

**I DID A
NO—NO
A FEW YEARS
AGO**

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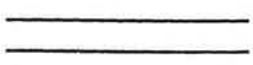
I Did A No-No A Few Years Ago.....38

Well, here it is, folks--my second Hardcastle & McCormick zine. This one contains "The Shoe and The Other Foot", a continuation of the episode, "When I Look Back On All Those Things"; a missing scene entitled "Strike One, You're Out" from "In The Eye of The Beholder"; a short scene concocted in the middle of the night called "Nightmares Ain't What They Used To Be"; "S. Claus & Associates", a continuation of the Christmas episode, "Hate The Picture, Love the Frame"; a poem, "A Visit from St. Nicholas--McCormick Style", which is another version of what happened on a certain night; and the main story, "I Did A No-No A Few Yars Ago", an original idea from my own befuddled brain.

I want to thank Ann Leonhart and Reg Marracino for editing the story, "No-No". They very daringly disagreed with me on character interpretation in certain scenes, which takes a lot of guts since I can be a royal pain in the butt when it comes to criticizing my stories. I went along with them on some of their suggestions, and on others, I had to stick with my own feelings, so if you don't agree, please feel free to let me know. I'm not promising I won't send Milt to your gatehouse with a shotgun, but I'll definitely listen.

I owe a very big thanks to Mysti Frank for typing this for me. I've published fourteen other zines and the worst thing about them is the typing. You would think I'd get better as time goes on, but I don't. So I really am grateful to Mysti for taking that God-awful rough draft and making some sense out of it. You'll probably notice that the type is different on some of the stories. That's because I ended up writing and typing some new stories while Mysti was doing the ones I had given her.

Well, I'll shut up now, throw in a few ads, then let you get on with the stories. I hope you like them.



NIGHTMARES AIN'T WHAT THEY USED TO BE

"No! Judge, don't let 'em do this to me again--please!" I didn't do anything wrong, I swear!"

"I'm sorry, Mark, but they've got evidence--"

"I've been set up! Oh God, you gotta believe me! I wouldn't have broken into that place!" He grabbed Hardcastle's arm through the bars and pulled him close. "Oh please, Judge, don't leave me in here alone," he whispered. "Look at those three guys behind me. They're just waiting. As soon as you walk out that door..."

"I'm sorry, kid, but they won't let me stay."

"You got to! Judge, I'm scared, I'm real scared. I'm not gonna make it through this one."

"Look, kid, it's not gonna be long."

"Not long! Judge, they gave me five years! That's a lifetime in here! You don't understand what it's like!"

"Don't worry, I'll have you out a lot sooner'n that. You just keep your nose clean, and watch your back."

"Oh God, Judge, you're not listening to me!! I didn't commit no crime!" He grabbed Hardcastle's jacket in a death-like grip, tears rolling down his cheeks. "You've gotta feel something, some kind of affection for me, or you would never have taken me in! Remember our basketball games, Judge? We-we have fun, don't we? And-and our Lone Ranger and Tonto routine. We make a helluva team."

"Don't do this, McCormick."

"I've got to!" His voice grew hysterical. "Oh please, Judge, don't turn your back on me! I need you!"

"I'm not turning my back on ya, kid, at least not figuratively. Right now, though, they're tellin' me I've gotta go."

"No! You can't!" His grip on Hardcastle's jacket tightened when he felt him trying to pull away. "Don't leave me, Judge!"

"I'm sorry, Mark, but I gotta." Hardcastle pulled away from his grasp and patted his arm. "Just hang in there. You're gonna be all right."

He gripped the bars tightly, his cheeks pressed against them as he watched the judge until he disappeared from sight. Starting to turn, he suddenly felt hot breath on the back of

his neck and froze, petrified with fear.

"What's the matter, sonny?" came a harsh voice behind him. "Daddy abandon ya?"

"Get away from me!" he hissed.

"Get away? Sure, we'll get away."

An arm grabbed him around the neck, and another snaked around his chest. He was jerked backwards to the floor, and hands began groping at his shirt, his slacks...

"Judge!!! Judge!!!"

"McCormick, what's wrong? Wake up! C'mon, kid, wake up!"

Feeling a hand on his shoulder, he lashed out with his fists.

"Hey, hey, hey! Stop that! C'mon now, just take it easy."

Slowly opening his eyes, McCormick stared at the two large hands firmly encircling his wrists. His gaze traveled up to the craggy face, now creased with lines of concern, and he whispered hoarsely, "Judge?"

"Yeah, it's me, kid. Who did you think it was?" When there was no answer from McCormick, he leaned back and frowned.

"That must've been one helluva dream. You were yellin' so loud, I came runnin' in here, thinking someone was tryin' to kill you."

McCormick turned his head to the back of the sofa. "Worse," he confessed in a muffled voice.

Releasing his wrists, Hardcastle grasped his chin and turned McCormick's head back so he could see him. "You're cryin', you know that?" he pointed out gruffly, and reaching into his pocket, he withdrew a handkerchief and awkwardly wiped the tears from McCormick's cheeks. "You wanna talk about it, kid?"

"I-I can't," he mumbled.

"You were yellin' 'Don't leave me, Judge'," Hardcastle spoke softly. "Where'd you think I was goin'?"

"You-you heard that?"

Hardcastle nodded.

Staring up at the ceiling, McCormick released a ragged sigh. "God, Judge, nightmares ain't what they used to be.

When I was--when I was a kid, I used to have nightmares that something was hidin' under my bed or making noises in my closet." He laughed shakily. "You-you'd think that now that I'm grown up, I wouldn't be so scared of things that go bump in the night."

Hardcastle eyed him suspiciously, knowing it was more than some nocturnal spectre that had caused McCormick's body to shake like a leaf in the wind. "Kid, we never outgrow our fears," he returned quietly. "The subject matter changes that's all. The bogeyman or that three-legged monster we saw on a late-night horror flick sooner or later turns into real flesh-and-blood people who shoot or stab ya instead of suckin' your blood. It still scares the hell outta ya, no matter which it is."

Studying Hardcastle's face a moment, McCormick pushed himself up from the sofa on his elbows, and reached out to grip the judge's arm, his voice intense. "I-I gotta ask you something important."

"Sure, kid. Shoot."

McCormick's eyes searched the lined face. "If-if it looked like I had committed a crime, would you-would you believe me if I swore I didn't do it?"

Hardcastle drew back in surprise. "'Course I would."

"No-no matter how much evidence there was against me? You wouldn't-you wouldn't let me go back to prison?" he almost begged.

"Not if I could help it," Hardcastle answered firmly. Watching McCormick's tear-stained face closely, he asked in a gruff voice. "Is that what this is all about? Did you have a nightmare about going back to prison?"

McCormick nodded. "I was-I was framed or something and I was back in a cell, and there was three guys behind me, and you-you said you had to go, and I was pleading with you not to 'cause I was scared to death. You said they wouldn't let you stay, and as soon as you left, those-those... They g-grabbed me and pulled me down to the floor and-and..." The tears started again and McCormick rolled over quickly, burying his head in the back of the sofa.

Hardcastle sat motionless on the edge of the sofa, his face twisted with anger. "Is that what happened to you in prison before?" he asked harshly.

The curly head moved slightly. "I was so afraid, though," he whispered in a choked voice. "If-if I had dropped my guard for a minute..."

"Damn!" Hardcastle exploded softly. Reaching out, he squeezed McCormick's shoulder. "Look, kid, you got banged up some on that case we just finished. You're tired and you're hurtin'. Now, let me help ya out to the gatehouse, I'll tuck ya in bed, and you can get a good night's sleep."

"I'm okay," McCormick mumbled into the sofa. "I don't wanna go to sleep."

"Nonsense," Hardcastle retorted and grabbing an arm, pulled him to a sitting position. "You get some zzz's and tomorrow, the world'll look rosy again."

"No! Please, Judge, don't make me go back to sleep!" McCormick pleaded.

"You're gonna go to bed," Hardcastle stated firmly, and hooking his arm around McCormick's back, he forced him to stand. "I'll be right there in a chair beside you all night. You have another nightmare, I'll wake ya up before it gets too bad."

"You promise? You won't leave me?"

With the cry of "Don't leave me, Judge!" still ringing in his ears, Hardcastle tightened his grip and promised, "I won't leave you, kid. You need me, I'll be there."

McCormick looked up, his eyes hopeful. "It was just a nightmare, wasn't it, Judge?"

Hardcastle broke into a grin. "Now yer cookin'."