

12-1-1994

Solitary Confinement

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Recommended Citation

Jernigan, Kevin (1994) "Solitary Confinement," *Forces*: Vol. 1994 , Article 4.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.collin.edu/forces/vol1994/iss1/4>

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Solitary Confinement

Kevin Jernigan

"Thanks for dropping by, ol' buddy. I really wanna talk to somebuddy while I'm getting' ready, see what I'm sayin'? I gotta get ready and I want somebuddy to talk to."

"What's up Barker?" asked his best friend.

"Drake. Call me Drake. See what I'm sayin'? Us friends don't need to be formal between them. That's why they're friends. They can talk, see what I'm sayin'? They're just plain ol' friends. That's what I'm tellin' her tonight."

"Her?" asked his best friend. He reached across the table he was sitting at and picked up a deck of cards lying on top of a stack of pizza boxes.

"Yeah, her. Didn't I tell you yet? I'm gonna go out tonight, see what I'm sayin'? I've got a date, and she's sure a good looker. Works at that there Shepherd's men's clothes place. They got all kinds of guys' stuff. Everything and more, see what I'm sayin'? Catherine."

"Catherine?" asked his best friend while dealing out a hand of solitaire.

"Yeah, that's what it said on her name tag, just like Catherine the Great, see what I'm sayin'? And she sure is. That's how I remember things. Not that she's great, that's the easy part. I mean about her name. Like I said, just like Catherine the Great. You can move the red queen over. I like playin' that there solitary a lot too."

"Anyway, she was working at that there store when I went in and I was gonna buy a shirt. So she asked me could she help me, see what I'm sayin'? She just came on over like she'd done homed in on me. Girls do that to me in stores. I told her I was gonna buy a shirt and she asked me 'What kind of shirt?' and I said 'A regular kind of shirt,' so she just pointed at a wall full of shirts, and they were stacked. The shirts, I mean. I'm not crude like some guys are, see what I'm sayin'? Four goes on the five."

"Mm Hmm," said his best friend.

"So anyway, that's where I got this here shirt," said

Drake, laying a shirt on the ironing board. His best friend stopped his game long enough to stare at the shirt. It was bright pink with a green and gold paisley design.

His best friend shook his head and returned his attention to the cards.

"Nice, huh? She picked it for me. Said it would make me stand out in a crowd, and I figured 'Yeah, then girls could notice me better, see what I'm sayin'? If it were dark in a night club they could see me comin.' It's funny I didn't notice it at first. In the store, I mean. I just walked on over to the shirts she was pointin' at and looked up and down, there was so many, and she asked what kind of shirt I was lookin' to get, and I said 'Oh just a regular shirt like a guy wears to go out in.' That's where I let her know I was a single guy that likes to go out, see what I'm sayin'? Girls are like that. You mention goin' out, and they wanna go with you."

"So then she asked what size and what fit did I want, and I said, 'Big enough to fit me.' She smiled real big and put her hand over her mouth, and I could see she wanted to help me, but she was shy. Girls are like that, see what I'm sayin'? Helpin', I mean, not bein' shy. That's a hindrance. Bein' shy, I mean, 'cause girls like to help a guy. You can move that there row and turn over the card underneath it."

"Thanks," said his best friend, studying the cards in front of him. "Then what did whats-her-name do?"

"Catherine. Like Catherine the Great. Remember I told you how I remembered? Well, she asked me did I want a full fit or a taper fit? and I stopped her right there and told her I'd take a sport fit 'cause I like sports and I watch every sport I can. Football, baseball, fishin'. I told her once I watched a guy catch a whole big ol' string of fish. Took all day long, see what I'm sayin'? Thrill of the hunt. I finally had to leave when I ran outta beer. Girls like that. They like a sports guy, and I could tell Catherine wasn't no exception 'cause she stopped and looked me up and down and stared at me. She wanted to say somethin', I could tell, but I knew she was too shy so I said 'I'll try a striped shirt,' and she said 'Stripes would make you look wider,' and I said 'Is that bad?' She didn't say nothing, and I knew she knew I made a mistake, and she didn't wanna mention it cause I knew she cared about me, see what I'm sayin'? Girls don't mention when a guy she likes makes a mistake."

"Did you say you have beer?" asked his best friend, studying the cards.

"Hand me that there can of starch, would you? I'm gonna iron the wrinkles outta my new shirt, but I wanna keep the fold marks in it from when it got packaged so girls will see that it's new and that I ain't no cheap skate that wears an ol' shirt on a date, see what I'm sayin'? Looks to me like you ran outta options there buddy, but I'll

let you cheat.”

“What?” said his best friend, scooping up the cards and shuffling them. “So how did you pick that shirt?” he asked.

Drake picked up the can of starch and returned to the ironing board.

“Like I told you, she picked it for me. After she didn’t mention my mistake she got a measurin’ tape and put it round my neck, and I smiled when her fingers touched my neck, and she smiled, and she said ‘Seventeen-and-a-half’, and I said I thought she was older than that. She put her hand over her mouth ‘cause she was shy again, and she walked over to the shirts and reached up to the top shelf to get one, and I said ‘Make sure it’s one of them sports ones’, and she got it and brought it over and said I could use one of the try-out rooms. She was still smilin’ at me when I shut the door, and that’s where I got my idea.

“What idea?” asked his best friend.

“My idea to compose her a note. There were pieces of cardboard and paper lyin’ round the floor of the try-out room, and I picked up a piece of cardboard ‘cause the paper tore when I tried to write on it, and I composed her a note. Here’s a copy of it. I wrote a copy of it so I could remind her of it tonight, and so I could remember what I wanted to remind her of.”

Drake took a folded piece of cardboard out of his back pocket and handed it to his best friend, who took it and began to read.

“Read it out loud so I can hear you,” instructed Drake. His best friend was shaking his head. “Dear Catherine the Great,” he read as instructed.

“I know this here note is being forward and all but I notic’d how you sidel’d rite up to me when I walk’d in your store and you were smilin at me. I’m sure I’ll like any shirt you pick for me and then I could wear it out when we go on a date. Then when people ask where did I get such a good shirt I could say she pick’d it for me meanin you and that’s sort of what your doin anyway and I’d like to take you on a date so I can get to know you and you can get to know me and then I can thank you for it. I’ll write my name at the end of this here note so you can call me and I can ask you where do you wanna go. My name is Drake. That’s like the duck so you can remember.

Sine’d,

Drake
555-3683

“Well, it certainly doesn’t lack charm, does it?” said his best friend. “What about misspellings?”

“Are you kiddin’?” said Drake. “that there will cast a spell that can’t miss, see what I’m sayin’? Probably already has. You should’ve seen the look on her face when I slipped it to her. I handed it to her and said ‘I found this here on the floor of the try out room’ and asked her could she do somethin’ about it, and I winked at her and her eyes got real big. I didn’t want her to feel uncomfortable, being shy the way she is, so I mentioned about the shirt and said I was sorry but it didn’t fit ‘cause it wouldn’t button all the way. I tried to show her and a button popped off when I tried to close it over my stomach. She put her hand over her mouth again, and I told her not to feel bad and I’d try another shirt and I’d let her pick it for me. She laughed and I knew she was feeling’ better and she said ‘OK.’ She told me to go back in the try-out room and wait and she’d bring me another shirt, and I did. Go back in the try-out room, I mean. I let her help me, see what I’m sayin’? She sure kept me waitin’ there awhile, but I knew it was on account of she was bein’ shy. Hey, what time is it?”

His best friend interrupted his game long enough to glance at his watch. “Six-fifty-two,” he said. “Why?”

“Well, she probably hasn’t had time to call me yet on account of she’s probably still gettin’ off work.”

“That store closes at six,” said his best friend, shuffling the cards again.

“Well she’s shy, like I told you. You should’ve seen when she brought my shirt to my room. I was in the try-out room, I mean, and she knocked real softly, and I opened the door and she had her hand over her mouth bein’ shy again, and I could see over her shoulder that the other girls that worked there were watchin’ and I knew it was ‘cause they were jealous, see what I’m sayin’? Girls are like that. They get all jealous when they see another girl talkin’ to a guy they like.

“Hey! The label just came off my new shirt!”

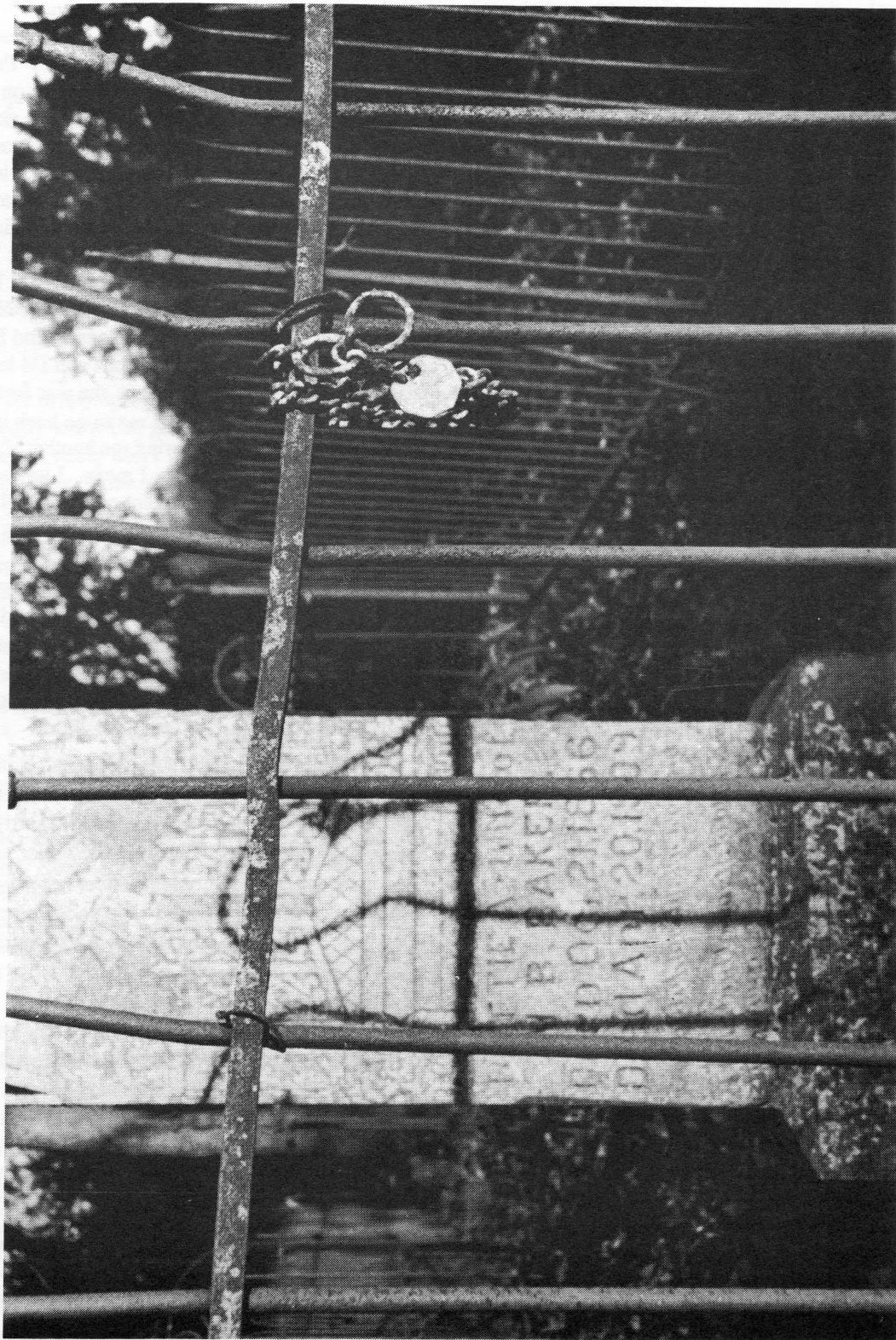
Drake held up the label for his best friend to see. His best friend stopped dealing the cards to look.

“Why do you suppose that happened?” he asked Drake.

“Well it’s probably a sign of quality, see what I’m sayin’? She said it’s from France or one of them other intentional places like that. I knew it was good ‘cause it was expensive. It cost me twelve dollars and ninety-five cents, and that was without any tax.”

“This label says Taiwan,” said his best friend, examining it.

“Yeah, well the French people probably made it there,



Katherine J. Brands

see what I'm sayin'? They're rich, and they can make things anywhere. I know 'cause I paid for this here shirt, didn't I?"

"You sure did pay," said his best friend, returning to his dealing.

"Yeah, and when I tried it on there was plenty of room in the sleeves. I bet only those French people know how to make a shirt so a guy has enough room in it.

"I told Catherine I liked it real good and that she sure knows how to pick a shirt for a guy, and she said that's why she worked there. I knew she picked this real special for me and the label probably comes out so other people can't know where you got it, and so a girl can get her guy a shirt without her friends copyin' her, see what I'm sayin'? Girls do that. They see what their friends have and they want it, too. I wonder why she hasn't called yet?"

"Can't imagine," said his best friend.

"She's probably gettin' all ready for me. I'm all ready myself," said Drake. He walked over to the closet and took out a hanger.

"Why are you hanging that thing inside out?" asked his best friend, watching him.

"So it won't get dirty on the outside. I don't wanna take any chances, 'cause Catherine works with shirts and she'd notice, see what I'm sayin'? She's a real profession-

al."

"She must be to be able to see a smudge on that," said his best friend.

"Yeah, she is. She even put it in a plain box for me when I paid for it. She said it would protect it better than just an ol' bag would, and I agreed but I never would have thought of that myself. I figured she just didn't want any other girls seein' where I bought the shirt.

"She said 'Bye' and I said 'Bye' and then I told her 'Don't forget to take care of that there cardboard that I found in the try-out room,' and she said 'Oh I already have,' and then she put her hand over her mouth in her shy way.

"When I got home, I had to call you right away to tell you about it all. Thanks for comin' over, like I told you before."

"No problem. What are friends for?" said his best friend scooping up the cards and shuffling them again.

"Yeah, what for? I got somebuddy to talk to while I'm waitin' for my girl to call me. I just gotta give her time to get over her shyness, see what I'm sayin'? You might as well deal me in the next hand of solitary while I'm waitin'."

The Stone Said

The stone said to the dust:
"Dust is what you are now
And shall forever be."

Brian Delong