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Prometheus

A Due Process Comedy

By: Sean J. White

Scene: A conservatively dressed professional woman sits at a table. On it is a file folder and some type of out-of-date recording device--perhaps a tape recorder or phonograph, etc. There is another chair on the other side of the table from her.

(Enter Argyle in an orange prison two-piece jumpsuit and rubber sandals--not in chains. He is a grizzled old convict with a youthful gleam and demeanor. But for the wrinkles and gray hair, he seems thirty.)

Woman: (Turns on the recording device.) Good morning, Mr. Argyle.

Argyle: (Sits down across from the woman.) Ma'am.

Woman: (Reads from the file in a monotone voice.) Alvin Argyle appears in person for this, his twenty-third parole hearing. He is serving an indeterminate sentence for armed robbery committed at the age of fifteen. Argyle entered a convenience store shortly after three p.m. on the day in question. With a hand in his jacket pocket, he approached the clerk and demanded money. The clerk laughed. Witnesses say that Argyle then snatched a handful of cigarettes displayed on the counter and ran out. Police tackled him two blocks away. (Looks up at Argyle.) Is this what happened, Mr. Argyle?

Argyle: Yes, ma'am. More or less.

Woman: And you were convicted of armed robbery with the threat of a deadly weapon, possession of stolen property, and fleeing the scene of a crime?

Argyle: You know, I don't agree with the last two.

Woman: Oh? Why not? You were convicted of those charges, were you not?

Argyle: Well, first, if I robbed the place--which I do admit to--how can I be charged for possession of something I stole during the robbery? If I went in to rob the place and didn't get anything wouldn't that make it 'attempted armed robbery' instead? And fleeing--

Woman: (Cuts in.) Were you or were you not convicted of those charges?

Argyle: (With exasperation.) Yes. Those were the charges I was convicted of.

Woman: (Flips a page or two in the file.) Okay, moving on. Let's talk about your parole plan.

Argyle: Okay.

Woman: It is unacceptable. Where are you going to live? Where are you going to work?

Argyle: C'mon, lady. I'm going to be sixty next year. That'll be three-quarters of my life in prison. What am I going to do?

Woman: (Flipping through the file again.) Um, well, it says here that you completed a computer vocational course twenty years ago. Why is there no mention of that in your parole plan?

Argyle: Are you serious?

Woman: The Department of Corrections saw fit for you to take this program with the intention of you using it upon release. You should have planned your post-release employment around that. It is an associate degree coordinated through the state technical college system.

Argyle: It did not seem appropriate to mention the course. I'm pretty sure it won't help at this point.

Woman: If you felt that way, you should have reported it to staff.

Argyle: Ma'am, I've informed the review committee on multiple occasions.

Woman: Did you do so orally, or in writing via a fifteen-oh-three-bee?

Argyle: I just--I just told them. I've told them every year for the past ten years.

Woman: (Tsks, and shakes her head.) You need to put it in writing. (Looks at the file again.) I also see you've refused your other programs.

Argyle: The review committee won't let me into anger management or the drug rehabilitation until you endorse it. (Somewhat to self.) Though I don't understand why I need drug rehabilitation at this point...

Woman: What about the domestic violence and the sex offender treatment programs?

Argyle: (Aghast.) Are you serious?

Woman: The review committee has determined that you have a need for these programs

Argyle: (Getting upset.) I'm in prison for armed robbery, and I've never had any kind of sexual encounter in my life!

Woman: I find that hard to believe.

Argyle: (Agitated.) Are you serious? Why would I lie?

Woman: Obvious self-interest. You lie so you don't have to correct what the Department of Corrections has determined you need to correct. If you don't have programs to complete, you believe you can reach community custody faster. I'm beginning to think you just want to get out of prison to return to your reign of terror.

Argyle: (So upset he can barely keep himself seated.

Gesticulates.) I'm sick? No, lady, you're the sick one.

I was a stupid kid who made a stupid decision. One stupid decision and that's a 'reign of terror?'

Woman: Please calm down, Mr. Argyle. (Tsks again.) I can see why you need anger management. (Looks into the file.)

Argyle: (Still angry but with a leash on it.) So you want me to take some programs the review committee won't allow me into until you give the say so, and other programs unrelated to my crime? Are you going to recommend to the review committee they let me get into my programs?

Woman: I will make that determination at the end of this review. (Returns to the file.)

Argyle: I want you to remove the need for domestic violence and sex offender programs.

Woman: (Annoyed.) Mr. Argyle, that is a determination for the review committee not parole review. (Returns to the file.)

Argyle: So basically we're wasting time here? I can't take the programs I need and you won't dismiss the inappropriate programs--

Woman: (Irritated.) We will NOT discuss your programming needs any further. Is that understood?

Argyle: (Waves his arms in exasperation.) Sure. Fine. Whatever.

Woman: Good. Then we'll move on. (Smiles. A fake smile meant to express an illusory desire to reassure.) One of your victims has decided to attend this parole review. Do you

understand the rules?

Argyle: (Surprised.) What are you talking about? I was never informed--

Woman: You don't understand the rules?

Argyle: Hold on now. I know this one, and YOU are in violation of the rules. I memorized it. Administrative code section parole one-oh-seven point oh-three, and I quote: 'the parole review committee shall inform the prisoner subject to review of all victim attendees of the parole review prior to the review.'

Woman: A policy that goes on to say: (She looks into the file and reads from a paper.) 'This disclosure may be waived for emergency circumstances determined at the discretion of the parole committee.'

Argyle: (Posture collapses in defeat.) Fine. Whatever. Do what you're gonna do.

(Two uniformed men roll a closed coffin on a cart on stage, then stand behind it at parade rest.)

Argyle: (Confused.) What's this?

Woman: Mr. Argyle, you are not to communicate with your victim in any way, nor to make eye contact. Any such communication or contact may constitute felony intimidation of a victim or witness per state statute, and violation may be subject to prosecution. Do you understand, Mr. Argyle?

Argyle: (Laughs at the absurdity.) Sure. Whatever.

Woman: (To the coffin.) Go ahead, Mrs. Muerta. Say whatever

you'd like. (After about fifteen or twenty seconds of silence.) Don't worry, Mrs. Muerta, you're safe here. You can say whatever you'd like, whatever you feel you need to say. (After another long silence.) That's okay, Mrs. Muerta. I understand how frightening this might seem. If you want to try again, just let us know.

(The uniformed men wheel the coffin off-stage.)

Woman: Okay, Mr. Argyle. Please take a moment to explain why you feel you have earned the opportunity of community custody.

Argyle: (Takes a deep breath.) Well, I--

Woman: (Cuts Argyle off.) Your moment is up, Mr. Argyle. And now I will make my determination. (She pauses, flips through the files.) It is my determination that you are not a suitable candidate for community custody at this time. The reasons for this decision are as follows: Misrepresentation on the pre-parole plan, refusal to complete mandated programming, a lack of remorse, continued risk to the public, and insufficient time served for punishment. Entry into programming is not recommended at this time. Reconsideration will occur in twenty-four months, and I am required to inform you that this decision is binding short of a certiorari review by the courts. On a personal note, I hope you will spend the next two years making yourself a better candidate for release. You seem to me no better now than when you first came to

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prison. Do you understand everything that has occurred,
Mr. Argyle?

Argyle: (Uncaring.) What else can I do?

(Woman turns off the recording device at CURTAIN.)

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27 March 2014

Safe Streets Arts
Prisons Foundation
2512 Virginia Ave., NW
#59043
Washington, DC 20037


Dear Prisons Foundation:

I arrived to prison in 1997 at the age of nineteen. I have had short fiction and poetry appear in descant, Warpur, Palate, Trajectory, Clare, Freshwater, Frogpond, and Muse. In 2013 I won honorable mention in PEN American Center's Writing Awards for Prisoners in the genre of poetry. Safe Streets Arts mounted one of ^{my} plays as part of "From Prison to the Stage" in 2013.

Please consider the enclosed play, "Prometheus: A Duo Process Comedy" for the 2014 contest. A #10 SASE accompanies this submission for reply. Rules of the prison prevented the use of a computer.

Thank you.

Respectfully,


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