

THE SHOE AND THE OTHER FOOT

"...Judge, you know someone by the name of Melinda Marshall?"

"Is she in some kind of trouble?"

"Well, not exactly, sir. You see, this car is registered in her name. We received a call this morning... Uh, Judge, I'm afraid you're under arrest. She says you stole her car."\*

Hardcastle's eyes widened in disbelief, and the officer moved back, ordering hesitantly, "Sir, if you'll--if you'll step out of the car?"

The judge finally found his voice. "You're kidding, right? I mean, I'm not really under arrest. Somebody put you up to this, Officer--" he squinted at the shiny badge above him, reading the name, "--Jackson. Lieutenant Harper has got something to do with it, doesn't he?"

Jackson shook his head. "No, sir. Miss Marshall has sworn out a warrant for your arrest." The policeman's tone of voice became less formal as he dropped his guard a moment. "Please, Judge, don't make this any harder for me than it already is. I'm sure there's some mistake, but when the word gets out that I had to arrest the Judge Hardcastle, I'm going to have to take a lot of ribbing. Please don't compound my problems by resisting arrest."

"Resisting arrest?!" Hardcastle roared.

"Hey, Judge, you heard the officer," McCormick shot in gleefully, and leaned back with his arms spread across the back of the seat. "The poor guy's in a predicament here, so don't make it any worse for him. And don't mind me when I say 'I told you so.'"

Hardcastle whirled around in his seat. "You shut up!" he yelled, pointing a finger at McCormick.

Ignoring him, Mark looked up at the policeman. "I'm Mark McCormick. Am I under arrest, too?"

"No, sir," Jackson replied. "Judge Hardcastle's name is the only one that appears on the warrant."

"Great," McCormick grinned. "I guess you'll be calling a

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\* Continuation of "When I Look Back On All Those Things"

tow truck to take this car in."

"Yes, sir."

"Then I'll just get out and walk home." McCormick started to open the door. "Don't worry about me, Judge. It's only about two miles, and I promise I won't hitchhike, so I'll be all right."

Grabbing him by the collar, Hardcastle jerked him back. "You move from that seat, McCormick, and I'll kick your butt all the way to South America!"

McCormick assumed an expression of surprise. "Judge, I am shocked! First, you steal a car, then you threaten violence right under the nose of an officer of the law."

"You're gonna be lyin' out there on the side of the road if you don't shut up!" Hardcastle shouted. Turning back to Jackson, he tried to control his temper as he coaxed, "Now, look, you and I both know a mistake has been made here, so why don't we just make some calls on your radio and--"

"I'm sorry, Judge, but I can't do that," Jackson apologized. "You were a police officer once, so you know that we aren't asked our opinions, we're just told to obey orders, and my orders are to place you under arrest." His voice took on a firm, business-like tone as he began to recite, "Judge Hardcastle, you have the right to remain silent. If you give up that right, any--"

"Whoa! Wait a minute!" McCormick interrupted. "Judge, lean forward."

"What the hell for?" he demanded.

"I want your wallet."

Hardcastle's eyes widened. "You're not going to try to bribe him, are you?"

"Now, would I do a thing like that?" Pulling the wallet from Hardcastle's hip pocket, McCormick searched through it until he found what he wanted -- a small, laminated card. "Here," he held it out to Jackson. "Read him his rights off the card here. We don't want this one thrown out of court because of some technicality."

Snatching his wallet out of McCormick's hand, Hardcastle glared at him. "You're getting a real kick outa this, aren't you, kid?"

"Oh, you bet I am, Kemosabe," McCormick grinned. "I haven't had this much fun since a crazy ol' judge threw me in the slammer for a crime I didn't commit. History repeats itself, only the shoe's on the other foot this time."

"You keep this up and my shoe is gonna be in your mouth,"

Hardcastle threatened.

"Uh, excuse me, gentlemen," Jackson interrupted. "Judge, I'd appreciate it if you'd let me get this over with."

"All right, all right!" Hardcastle yelled. "Get the hell on with it!"

"Would you please step from the car?"

Hardcastle did so, and Jackson began literally reading him his rights. When he finished, he handed the card back to Hardcastle, and McCormick burst out laughing.

"I love it, Judge! I love it! Hoisted by your own petard!"

Hardcastle sighed. "Jackson, would you mind turning your back while I beat the hell outa the wise guy here?"

Jackson dared to flash a smile. "He does seem to be enjoying the situation, sir."

"Officer, you don't know the half of it," McCormick quipped.

"You! You're in trouble!" Hardcastle warned and whirling around, started toward the black and white, yelling over his shoulder. "Get your butt in this car, McCormick! I wanna get down to the station and get this damned thing cleared up!"

McCormick started to follow, but Jackson stopped him with a hand on his arm. "I, uh, I'm sorry, Judge," he called to Hardcastle, "but you know the rules. I can't transport anyone else with a...a suspect."

"Good thinking," McCormick grinned. "You put me in the back seat with him, and you'll have a murder on your hands."

"You're damned right about that!" Hardcastle yelled, stomping back to the two men.

McCormick ducked behind Jackson. "Hey, don't you have some kind of rule about handcuffing your prisoners?" he asked hopefully.

"Well, uh, yes, but I don't think it's necessary in this case," Jackson decided.

"Oh, I don't know," McCormick shook his head doubtfully. "That's one mean sucker you got there, officer."

"That does it!" Hardcastle roared. "When I get this straightened out, McCormick, I'm gonna think of twenty-five different ways to make your life miserable!"

"So, you've only got three more to go!" McCormick retorted.

Not fooled by the verbal dueling, Jackson intervened with a suggestion. "Judge, what if I let you just follow me to the station? Mr. McCormick would, uh, would, have to drive, of course, but if I could have your word..."

"Hey, don't worry," McCormick promised him. "I'll get ol' Hardcase there. After all, I'm a taxpayer and I wanna see justice done."

Hardcastle stalked around the car and climbing in, slammed the door with an angry bang. "Go ahead, kiddo, enjoy it while you can because pretty soon, you're gonna be laughing outa the other side of your mouth," his voice rose in volume, "because I'm gonna knock your teeth out! Now, get the hell in this car!"

McCormick slapped Jackson on the shoulder and winked. "Better keep your eye on the rearview mirror, officer. If I get murdered back here, I want a witness."

Shaking his head in wonder, Jackson started toward his vehicle, obviously perplexed by the actions of the two men.

Grinning, McCormick climbed into the car beside the judge, ready to take up the sword again.

Hardcastle didn't give him the chance. "Don't start it again," he growled. "One more smart remark outa you, kid, and I'll make you wish you were in Borneo."

McCormick switched on the ignition with a chuckle. "Forget it, Kemosabe. Not even your threats are going to keep me from enjoying this. The Honorable Milton C. Hardcastle gets arrested for stealing a car. God, I love it! I gotta tell the world, and that includes the newspaper, radio stations..."

"You wouldn't dare!"

"Oh, wouldn't I?!"

Hardcastle glared at McCormick's profile as the young man pulled onto the highway behind the black and white. "Kid, you know damned well I didn't steal this car!" he yelled.

"Oh, c'mon, Judge, I've heard that line before," McCormick retorted. "As a matter of fact, I think it was once said in a very pleading tone by a poor, innocent young man who got railroaded into court and who some jackass judge wouldn't believe and slapped in the slammer for two years."

"I never said I didn't believe you!" Hardcastle protested.

"You put me in prison!" McCormick shot back.

"I told you Justice is a tough ol' broad!" Hardcastle shouted. "No matter how you look at it, technically you broke the law, and that's the only thing I could rule on, so don't

blame me because you got muddy water sloshing around in that pea brain of yours."

McCormick threw him an angry look. "All right, I did something stupid--"

"Stupid?" Hardcastle interrupted. "That's the understatement of the decade."

"Well, what about you?" McCormick shot back. "I told you Melinda was Mount St. Helens looking for a place to erupt, but did you believe the voice of experience? No! You thought she was a sweet, innocent kid. Never let it be said The Lone Ranger ever took advice from Tonto. Well, now it's your turn to get the shaft. Masked Man go to prison while faithful Indian companion hang around big tepee and take life easy for the next two years."

"I wouldn't go spreading your bearskins all over the place, kid, because I'm not going to prison," Hardcastle retorted.

"Yes, you are!"

"No, I'm not!"

"You stole a car!"

"I did not!"

"Neither did I!" McCormick fired back. "But I went to prison. What's the deal here, Hardcase? Is there one set of laws for guys like me and another set for hard-headed judges?"

Hardcastle sighed. "McCormick, I know this is gonna be hard, but force yourself to think a minute. My case is different from yours because I've got proof that Melinda gave me permission to use the car. You were there; you heard her."

"Me? Me!" McCormick started laughing. "I hope you don't plan on me taking the stand in your defense, Judge. I'm the one you put in prison six years ago for stealing a car from the same woman. You think any jury in the world's gonna believe me?"

"Yeah, you're right," Hardcastle agreed thoughtfully. "I'd better keep your name out of it; otherwise, you could go back to jail."

McCormick took his eyes off the road long enough to throw Hardcastle a startled look. "What do you mean I could go back to jail? You're the one being accused of stealing the car."

"Yeah, but you see, it's like this, kid," Hardcastle began explaining with relish. "I've got a clean slate as far as committing any crimes are concerned, while you--" He held up his hand, raising his fingers as he counted off one at a time. "You had that joyride beef against you when you were a kid, that repo

mixup in Florida several years ago, the prison term for stealing a car from Melinda, and last but not least, you got charged with stealing the Coyote, for which you were later cleared, but everyone remembers it. Now, it's public knowledge that you're in my custody, so if you wanted to get revenge against Melinda, you just might've talked a naive, gullible old judge into helping you out, maybe convincing him it was just a prank or something."

"Naive, gullible, old... Where'd you get that fairy tale?" McCormick shot in. "You don't even know the meaning of those words."

"Hush. You mustn't interrupt while I'm talking," Hardcastle censored in a voice much like a father might use for his small son. "As I was saying, if all that came out in court, the old judge would probably just get a reprimand, while this repeated offender would go back to prison for a helluva lot longer'n two years."

McCormick's hands tightened on the steering wheel as he threw Hardcastle a horrified look. "God, you wouldn't, Judge! You wouldn't do that to me!"

Slapping him on the arm, Hardcastle chuckled. "'Course I wouldn't, kid. I was just getting back at you for those smart remarks you were making. You act like you want me to go to prison." He hesitated, then asked, "You don't, do you?"

McCormick was silent.

"Well?"

"I'm thinking about it," he mumbled.

"McCormick!"

Mark grinned. "No, Judge, as strange as it may sound, I don't want you going to prison." He laughed softly. "God, I oughta have my head examined for saying that." Glancing at Hardcastle out of the corner of his eye, his grin grew wider. "But you can't blame me for getting a certain amount of sweet revenge out of this situation. I was right about Melinda and you were wrong. C'mon, admit it."

"Okay, okay, I admit it!" Hardcastle yelled. "Does that make you feel better?"

"It makes me feel terrific," McCormick assured him. "The Green Hornet got stung and Cato gets to say 'I told you so.'"

"Well I wouldn't say that too many times if I were you, kid. Redundancy can be hazardous to your health."

"Oh, you ain't heard nuthin' yet, Kemosabe," McCormick promised. "Just wait till we get to the police station."

Frank Harper's office was a minor madhouse, the lieutenant desperately trying to explain his position, Jackson attempting to reach anyone on the phone, and McCormick doubled over in his chair, shaking with laughter, while Hardcastle's voice boomed above the pandemonium.

"What the hell do you mean I may have to go to jail?"

"Milt, you know the law as well as I do," Harper argued.

Jackson hung up the phone and shook his head. "Sorry, lieutenant. Miss Marshall was placed in protective custody the moment she stepped onto the plane for Miami. They refuse to let us talk to her."

"And Agent Wahl just left for a special assignment in Europe and won't be heard from for three days," Harper repeated the information he had learned earlier, and leaning back in his chair, sighed. "Well, there you have it, Milt. Wahl can't clear you of this charge till we can contact him and until then, we have to follow procedure. That means fingerprints, mug shots, the works."

"Mug shots!" McCormick chortled. "Boy, that name really fits in this case."

Hardcastle threw him a hard look. "Frank, isn't there a law against being a smart ass?"

"Not that I know of," Harper smiled.

"Hey, don't blame me because you got caught up in the wheels of Justice," McCormick retorted gleefully. "Some Arkansas mule told me she's a tough ol' broad."

Hardcastle held a clenched fist just inches from McCormick's nose. "One more word outa you, kid, and you're gonna be chewing on this. I'm not gonna tell you again."

McCormick grinned. "Sticks and stones may break my bones--"

"And so will I if you don't shut up!" Hardcastle roared.

McCormick looked around his fist and winked at Harper. "Touchy, isn't he?"

"Getting arrested does that to some people," Harper quipped.

Hardcastle lowered his fist to point a finger at Harper. "You stay outa this, and you," the finger went to McCormick, "you just remember that when this is all over, you gotta go home with me."

"Where I will dutifully perform all my chores while constantly reminding you of this little 'zit' on the otherwise perfect life of Judge Milton C. Hardcastle," McCormick promised.

"If I hear 'I told you so' one more time..." Hardcastle left the warning unfinished.

"I told you so!" McCormick shot back and ran around the desk beside Harper. "Uh, Frank, can I use your phone?" he asked quickly.

"Sure." Harper gestured toward it. "Be my guest."

"Thanks." McCormick punched in the numbers, waited a few seconds, then asked, "L.A. Times? Let me speak to the editor, please."

"McCormick!!" Lunging across the desk, Hardcastle snatched the receiver from Mark's hand and putting it to his ear, he heard, "...time is 3:06 and 12 seconds."

His eyes widened and McCormick held out his wrist with a grin. "Is my watch right, Judge?"

Slapping his arm away, Hardcastle returned the receiver to its cradle with a bang. "It's not gonna make any difference to you, kid, because you're not gonna have much time left." He turned an angry look on Harper. "Can't you make him get the hell outa here?"

"Sorry, Milt, no can do," Harper shrugged. "The police station is a public facility. He can leave if he wants to--"

"And miss all the fun?" McCormick shot in. "No way, José. This is better than a John Wayne movie. The personification of True Grit gets himself arrested on charges of stealing 20th century's answer to the horse. Hey, Judge, you know what they used to do to thieves in the old days."

"The same thing I'm gonna do to you if you don't shut that smart mouth of yours!" Hardcastle shouted.

Harper circled his desk, trying valiantly to hide a smile. "As much as I'd love to sit around here all day and listen to these witty remarks flying through the air, some of us have to work." He gestured to Hardcastle. "C'mon. I'll get you booked, the bail'll be set and you can pay it, and then I can get you two outa my hair."

He led the way to another part of the station, McCormick following them like a gleeful puppy anticipating a juicy bone.

The fingerprints were taken and Hardcastle tried to wipe the ink off his hands.

"Forget it, Judge," McCormick leaned forward to whisper. "I got that stuff on me six years ago, and it's still under my fingernails."

"Oh, it is not!" Hardcastle retorted.



McCormick straightened. "All right, I exaggerated. It finally wore off last April."

Harper nodded toward the camera in the corner of the room. "Pictures, Milt."

Sighing heavily, Hardcastle stepped in front of the camera. "Okay, what do you want me to do?"

The policeman/photographer bent down to peer through his lens. "Turn to the left, please, Judge."

"Uh, Neilson, you better point it out to him," McCormick suggested. "The Judge has a problem with directions like that."

Hardcastle threw him a furious look. "McCormick, shut up!"

The camera flashed and McCormick staggered back in mock horror. "God, what a picture that one's gonna be! It'll make men quake in their boots and women have miscarriages!"

"You really think this is funny, don't you, kid?" Hardcastle snapped.

"Oh, no, Judge, I think it's hilarious," McCormick returned with a chuckle. "The Honorable Never-Commit-A-Crime Hardcastle is gonna have his face slapped into a mug book between Ice 'Em Isaacs and Hit Man Hooligan." Claspng his hands together, he gazed up at the ceiling. "Thank you, Lord. There really is justice in this world."

The photo session was finally completed, and McCormick slapped Neilson on the back. "Hey, you think you can give me a dozen of those, wallet size, and a coupla five-by-sevens?"

Neilson threw him a toothy grin. "You want one for your keychain?"

"Yeah," McCormick agreed enthusiastically, "and give me a big blow-up, too. I'm gonna put that sucker out in the flower garden to scare away the birds."

Neilson's hearty laughter was cut short when he saw Hardcastle's angry look.

"Are you through?"

"Uh, yes, yes, sir, Judge."

McCormick winked at the subdued officer. "Don't worry about him, Neilson. Ol' Hardcase barks a lot worse'n he bites."

"That's only because you haven't been 'bitten' by me yet," Hardcastle retorted, and grabbing McCormick by the back of the collar, he started pulling him toward the door. "Frank, where do we go now? Let's get the ball rollin' here. I wanna get this

thing over with."

Harper hung up the phone and smiled. "Bail's been set at \$5,000, Milt. Pay your ten percent, cash, and you can get outa here and go home."

"You know damned well I don't carry that kinda money around with me," Hardcastle growled.

"No problem," Harper shrugged. "Just call a bailbondsman."

"Ha!" Hardcastle snorted. "I've made enemies of those guys over the years. Every damned one of 'em would like to see me rot in jail." He whirled around to McCormick. "You said you had some money saved up. How much?"

McCormick started backing away, an expression of shocked amusement on his face. "Do my ears deceive me? The rich Judge Hardcastle wants an ex-con to bail him outa jail? Aw, man, I've died and gone to heaven! This is too much! My heart can't take it!"

"Neither will your head because I'm gonna break it if you don't shut up and go get that money!" Hardcastle roared.

"What's this?" McCormick retorted. "You're ordering me to bail you out?"

"You're damned right I am!"

"With my money? Money, I might add, that I have worked diligently for, and earned every single penny of with the sweat of my brow."

"You haven't sweated in your entire life!" Hardcastle shot back.

"Money that I put away for a rainy day," McCormick continued, ignoring him, "and now ol' Judge Thunder-and-Lightning comes along and wants to steal it from me."

"I'm not stealing it!" Hardcastle yelled. "I just want to borrow it!"

"At what rate of interest?"

Hardcastle's eyes widened in disbelief. "You'd charge me interest?"

"Hey, Judge, what can I say? It's a jungle out there," McCormick returned philosophically. "A man's gotta make a buck wherever he can."

"By shafting a friend?" Hardcastle demanded.

"If you can't do it to a friend, who can you do it to?"

McCormick grinned.

"Well, forget it!" Hardcastle shouted. "I'll go to jail before I pay you interest! And you just remember this, kid, next time you run short of funds and come running to the ol' cash register here."

"Milt's right, you know," Harper interjected mildly.

"Yeah, yeah," McCormick frowned, "but what if I lend him the money, and he jumps bail?"

Hardcastle grabbed him by the front of his shirt. "What the hell's wrong with you?" he shouted. "You know damned well I won't jump bail!"

McCormick shook his head doubtfully. "I don't know about that, Judge. I would never have thought you'd steal a car, either."

"I didn't steal a car!"

"Uh-huh, that's what they all say."

Hardcastle jerked him close, his nose only inches away from McCormick's as he yelled, "You get down to that damned bank and you get me that money, or you're gonna need a wheelchair for the next six months of your life!"

Pulling away from his grasp, McCormick straightened his shirt indignantly before replying, "Threats aren't gonna work, Judge. You ask me politely for the loan, and I'll give it to you--interest free."

"I'll rot in jail first!" Hardcastle roared.

"You Arkansas jackass!" McCormick shouted back. "You never ask me for anything; you're always ordering me around like some kind of slave! Hardcase yells 'jump'; I'm supposed to ask 'how high.' Every time The Lone Ranger gets his mask on cross-wise, Tonto's gotta come along and straighten it. Well, not this time, Kemosabe. If you can't ask me for the loan, from one friend to another, then you're not gonna get it!"

"He's right, you know," Harper interjected mildly.

"You stay outa this!" Hardcastle yelled. "That's his problem right now--I've spoiled him!"

"Spoiled me?" McCormick gave a short laugh. "That's not exactly what I call being chief cook and bottle washer, not to mention playing John Wayne's horse."

"You get paid for it!" Hardcastle shot back.

"An allowance!"

"Which, I might point out, is three times what I'd pay a caretaker as salary," Hardcastle returned with relish. "And you get it tax-free because I don't file a W-2 on ya."

"Money's not everything," McCormick grumbled.

"I agree," Hardcastle retorted. "If it was, I'd kick you out and get somebody in there at a third of the money who wouldn't always be messing up the gatehouse, raiding the refrigerator, and spilling soda pop all over the rug in the den."

"Okay, you made your point," McCormick conceded with what appeared to be great reluctance.

"Good," Hardcastle snorted. "Now, will you please go get that money?"

McCormick broke into a grin and slapped him on the shoulder. "For you, Judge, anything. Be back in a jiff."

Harper shook his head in wonder as he watched the young man leave. "If I live to be a hundred, I don't think I'll ever understand you two," he sighed.

Hardcastle shrugged. "What's to understand?"

Harper turned an accusing eye on the judge. "C'mon, now, you've gotta admit you were a little hard on Mark."

"Hard on him?" Hardcastle looked genuinely surprised. "Hey, the kid loves it."

"Aw, c'mon, Milt, he can't love it when you complain about everything he does," Harper pointed out, and sitting down, he propped his feet up on an officer's desk and threw Hardcastle a curious look. "Let me ask you something, Milt. If you could change Mark, what would you change?"

"His shoes!" Hardcastle answered without hesitation. "I'd make him throw those damned tennis shoes away and get some new ones. They're beginning to smell like King Tut's tomb."

Harper shook his head with a smile. "See what I mean? Here I am trying to play amateur psychologist, and you aren't helping any."

Hardcastle grinned. "That's because you're trying to put McCormick and me in a category, and those shrinks haven't invented one for us yet."

McCormick returned in minutes and still determined to get some answers, just to satisfy his own curiosity, Harper took the young man in his office to sign the papers for Hardcastle's release, and began to press. "You were a little hard on Milt a while ago, weren't you? I mean, this situation is embarrassing enough for him; you didn't make it any better."

"Are you kidding?" McCormick grinned. "Ol' Hardcase loved it. If I had acted any other way, he would've thought I was sick or something."

"Yeah, well, I guess it gets kinda rough on both sides," Harper decided thoughtfully. "Tell me something, Mark. You're always complaining about how Milt acts. If you could change anything about him, what would it be?"

McCormick's grin grew wider. "How many hours you got?"

"C'mon, Mark, I'm serious."

"Okay." McCormick's grin turned into a thoughtful frown. "If I could change the judge, I'd limit him to four days a week playing basketball at six-thirty in the morning."

Harper stared at him in surprise. "You're kidding!"

"No," McCormick replied fervently. "I mean, I can put up with him waking me up before the rooster crows, but he wants me out there playing with him. You ever tried to dribble a basketball while your whole body's screaming 'Sleep! Sleep!' and you're being slam dunked by a Sherman tank?"

Harper grinned. "No, can't say that I have."

"Well, let me tell you, it ain't easy," McCormick assured him.

Shaking his head in wonder, Harper started toward the door. "Milt was right," he mumbled. "You two defy a category."

McCormick stared at his back in surprise. "Huh?"

Three days later, Harper joined the two men by the pool-side, and removing his jacket, he loosened his tie and dropped into a lawn chair with a sigh. "Ah, this is the life. I haven't had a lunch break yet, so I think I'll take it now."

Hardcastle leaned forward. "Hey, Frank, you want something to eat? A sandwich? Some cookies?"

Harper shook his head while gazing longingly at the glass in Hardcastle's hand. "No, but I could sure use some of that lemonade, if it's not too much trouble."

McCormick was on his feet and heading for the house before Hardcastle could utter a word. "Damn kid," he muttered. "How come I can't get him to move that fast?"

Harper broke into a grin. "Mark been giving you a rough time these past few days?"

"Yeah, he's determined to get my goat," Hardcastle grumbled, then admitted ruefully, "but I guess the kid's entitled to it. I hated like hell to put him in prison for supposedly stealin' that car, and now that I've had my own little run-in with Melinda Marshall, I really regret it."

Somewhat surprised by the open admission, Harper asked, "Have you told Mark that?"

"Hell, no," Hardcastle snorted. "If he doesn't know it without my having to tell him, well...that's just tough on him."

McCormick came across the yard, carrying a large glass of lemonade. "What's tough on me?" he demanded, handing the beverage to Harper.

"I am!" Hardcastle yelled.

"Tell me something I don't know," McCormick retorted, dropping into his chair.

"What the hell're you sitting down for?" Hardcastle shot back. "These hedges have to be trimmed, and the vines cut away from those trees."

McCormick sipped his lemonade and shrugged. "I'm on a break."

"A break!" Hardcastle shouted. "You've been sitting there goofing off for over two hours!"

Cocking an eyebrow, McCormick grinned. "I wasn't here alone. I always try to emulate my very favorite judge in the whole world."

"Your favorite judge..." Snorting something unintelligible, Hardcastle dropped the subject and turned to Frank. "Well, have you got some good news for me?" he demanded.

Harper smiled. "As a matter of fact, I do. Wahl contacted us a short while ago, and cleared you of the auto theft charges."

"Great!"

"Oh, darn!"

The simultaneous, but different responses caused Harper to grin. "You know, Milt, you can file charges of false arrest against Miss Marshall, if you like," he suggested.

Shaking his head, Hardcastle sighed. "Nah, I don't wanna do that. Melinda didn't do it deliberately--she's just a little flaky."

"Like a box of Wheaties," McCormick added fervently.

"That's what I've been trying to get through your thick skull for the last six years."

"Yeah, yeah, okay, I'll admit the girl's got a coupla pistons missing," Hardcastle reluctantly agreed and threw McCormick an amused glance. "And I thought you were bad."

McCormick grinned smugly. "Makes you realize just how lucky you are to have me, doesn't it?"

"I wouldn't go that far," Hardcastle retorted.

Harper burst into laughter. "Well, neither of you will probably be surprised to learn that Miss Marshall won't be testifying in Miami."

Hardcastle blinked in surprise. "Why not? I though they had that case sewn up against Rubin."

"Well, it seems when they started questioning the young lady, she got things a little mixed up," Harper explained. "According to her, she was head of that company and these guys tried to take over, and... Well, the Feds decided they'd better not put her on the stand."

"Thank God!" McCormick exclaimed. "Melinda would've ended up having the entire state of California put under arrest." He glanced at Hardcastle and frowned. "Judge, you got that look," he accused.

Hardcastle glanced up innocently. "What look?"

"That look that says you've got something on that donkey brain of yours that I'm not gonna like," McCormick shot back.

"I was just thinking." Hardcastle chewed on his lower lip thoughtfully. "If Melinda's not testifying against Rubin, that means he's gonna get off scot free. Right, Frank?"

Harper nodded slowly. "Afraid so, Milt."

"No, huh-uh, no way, Judge." McCormick was shaking his head vigorously. "We're not going after Rubin, so just forget it."

"All right."

"We're not going to do it, and that's final," McCormick insisted.

"Okay."

"Judge, I mean it."

Harper blinked in surprise. "Mark, he's saying he's not going to do it," he pointed out.

"Yeah, but ol' Hardcase says one thing while that devious little brain of his is thinking something else," McCormick complained.

"I do not," Hardcastle protested mildly.

"You do, too!" McCormick shot back. "It's too bad Agent Wahl didn't get amnesia while he was on that special assignment. Then he couldn't have cleared you, and you would've gone to prison, and I would've gotten some peace and quiet, not to mention the opportunity to live until at least my 34th birthday."

"Aw, are you still griping about my not going to prison?" Hardcastle sighed. "Well, let me tell you something, McCormick-- no matter what Wahl did or didn't say, I wouldn't have gone to the slammer, anyway."

"Oh, yes, you would've!" McCormick returned hotly.

"No, no, no," Hardcastle disagreed mildly. "You see, kid, the case would've been thrown out of court because my rights were violated."

Harper suddenly straightened and took notice. "What the hell do you mean by that, Milt?"

"You didn't let me have my one phone call," Hardcastle explained.

Harper's eyes widened in surprise. "I didn't know you wanted one."

"I didn't," Hardcastle grinned, "but, nevertheless, you were supposed to inform me of my right to have one. If that violation had come up in court, and believe me, it would've, the case would've been thrown out."

"You knew that all along, and you didn't say a word," Harper accused.

"You're damned right." Hardcastle's grin grew wider. "That was my ace in the hole in case something happened to Wahl and he couldn't clear me."

"Damn, I don't believe it!" McCormick complained. "How come this judicial jackass gets all the breaks, and I didn't get any?"

Hardcastle leaned over and slapped McCormick's knee. "That's called clean living, kid. And speaking of living--" He rose to his feet.

McCormick looked up. "Uh-oh." He swallowed hard and standing, began to back away slowly. "Uh, Judge, I don't like that look, either."



"And for good reason," Hardcastle assured him. "You've been having a field day with this whole thing, haven't you, McCormick?"

"Uh, don't-don't take it personally, Judge," McCormick stammered. "I was just-just..."

"Getting your kicks at my expense!" Hardcastle shouted and took a step toward McCormick.

"Well, I think I'll leave you two alone now," Frank laughed and started to rise.

"No! Don't go!" McCormick yelled over Hardcastle's shoulder. "I'll, uh, I'll get you another glass of lemonade!"

"You stay right there!" Hardcastle ordered.

"Aw, c'mon, Judge. Be a good sport," McCormick pleaded.

"Oh, I am," Hardcastle growled. "I'm being a very good sport. I'm not beating the hell outa you, am I?" He took two steps toward the young man, and trying to stay out of his reach, McCormick started to take a like number of steps backwards. On the second one, however, he yelped in surprise as firm ground suddenly disappeared beneath his feet.

Jumping back to avoid getting soaked by the spray of water slapping the tiles, Hardcastle grinned at the dripping figure sputtering and coughing in the pool. "Don't worry, kid." He offered a hand. "That's just for starters."