

BLIND JUSTICE

By Jeff Dunne

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## CHARACTERS

BAILIFF	A large, serious servant of the legal system
JUDGE	An artificial/digital intelligent agent that has been tasked with serving as a judge for the county. Envisioned as a voice behind a box.
PAMELA	A distraught mother that is caught beneath an oppressive, unyielding steamroller of a judicial system

## SETTING

A futuristic courtroom

## TIME

The year 2042

SCENE

*(It is a futuristic courtroom. A bailiff leads in a defendant, bringing her to stand behind a witness podium. A moment later, a small light on the judge's stand lights up.)*

BAILIFF

This court is now in session.

*(Pamela looks at the bailiff in confusion, unclear why she is there, but is ignored.)*

Next case in the docket is 101 703 Alpha Tango.

*(A disembodied voice – the electric judge – speaks...)*

JUDGE

State your name and place your index finger on the scanner.

PAMELA

Pamela Tate.

*(She places her finger on a scanner, and there is a beep.)*

BAILIFF

City of Prandell versus Tate, 101 703 Alpha Tango.

JUDGE

Ms. Tate, you are aware why you have been summoned. As the county's evidence is substan—

PAMELA

Wait! No! No one said what this is about.

BAILIFF

Ms. Tate, delaying these proceedings is not going—

PAMELA

I'm not stalling. No one told me anything except that I had was to appear in court today or I'd be arrested.

JUDGE

Pamela Tate, you have been charged with murder in the second degree of one Christopher Tate.

PAMELA

What!?!

JUDGE

You are charged with the murder of Christopher Tate.

PAMELA

My son?!?

JUDGE

That is correct.

PAMELA

That's insane! I... I just dropped him off at school forty-five minutes ago!

JUDGE

You are mistaken. You murdered Christopher Tate on January seventeenth, 2042, at approximately—

PAMELA

I did no such thing! I just told you I dropped him off at school this morning!

BAILIFF

You are not to interrupt the judge, Ms. Tate.

JUDGE

We have video footage taken from Patrol Drone four zero seven as it was passing your apartment complex. It clearly shows you administering an overdose of cetyldosaprene dissolved in orange juice.

PAMELA

I don't dissolve anything in—

JUDGE

Seventeen minutes later patrol drone five eight eight observed Christopher Tate lying comatose in the center of your living room floor. A medical sensing drone was dispatched—

PAMELA

This isn't right!

JUDGE

And approximately eight minutes later it was determined that Christopher Tate had no pulse and a body temperature of ninety-four point two.

PAMELA

Now listen...

JUDGE

You will enter a plea at this time.

PAMELA

I don't believe this.

JUDGE

You will enter a plea, or will be found in contempt of court.

PAMELA

Not guilty! Of course I'm not guilty! My son is fine. I just dropped him off at—

JUDGE

And do you have any evidence to present in your defense?

PAMELA

You mean like the fact that he's alive and well and sitting in art class right now?!?

JUDGE

Bailiff, please confirm this information.

*(The bailiff types something onto an armband, and a moment later is talking to someone.)*

BAILIFF

This is the Prandell Municipal Court. Can you please confirm whether one Christopher Tate is currently on your premises? Yes. *(Pause.)* Thank you.

*(Bailiff touches a button on an armband, and the call is disconnected. Turning to Pamela...)*

There is no indication of a Christopher Tate at the school. They say that they have not seen the Tate boy since October.

PAMELA

Not seem him since... Wait, what school... did you call Oakbreach Elementary?

BAILIFF

Correct. That is your county's designated sch—

PAMELA

Okay. It's okay. *(Takes a calming breath.)* Chris isn't there anymore, because I moved him to the Orchard Academy last fall. If you call there—

BAILIFF

The Orchard Academy is a private institution.

PAMELA

That's right.

BAILIFF

We have no authority to access attendance records of private institutions.

JUDGE

Do you have any other evidence to present?

PAMELA

What do you mean? Just call the Academy and ask them if he's there!

JUDGE

That evidence would not be admissible.

PAMELA

Not admissible!?! What the hell—

JUDGE

As a private institution, we have no regulatory assurance that any attendance reporting would be accurate.

PAMELA

What?!!

BAILIFF

You could have bribed someone to say that your son is there.

*(Pamela just shakes her head in shock, unable to form words.)*

JUDGE

If you have no other evidence to present...

PAMELA

Wait! Just... just go get him from school, then! Just go over and see for yourself! Better yet, bring him here!

JUDGE

Ms. Tate, we have been tolerant up to this point with your attempts to stall these proceedings by making unverifiable claims. However, if you continue, we will find you in contempt of court.

PAMELA

Just go get him! Please!! Please just bring my son here!

BAILIFF

Honestly, Ms. Tate. If your son was truly alive, wouldn't you have brought him here yourself to prove your innocence?

*(Pamela is stunned by the audacity of this accusation, and just gawks at him for a moment.)*

We see it all here in court, Ms.—

PAMELA

No one told me what I was here for! I thought it had to be a traffic ticket or something!

JUDGE

I will ask you this just one last time. Do you have any further evidence—

PAMELA

Video. Video. You said this was witnessed by a patrol drone. There has to be a video, then, right?

JUDGE

That is correct.

PAMELA

I want to see the video. I demand to see the video!

JUDGE

Granted.

*(Pamela looks down at a video screen on the station where she is located, watches for a few moments while shaking her head with increasing vigorousness.)*

PAMELA

That's not him. That's not Christopher. I mean—

JUDGE

Our advanced analytics estimate the match likelihood at 99.2%.

PAMELA

I admit it looks a little *like* him, but it's definitely not him.

JUDGE

In contrast, humans have an estimated identification match rate of only 82.7%.

PAMELA

I know my own son!

JUDGE

It is very unlikely that you are able to identify the child in the video as accurately as our analytics.

PAMELA

It's not him, damn it! He doesn't have any clothes like those! His hair is longer!!

BAILIFF

Hair length can be easily adjusted.

PAMELA

I'm telling you that isn't Chris!

JUDGE

I must ask you to control yourself, Ms. Tate.

PAMELA

That's not Christopher!

*(The bailiff starts to approach her.)*

I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I won't yell. Wait. The carpet. Can you expand the picture? Don't zoom in as much?

*(She watches her screen.)*

That's not even my apartment. Those aren't my things.



JUDGE

Bailiff, confirm the address in the navigation logs.

BAILIFF

I am showing it as apartment 1814 of 70 Coventry Boulevard.

PAMELA

Yes, that's my address, but that's not my apartment.

JUDGE

And do you have any proof of this?

PAMELA

Proof? Proof that it's not my apartment? It's just not!

JUDGE

If you cannot provide any more significant evidence than your personal claims, then—

PAMELA

What kind of evidence would you believe!? Just go to the apartment and you'll s—

JUDGE

We have already explained to you that attempts to stall these proceedings will not be entertained.

PAMELA

This is insane! You won't listen to anything! My son is alive, and you are accusing me of killing him! There's no... no sense to any of this!

JUDGE

If you have no further evidence to pres—

PAMELA

You mean like common sense?! Just let me go get my son and you'll see—

*(The bailiff steps forward, clearly expecting her to make a run for it.)*

JUDGE

Given the evidence available, we find you guilty of second-degree murder as charged. You are sentenced—

PAMELA

Wait! No! Wait!! You can't do this! My son's alive! He's alive!

JUDGE

We calculate the odds that you are telling the truth to be less than one tenth of a percent. However, even if we believed you, it is well-established that humans are easily fooled. You could, for example, be under the delusion that your son is alive. Or perhaps have mistaken some other child as your own.

PAMELA

Are you crazy!?!

JUDGE

One of the primary reasons the legal system relies on digital intelligent agents to determine justice is that we are incapable of mental instability.

PAMELA

But you're making a mistake!!

JUDGE

That is unlikely. Computers are significantly more effective than humans at evaluating data. We are unbiased, unbribable—

PAMELA

Just let me get my son!!

JUDGE

And not subject to emotional outbursts. Bailiff, please escort Ms. Tate—

PAMELA

What's going to happen to Chris?! What's going—

JUDGE

If his body is ever recovered, funeral services will be paid from the balance of your estate—

PAMELA

He's not dead! He's at the Orcha—

*(The bailiff has come up behind Pamela and injected her with something that instantly puts her into a catatonic state.)*

JUDGE

Bailiff, please have Ms. Tate brought to detention for processing and transfer to Ardenale Penitentiary.

*(As the bailiff goes to collect Pamela's form, there is a beep of an incoming message. The bailiff looks at her wrist.)*

BAILIFF

She just received a text from someone her PDA identifies as "Chris."

JUDGE

Is that so?

BAILIFF

It reads, "Mom, Daniel wants to know if I can come over after school."

JUDGE

And?

BAILIFF

That's the whole message.

JUDGE

It is none of our concern.

BAILIFF

Could the message have come from the boy?

JUDGE

No. Christopher Tate is dead. That message must be from some other Chris that refers to Ms. Tate that way. It is not our concern.

*(Bailiff nods, and begins to carry Pamela off stage. Lights out.)*