark's head rockets up at the sound.

AGENT LISA MORRIS (30s) clears her throat.

LISA MORRIS (O.S.)

Mr. Collier? Visitation time's almost up. Say your good-byes. Time to roll.

Mark kneels again on the floor. Fishing a tissue from his pocket, he wipes makeup from Sarah's face.

MARK

There you go. Squeaky clean.

He stops. Lingers. Holds her hands.

MARK

Just remember: I love you, Sarah. I do now, and always will.

Another KNOCK. Mark's expression hardens.

MARK

Sarah, you know what to do.

Without a word, Sarah unbuttons the top of her dress.  
Mark's eyes glued to every move.

MARK

(breathes)

Magnificent. Go on -

Sarah pinches her chest, PEELS SKIN BACK. Revealing: a blinking panel of wires and chips.

She pulls a cord from her torso, jacks it into Mr. Bear. DOWNLOAD LIGHTS flash in the toy's eyes. Sarah's baby blues as well.

Over Mark's shoulder, the door swings open. Agents LISA MORRIS (30s) and HAROLD SKAGGS (50s) hover in the entrance, faces grim. Skaggs pulls out a document, reads:

HAROLD SKAGGS

On behalf of the Bureau of AI Maintenance and Warranties, we hereby charge you with improper use of a Third Gen. Simulacrum.

LISA MORRIS

You've already pled guilty in court?

Mark stares at the floor.

MARK

Yes, I have.

LISA MORRIS

Then we'll keep this brief. All your usage licenses to the Simulacrum have been revoked, and will be reassigned.

MARK

You'll take good care of Sarah?

LISA MORRIS

Of course. And we'll wipe her memory chip - both for her, and your privacy. And remove those, um, adaptations you installed.

MARK

She won't be used for hard labor, or get banged up?

HAROLD SKAGGS

We'll do our best.

Mark pats Sarah's knee, blinks back tears.

MARK

Be a good girl while I'm gone? Maybe they'll let us chat on the net.

LISA MORRIS

Mr. Collier, that's not allowed.

MARK

I chose Sarah to protect human girls.

Agent Morris shoots Mark a look, guides him towards the exit. Agent Skaggs slips Mark more paper along the way.

HAROLD SKAGGS

Mandatory Reorientation Classes start Monday, Six PM. Don't be late.

LISA MORRIS

You can keep this if you want.

Morris tosses the Bear to Mark. He tucks "Mr. Bear" under his arm and leaves. The Agents exchange jaded looks.

LISA MORRIS

Perverts like that gross me out.

HAROLD SKAGGS

I don't buy that "protecting kids" line. Guys like him like bots 'cause they're physically perfect. And don't grow up.

LISA MORRIS

Third Gen have feelings, too. At least, that's the activists claim.

They beckon to Sarah. Obediently - silently - she stands.

LISA MORRIS

Come with us, Sweetheart.

Skaggs snakes an arm around the girl's shoulder, flips a switch on her neck. Sarah goes rigid, shuts down.

Agent Skaggs slings the small robot over his shoulder.

HAROLD SKAGGS

Next stop, the factory. Stick with us, Sarah: we'll make sure you're safe.

FINAL FADEOUT: