

**I DID A
NO—NO
A FEW YEARS
AGO**

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T A B L E O F C O N T E N T S

The Shoe And The Other Foot..... 1

Nightmares Ain't What They
Used To Be.....18

A Visit from St. Nicholas --
McCormick Style.....22

Strike One, You're Out.....25

S. Claus & Associates.....30

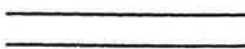
I Did A No-No A Few Years Ago.....38

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.



STRIKE ONE, YOU'RE OUT

"Oh-oh."*

McCormick moved quickly to the tree around which the rope was tied, talking fast as he began pulling frantically at the knots. "I'm sorry, Judge, I'm really sorry. I'll have you down in a jiffy. Just hang in there." Realizing what he had said, he groaned, "Oh, Lord, I didn't mean that. Just-uh-just-just take it easy, Judge, okay?"

Swinging upside-down, Hardcastle filled his lungs with air and released it in a roar. "McCormick!! I'm gonna beat your ass all over this place! What the hell're you doing setting up traps like this? I'm gonna break every damned idiotic bone in your body! Now, get me down from here!"

"I-I'm trying, I really am." McCormick's fingers fumbled with the knots in the darkness, the taut rope having pulled them impossibly tight. "Just calm down, Judge," he coaxed. "Take it easy. You get excited and you're liable to have a-a heart attack or something."

"Heart attack!" Hardcastle yelled. "You're gonna think you've had one when I get through with you!"

"I'm sorry, Judge," McCormick's continued apologies were as futile as his efforts to untie the knots. "I am really and truly sorry."

"Sorry don't cut it, McCormick! When I get through with you, you're gonna be walking bent over for a month!" Hardcastle wriggled around, looking as if he intended to carry out his threat before his feet were back on the ground. "Get me down!!"

"I'm trying, Judge! I'm trying!" McCormick was on the verge of panic. "I can't get the rope untied!" Abandoning his endeavors, he whirled around. "I know! I'll go get the axe! Don't go anywhere till I get back!"

"McCormick! Move it and you lose it!" Hardcastle shouted, and reaching up into his pocket, he felt for the only thing that hadn't fallen out--his pocketknife. Defying gravity, he bent upward with a grunt, and grabbing the rope with one hand, began sawing right below it with the other.

* Missing scene--"In the Eye of the Beholder"

McCormick hung back, torn between moving in and helping to support Hardcastle when the rope gave, or turning tail and running. Realizing there was nowhere to go to escape the judge's wrath, with a sigh he decided to take his medicine, and moving beneath Hardcastle, grabbed his back just below the armpits.

The rope snapped suddenly, and Hardcastle's legs dropped like a rock, almost his entire weight falling against McCormick. Both stumbled backwards, McCormick plowing into a tree with Hardcastle's broad back slamming hard against his chest.

His breath knocked out of him with a loud "Oof!", McCormick put his hands against Hardcastle and tried to push him away. "Damn, Judge, you're heavy!" he complained, and knew immediately that he should never have opened his mouth.

"That does it!" Straightening, Hardcastle whirled around.

"Judge-ee!!"

The fist connected with McCormick's jaw, and he dropped like a sack of grain.

Hardcastle stared at the motionless body a moment, then groaned, "Aw, hell," and bending down on one knee, he began slapping McCormick's face gently. "C'mon, kid, wake up. Look, I'm sorry. You shouldn't have made me mad. C'mon, snap out of it."

McCormick's eyes remained closed, his head having the same qualities as that of a ragdoll as the judge grasped his chin and moved it back and forth, trying to arouse him.

"Aw, hell," Hardcastle muttered again, and grabbing McCormick's arms, he stood, pulling the limp body up with him. Ducking his head, he lifted the young man over his shoulder and started towards the gatehouse.

Carrying McCormick upstairs, Hardcastle bent over the bed and slid him off his shoulder, catching the curly head and lowering it gently to the pillow. Stepping back, he studied his handiwork, his face set in deep lines of regret.

A thick slab of steak would do the already-swelling eye a world of good, but it would take three or four hours to thaw one out. Settling for a cold compress from the bathroom instead, he laid the damp cloth across the injured eye and was relieved to see an almost immediate reaction.

McCormick's right eye fluttered, then opened to stare up at the judge.

Sitting on the edge of the bed, Hardcastle leaned over to turn the compress, and growled softly, "You okay, kid?"

"Uh-yeah," McCormick stammered. The one eye widened as he noticed his surroundings. "How'd I get in here?"

"I carried you," Hardcastle explained gruffly. "When I hit ya, you dropped like a rock and I couldn't get you to come to, and...Well, hell, I couldn't just leave you out there in the dark."

McCormick smiled at Hardcastle's obvious distress. "I'm sorry, Judge," he apologized softly. "I didn't mean for you to get caught in that trap."

"Yeah, I know," Hardcastle shot back. "You meant to lasso a leprechaun. If you had used that pea brain of yours for something constructive instead of getting knee-deep in a fairy tale, you wouldn't have gotten in trouble and I wouldn't have ended up...hitting ya."

"I know," McCormick mumbled and when Hardcastle leaned over to turn the compress again, Mark grasped his wrist. "I'm sorry, Judge. I won't do it again."

"Yeah, you will," Hardcastle sighed. "You got a one-tracked mind, McCormick. When you get an idea on those little mental rails of yours, there's no stopping you till you reach the end of the line."

"Look who's talking," McCormick retorted.

Hardcastle ignored him. "Maybe I oughtta take you to see a psychiatrist," he suggested thoughtfully. "You had a rough childhood, kid. Maybe that's why you can't tell the difference between fantasy and reality."

McCormick pushed himself up on his elbows, the compress falling off his eye. "I can tell the difference," he snapped. "Reality stinks, Judge. You getting shot last year--that was reality. And you thinking a few months ago that you were gonna die--that was reality. Oh, yeah, I know the difference. A lot of times, reality leaves you with an empty feeling in your gut that no amount of food can fill."

"All right, kid, just take it easy. Don't get your dander up." Hardcastle gently pressed him back onto the bed and picked up the compress. "I need to get this cold again,"

he mumbled and started towards the bathroom.

"You got a problem, too, you know," McCormick yelled after him. "You see everything in black and white. Judge, don't you know there's a whole world of colors out there?"

"Sure, I do," Hardcastle shouted back from the bathroom. "I just don't see any that don't exist--unlike some people I know." Returning to the bedroom, he saw the stubborn look on McCormick's face and sighed. "Look, kid. I'm just trying to straighten ya out for your own good." Sitting on the edge of the bed, he put the compress over McCormick's eye again and leaned back. "You know what'll happen if you run around telling people that you've seen leprechauns? They'll come out here and truss ya up in a strait jacket, and you'll be kicking and screaming your fool head off, and I won't be able to do a damned thing about it. Is that what you want? You wanna spend the best years of your life in a padded cell eating pabulum?"

"No," McCormick muttered angrily.

"Good," Hardcastle grinned.

"But just because I don't tell anyone that leprechauns exist, doesn't change the fact that they do," McCormick added hastily.

"They do not," Hardcastle argued with unusual patience.

"They do, too!"

"They don't."

"They do!"

"McCormick!" Hardcastle drew in a deep breath, determined not to get angry again. "How's the eye?" he asked calmly.

"It's okay," McCormick mumbled, unsure and a bit leery of the judge's sudden change of temperament.

Shifting his position a bit, Hardcastle asked in a casual tone, "Uh, by the way, how much did you say you owe Benny on the car?"

McCormick eyed him warily. "Twelve hundred and eighty-seven dollars. Why?"

Hardcastle shrugged slightly. "I just thought maybe we'd go down there in the morning and pay him, so he'd go on and finish up the work on it."

The compress fell to the floor this time as McCormick sat up quickly, staring at the judge in surprise. "You-you'd do that for me after what just happened with the traps?"

Hardcastle's eyes twinkled. "I know how much the car means to ya, kid. I know I act tough sometimes, but there's some things in my life that mean a lot to me, too."

The comment was vague, but McCormick felt his cheeks grow warm as he understood what Hardcastle meant, and realized this was also his way of apologizing. "I-I don't know what to say," he stammered.

"You don't say anything." Hardcastle slapped him on the arm and rose. "That's because you're going to bed. We'll go by Benny's tomorrow morning early, then when we get back here, I want you to get rid of all those traps you've got scattered around. Understand?"

"Yes, Your Honor," McCormick replied meekly, then added under his breath, "If I can find them all."

"What?"

"Nothing, Judge," McCormick returned hastily. "I'll take care of it as soon as we get back. And anything else you want done--just ask and I'll do it," he promised.

Hardcastle grinned. "Now, yer cookin'." He started towards the stairs and turned, asking hesitantly, "Is there-uh-anything you want from the house? A glass of milk, or something?"

McCormick smiled. "Thanks, Judge, but I've got everything I need right now."

Hardcastle nodded slightly. "Well, good night, kiddo. Sleep tight."

A strange lump rose in McCormick's throat as he responded somewhat hoarsely, "Good night, Judge."