CARPOOLING TO HELL

THE SHORTBUS ADDENDUM

The Seven Oligarchs of Injustice



Substantive Justice Through Public Accountability

Justin A. Tahai

THE NO "MOORE" HARM SERIES

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In re Substantively Substantial Cranio-Rectal Entrenchment

JUSTIN A. TAHAI

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The Shortbus Addendum

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A note to the reader

This work is political and legal satire. The named justices are real public officials; the bus ride, conversations, assignments, infernal holdings, and character reactions are fictional. Criticism of judicial institutions is not a claim that every named justice personally participated in any particular order, filing event, or alleged wrong.

Court orders and public sources are identified at the back. Documentary anchors are presented separately from satirical dialogue and invented mock opinions. The terms in-bred and in-cahouts describe fictional institutional habits, never biological ancestry or secret agreements. Adult language appears in the story.

“The seats belong to the people.”

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BEFORE DEPARTURE

The Board of Governors Arrives in Hell

The passenger manifest

IN THE COURT OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY

IN RE: THE SEVEN OLIGARCHS OF INJUSTICE

Original jurisdiction invoked by the people. Ceremonial reverence expressly waived. The public record remains admissible.

The infernal clerk called the matter for argument and read aloud the caption in its entirety, as required by a tribunal that still knew the difference between processing a document and considering it:

THE LIKELY IN-BRED, IN-CAHOUTS, IN-COMPREHENSIBLE IN-JUSTICES OF THE OLIGARCHY OF HARMING CHILDREN, RESPONDENTS IN SATIRE.

The Devil raised an eyebrow. "That is a rather substantial allegation."

"A substantially substantial allegation," corrected the Procedural Shoehorn, "which is why we have furnished substantially more than a ceremonial recital of it."

For avoidance of doubt—an ancient legal expression frequently employed just before doing precisely the opposite—the word *in-bred* described a closed ecosystem of professional habits, not the ancestry of any passenger. *In-cahouts* described the imaginary busload's fondness for mutually reinforcing procedural excuses, not a factual allegation of secret coordination. *In-comprehensible* referred to explanations delivered in

seventeen-foot sentences that somehow failed to answer a seven-word question. And *in-justices* was the legally operative designation assigned by the Devil's entirely fictional court.

"Then why describe them as an oligarchy of harming children?" asked the clerk.

"Because," said the Shoehorn, "the theme of this case is the foreseeable cost of institutional delay to children and families. The title is a satirist's accusation against the consequences of a system, not a judicial finding of malice by seven named individuals. A learned profession should be able to distinguish rhetoric from evidence without demanding an interlocutory appeal."

The Devil motioned for the complaint.

It was captioned *Petition for a Writ of Common Sense, or in the Alternative, an Extraordinary Shoe-Horning of the Record*. The pleading alleged a failure of ordinary professional gravity under the doctrine of *res ipsa bureaucratica*: the bureaucracy speaks for itself, usually in the passive voice and from an unmonitored mailbox.

The complaint named a Chief Injustice and six Associate Injustices. Each occupied a seat on the shortbus. Each would receive individual consideration; no one would be convicted by alphabetical proximity, participation in a committee, or the mere fact of appearing on the same organizational chart. The fictional court would be merciless about arguments and scrupulous about the difference between an allegation and a finding.

"I move to dismiss," said the Devil, testing the machinery, "for failure to plead professional embarrassment with particularity."

"Denied," replied the Shoehorn. "The petition contains a prima facie showing of vanity, a preserved record of procedural absurdity, and the uncontested fact that the parties are now waiting for an actual answer. Moreover, your motion was filed without a proposed order."

"That seems unnecessarily technical."

"So you recognize the problem. Excellent. The rehabilitative process is already working."

The Devil read the passenger manifest: **Valerie Stanfill; Andrew M. Mead; Catherine R. Connors; Rick E. Lawrence; Wayne R. Douglas; Julia M. Lipez; Christopher C. Taub.** Seven names, seven chapters, one extremely patient hero manufactured for the narrow purpose of dislodging the thing that an entire institution had found itself unable—or unwilling—to move: responsibility.

The governing standard was announced without a dissent: **When challenged, supply reasons; when mistaken, correct the error; when entrusted with public power, remember whose it is.**

On February 12, 2026, Chief Justice Valerie Stanfill delivered Maine's State of the Judiciary address.

She described the Supreme Judicial Court as exceptionally collegial and likened its members to a Board of Governors responsible for the operation of the Judicial Branch.

This seemed an excellent starting point for the Devil.

He had always admired an institution that could govern itself, evaluate itself, defend itself, and then express astonishment when members of the public questioned the resulting evaluation.

In Hell, such an arrangement was traditionally called an oligarchy.

In Augusta, apparently, it was called collegiality.

The Devil was not especially impressed by the distinction.

He had spent eternity studying human arrogance. He understood that the first symptom of an institution's decline was not necessarily corruption, stupidity, or malice.

It was the increasingly elaborate conviction that accountability was something intended for other people.

His latest assignment was therefore unusual.

Seven passengers. One short bus. Seven mandatory stops.

The destination was not physical punishment or eternal damnation, but a place the passengers apparently considered considerably worse:

PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY.

The bus arrived at 8:00 a.m.

Across its windshield:

CARPOOLING TO HELL — THE SHORTBUS ADDENDUM

A smaller sign announced:

Professional deference is not accepted as legal tender.

The driver stepped outside.

He carried the passenger manifest and one small instrument of extraordinary importance.

The **Procedural Shoehorn**.

It was not designed for violence.

It was designed to loosen intellectually immovable objects, including the spectacularly stubborn variety of institutional arrogance known medically, at least in Hell, as:

Substantively Substantial Cranio-Rectal Entrenchment.

The condition was especially prevalent among otherwise educated people who had spent so long treating their own conclusions as authoritative that they could no longer distinguish possessing a legal argument from winning one.

Its most advanced manifestations included:

A pathological aversion to admitting error.

The compulsive repetition of procedural excuses.

A reflexive invocation of professional dignity whenever substantive criticism became uncomfortable.

And an almost supernatural inability to recognize the difference between public service and personal importance.

The Devil inspected the Shoehorn.

“Are you qualified for this?”

“More than qualified,” it replied. “I'm purpose-built for removing things that have become unnecessarily wedged.”

“Excellent. The subjects are exceptionally entrenched.”

The bus doors opened.

The Chief Injustice was first to board.

Naturally.

ROUTE STOP ONE / SEVEN

Valerie Stanfill

ONE

The Chief Injustice and the Exalted Board of Governors

Chief Justice Valerie Stanfill stepped aboard with the solemn confidence of an individual whose professional title had acquired considerably more syllables than her accountability mechanism.

In this infernal fiction, she wore a magnificent black robe, carried a ceremonial gavel, and had brought along several copies of her State of the Judiciary address.

“Please be advised,” announced the Chief, “that the judicial branch is a coequal and independent branch of government.”

The Procedural Shoehorn nodded.

“An elementary constitutional proposition. Congratulations.”

The Chief frowned.

“That was not intended as a question.”

“Neither,” replied the Shoehorn, “was my acknowledgment intended as deference.”

The driver pulled away.

"Your presentation," said the Shoehorn, "described the Justices as a Board of Governors. An interesting corporate analogy. Shall we examine your performance as governors?"

"We have substantial responsibilities."

"Undoubtedly. The question is whether substantial responsibility has produced substantially adequate service."

The Chief straightened.

"Judicial resources are limited."

"So are the resources of the parents spending years attempting to obtain timely adjudication."

"We must manage complex caseloads."

"Parents must manage childhoods. Unlike caseloads, childhoods cannot be placed on the following year's calendar."

"The judicial branch requires adequate funding."

"Certainly. But appropriations are not a universal defense to administrative failure. An institution does not acquire immunity from criticism by demonstrating that it has expensive problems."

The Chief folded her hands.

"What, precisely, are you alleging?"

The Shoehorn smiled.

"At last. A request for specificity."

It produced three documents from its compartment.

The first concerned an appeal proceeding without a privately purchased transcript.

The second concerned electronic filing systems that had returned submissions over technical defects.

The third concerned a Law Court order dated June 23, 2026, authorizing future filings in a particular appeal to be docketed without presentation to the Court, subject to its stated exception.

“These are not findings of personal misconduct against you,” the Shoehorn explained. “They are questions concerning the performance of an institution over which you exercise substantial public leadership.”

The Chief examined them.

“I cannot personally adjudicate every dispute.”

“Correct. Nor can the head of a hospital personally treat every patient. Yet imagine a hospital administrator informing the public that the building's principal achievement was its extraordinarily collegial board while patients struggled to obtain access to their own records.”

“That's not a fair analogy.”

“Then distinguish it. Substantively.”

A dreadful pause followed.

The Chief turned toward the driver.

“Is this vehicle subject to judicial review?”

“Not until we've finished the route.”

The Shoehorn continued.

“Your professional biography includes work with a legal-aid clinic. Your public address recognizes access to justice, technology, staffing, and the difficulties experienced by people trying to use the courts. All commendable. But what good are those commitments if the institution cannot reliably translate them into practical access?”

The Chief's face hardened.

“Administrative reform takes time.”

"Then measure it. Publish the failures. Quantify rejected filings. Explain delayed hearings. Identify whether orders are being implemented. Audit the discrepancy between public promises and lived outcomes."

"That would be a considerable undertaking."

"So is keeping a parent away from ordinary family life while his appeals and implementation requests navigate overlapping procedures."

The Chief protested that the Court was not responsible for every aspect of the underlying family dispute.

"Agreed," replied the Shoehorn. "But the existence of jurisdictional boundaries does not exempt the branch from examining how its own procedures operate."

The first stop appeared.

THE GRAND CHAMBER OF INSTITUTIONAL SELF-CONGRATULATION

At its entrance stood a gold-plated plaque:

> *We have carefully reviewed our performance and find ourselves magnificent.*

The Chief smiled.

"Finally, an appropriate venue."

The doors opened.

Inside were no mirrors, no robes, no elevated bench, and no staff assigned to enforce ceremonial respect.

There was only a desk.

On it lay a report titled:

PUBLIC CONFIDENCE CANNOT BE COMPELLED BY COURT ORDER.

The Chief looked offended.

"That is a rather inflammatory proposition."

“Only,” replied the Shoehorn, “to someone who has mistaken obedience for admiration.”

The Devil appeared.

“Your assignment, Chief, is to reconcile the institution's promises with its actual performance.”

“How?”

“Through transparent public accounting.”

“Who will evaluate our explanations?”

The Chief then tendered a motion styled *Inherent Authority to Be Held in High Esteem*, supported by the proposition that high office itself should shift the burden of proof to anyone insufficiently impressed by its occupant.

The Shoehorn struck the motion—not for impertinence, which the infernal court encouraged, but for its failure to identify a cognizable cause of action. "A robe is evidence of an appointment," it wrote in the margin. "It is not self-authenticating proof of wisdom, kindness, administrative competence, or the right to be worshipped by the people who finance the building."

The Chief sought a protective order against the phrase *public accountability*. The Devil denied it after finding that criticism, unlike an ex parte compliment, did not become improper merely because it arrived without an invitation.

"You seem to forget," said the Shoehorn, "that a Board of Governors is a management metaphor. Boards that preside over persistent defects are supposed to investigate them, not issue congratulatory minutes and assert that the disappointed customers lack standing to be disappointed."

"But we cannot guarantee justice in every case."

"No. You can guarantee neither outcomes nor human perfection. You can, however, build processes that candidly identify what has been

received, what has been ruled upon, what remains unanswered, and how the lawful mechanisms of correction are supposed to function. That is not revolution. That is administration with its head removed from its own ceremonial vestments."

> **PROPOSED FINDING NO. 1: The grandeur of a judicial title is legally irrelevant to the accuracy of an answer, and institutional collegiality cannot substitute for publicly intelligible reasons.**

The Shoehorn delivered its first formal holding:

> **A judiciary may demand compliance with lawful orders. It may not demand that the public regard every exercise of its authority as wise, effective, or worthy of admiration. Institutional legitimacy is not established by the professional satisfaction of those occupying the institution.**

The Chief requested a continuance.

The Devil rejected it.

"Sorry, Valerie. The children have already waited long enough."

ROUTE STOP TWO / SEVEN

Andrew M. Mead

TWO

The Senior Associate Injustice and the Electronic Temple of Administrative Absurdity

Andrew M. Mead boarded with the unmistakable bearing of a man who had accumulated enough judicial experience to regard ordinary chronological time as an insufficient measure of professional seniority.

He had served on Maine courts for decades.

He had chaired the Task Force on Electronic Court Records.

He had participated in court technology work.

He had even chaired the Maine Justice Action Group.

In short, he possessed precisely the background that made the next stop especially entertaining.

“Welcome aboard, Justice Mead,” announced the Shoehorn.

“I understand this is some sort of inquiry.”

“Correct. Your specialized field is electronic court records.”

“Among other things.”

“Splendid. We have arranged a practical examination.”

The bus entered an industrial wasteland populated by enormous computer terminals.

At every terminal, a hopeful citizen attempted to submit a court document.

A green light announced:

SUBMISSION RECEIVED.

Moments later, a red light announced:

SUBMISSION REJECTED.

A third light blinked:

YOUR RIGHT TO PRESERVE THE ORIGINAL FILING DATE DEPENDS UPON SATISFYING A SEPARATE TECHNICAL PROCESS WITHIN A LIMITED PERIOD.

Mead studied the machinery.

"These rules serve important administrative purposes."

"Certainly. What happens when the machinery interferes with those purposes?"

"Defects must be cured."

"And when the assistance link is broken?"

"The user should contact support."

"And when the support mechanism is the defective link?"

The Associate paused.

"That would require troubleshooting."

"Excellent. A technological insight of genuinely historic importance."

A terminal flashed.

ERROR: AUTHORIZED SERVICE CONTACT NOT PROVIDED.

Mead approached it.

"Who is the service contact?"

"The litigant."

"Is the litigant registered?"

"Yes."

"Has the system generated service notices?"

"Yes."

"Has the filing nonetheless been returned?"

"Yes."

Mead looked perplexed.

"Perhaps the filing should be resubmitted."

"It already has been."

"With the appropriate designation?"

"The designation was corrected."

"With separate exhibits?"

"Yes."

"With a proposed order?"

"Yes."

"Then what is the problem?"

The Shoehorn gestured toward the enormous mountain of rejection notices behind them.

"**That is the question, Your Senior Injustice. You are the technology expert.**"

The bus stopped at the Maine Museum of Digitized Obstacles.

Inside were displays honoring the remarkable accomplishments of twenty-first-century bureaucracy.

One depicted a paper form converted into an electronic form without eliminating any of the paper form's inconveniences.

Another celebrated the electronic transmission of a rejection notice informing a litigant that the electronic system was unable to accept the electronic filing.

A third illustrated the technological advancement of requiring documents to be separately uploaded while retaining the historical tradition of rejecting the resulting packet for an omitted attachment.

Mead examined the exhibits.

“Complex systems require rules.”

“Of course,” replied the Shoehorn. “But a system that reliably produces rejections while unreliably producing access has accomplished something other than its advertised purpose.”

Mead invoked procedural safeguards.

The Shoehorn invoked engineering.

“Imagine an engineer designing a bridge that repeatedly refused passage to pedestrians because they had not selected the correct option on an electronic questionnaire.”

“Bridges are different.”

“Indeed. Engineers are expected to investigate persistent failure modes rather than merely admonish the pedestrians.”

Mead objected to the analogy.

The Shoehorn sustained the objection in part.

“You're right. A defective bridge can kill people quickly. A defective justice process may accomplish its harm more slowly, and thereby escape the urgency its consequences deserve.”

The Devil appeared beside an obsolete server rack.

“Justice Mead, do you know what we call a government system that cannot reliably perform its primary function?”

“A technical problem?”

"No. In Hell, we call it a government system."

Even the Shoehorn laughed.

Mead was escorted to the final examination room.

Its sign read:

THE ACCESS-TO-JUSTICE ACCEPTANCE TEST

The assignment was straightforward.

A member of the public would attempt to file a legally sufficient motion.

If the system rejected it, Mead would identify the actual defect, provide an intelligible correction path, and assess whether the system itself contributed to the problem.

He would then report the results publicly.

"Will I receive credit for participating?" he asked.

"No," said the Shoehorn.

"Why not?"

"Because administering a functioning court is the job, not an extracurricular achievement warranting a commemorative plaque."

The clerk then submitted an emergency motion for leave to recognize reality, together with a proposed order, separate attachments, a certificate of service, and a sacrificial PDF whose filename contained no forbidden punctuation. The portal rejected the packet because it had been uploaded on a day ending in *y*.

"This is preposterous," Mead said in the fictional hearing.

"Preserve that sentence," instructed the Shoehorn. "It is the first technically accurate error report issued by this department."

"A court must avoid duplicate filings," said the Associate.

"Then perhaps stop making correction, resubmission, reconsideration, service, and relation-back resemble a ceremonial maze constructed by a

committee that has never tried to file a motion while buying groceries, working a job, and raising a child. A system that requires an encyclopedia of error messages to submit a two-page request has produced a marvel of engineering—just not the one advertised."

The Shoehorn offered an alternative test: choose an ordinary person; give them an ordinary filing; observe what actually happens; distinguish user error from design failure; document each rejection; and permit the person responsible for the system to explain its utility without the phrase *user education* functioning as an all-purpose absolution.

"Is that a recognized test?" Mead asked.

"It is called *using the thing*. The technology profession discovered it some time ago."

> **PROPOSED FINDING NO. 2: A filing platform that needs repeated remedial motions to explain its own defects should not be permitted to style itself an access-to-justice initiative without proof of access.**

> **Holding: Judicial technological expertise shall be evaluated by the accessibility, reliability, and legal effectiveness of the systems it helps govern, rather than by the number of committees on which its possessor has served.**

Mead objected.

His objection was rejected.

The automated notice directed him to a broken help link.

ROUTE STOP THREE / SEVEN

Catherine R. Connors

The Associate Injustice and the Magnificent Doctrine of Institutional Self-Exoneration

Catherine R. Connors entered carrying an unusually heavy legal volume.

Its title read:

APPEARANCE OF IMPROPRIETY — A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO EXPLAINING WHY EVERYONE ELSE IS MISTAKEN

The Shoehorn regarded the book.

"An interesting selection."

Connors smiled.

"Judicial ethics are a serious matter."

"Extremely. Which makes your chapter particularly instructive."

The bus entered a hall lined with mirrors.

Each mirror depicted the same judicial officer from a different perspective.

One reflected the view of the bench.

Another the view of the litigants.

A third the view of the public.

A fourth showed a disciplinary panel.

The fifth reflected nothing but the words:

REASONABLE APPEARANCE OF IMPARTIALITY.

A real public proceeding supplied the scene's inspiration.

On February 26, 2026, a specially constituted judicial panel dismissed the disciplinary report concerning Connors. Three panel members concluded the claimed ethical violation had not been established. Two concurring panel members concluded a violation had occurred but did not warrant formal discipline. The report was dismissed.

The Shoehorn laid the opinion on a desk.

“One proceeding. Five jurists. Different reasoning. Same disposition.”

Connors regarded the document.

“The legal distinction is important.”

“Indeed. We will preserve it. We are not rewriting the panel's disposition. We are examining what the public can reasonably learn from the disagreement.”

“Judicial independence must be protected.”

“And judicial impartiality must be both practiced and capable of surviving informed public examination.”

“Allegations do not establish misconduct.”

“Correct. Nor does the absence of discipline eliminate the importance of ethical scrutiny. An ethical inquiry is not a personal insult merely because its subject holds judicial office.”

Connors folded her arms.

“One must apply the actual rule.”

“Of course. Which is why this chapter concerns Rule 2.11(A), informed public confidence, and the precise distinction between a proven ethical violation and a question that merits examination.”

The Devil entered wearing a powdered wig.

“Good morning. I've reviewed the decision.”

The Shoehorn raised an eyebrow.

“Your conclusion?”

“That even Hell cannot convert five different legal conclusions into a claim they all agreed on every point.”

Connors smiled.

“Precisely.”

“However,” the Devil continued, “I also find it exceptionally amusing that the judiciary required a specially constituted panel to settle the question of whether one of its own had adequately maintained the appearance of impartiality.”

“The process worked,” Connors replied.

“The process produced a reasoned, published decision,” said the Shoehorn. “That is a meaningful distinction from institutional silence. But the public remains entitled to discuss what the competing opinions reveal about the standards governing the judiciary.”

The Devil glanced at the mirrors.

“Quite. In my profession, we generally disclose conflicts of interest before collecting souls.”

Connors looked appalled.

“That is an outrageous comparison.”

“Naturally,” said the Devil. “I'm attempting to maintain a professional standard.”

The Shoehorn examined the panel's reasoning.

It did not attempt to convert a dismissed disciplinary matter into a finding of guilt.

Instead, it asked the question that made the entire room uncomfortable:

"What would happen if every judicial officer treated scrutiny of apparent impartiality as a professional obligation to be explained rather than an indignity to be resented?"

Connors considered the question.

The Shoehorn proceeded.

"**A judicial robe does not cure the appearance of impropriety through the sheer magnificence of its fabric. Nor does public criticism become legally incompetent merely because the subject of that criticism possesses an unusually impressive r□sum□.**"

The mirrors shifted.

Now they showed ordinary litigants attempting to understand whether a dispute would be decided by an impartial tribunal.

No one demanded a guaranteed outcome.

No one demanded that the judge agree with them.

They demanded a process worthy of public confidence.

Connors looked toward the exit.

"Am I free to leave?"

"Of course," replied the Shoehorn. "The entire premise of this exercise is accountability, not captivity."

She hesitated.

"And what is my assignment?"

"Explain the governing standard to the public, accurately present the competing reasoning, and defend the principles of impartial adjudication without suggesting that professional status makes the question beneath consideration."

The Devil nodded.

"That sounds reasonable."

“It is,” replied the Shoehorn.

“Then why does everyone hate it?”

“Because the standard applies to the people administering the standard.”

The Shoehorn then entered an order distinguishing three propositions that institutions too often collapsed into one sentence: an allegation had been made; the allegation had been adjudicated; and the public was free to examine what the adjudication actually said. None of these propositions implied that the others could be silently rewritten.

"The published proceeding was dismissed," Connors observed.

"Indeed," replied the Shoehorn. "A dismissal is a disposition. It is not a universal solvent that dissolves the different reasoning in the published opinions, and it is not a license for a satirist to reverse the disposition by rhetorical force. We preserve the legal outcome precisely because the words *accurate record* should mean something when lawyers say them."

The Devil, who had no patience for selective quotation, ordered the entire panel's reasoning placed on the reading table. A brass sign announced: *READ THE MAJORITY. READ THE CONCURRENCE. THEN FORM AN OPINION.*

"What is the standard of review?" asked Connors.

"De novo with respect to self-congratulation," said the Shoehorn, "and with the greatest possible care when anyone purports to convert public criticism into proven misconduct. The law cannot survive if even the critics of its failures start inventing facts."

PROPOSED FINDING NO. 3: An institution earns confidence through fair reasons and an accurate record, not by elevating ceremonial sensitivity to a standard of review.

> **Holding: Public confidence in judicial impartiality is not a discretionary courtesy to be extended by the judiciary. It is a legitimate object of informed examination, bounded by the evidence and the law.**

Connors departed.

The mirrors remained.

The Shoehorn left one final inscription:

THE APPEARANCE OF JUSTICE IS NOT ITS SUBSTITUTE. NEITHER IS THE APPEARANCE OF ACCOUNTABILITY.

ROUTE STOP FOUR / SEVEN

Rick E. Lawrence

FOUR

The Associate Injustice of Parental Rights, Responsibilities, and Other Decorative Legal Concepts

Rick E. Lawrence boarded carrying the burden of an exceptionally inconvenient professional history.

Among his actual judicial assignments had been service on Maine's Access and Visitation Committee and leadership of a committee developing recommendations for the guardian ad litem program.

The Shoehorn examined his résumé.

"Well, well. Someone who ought to understand the distinction between parental rights and parental access."

Lawrence regarded the Shoehorn cautiously.

"And your point?"

"Let us conduct an elementary examination."

The bus arrived before a magnificent courthouse.

On its doors were engraved the words:

THE BEST INTERESTS OF THE CHILD

Inside was a corridor containing hundreds of parenting orders.

Every order was beautifully written.

Every order described rights.

Every order identified responsibilities.

Some granted shared parental rights. Others prescribed electronic contact, in-person visitation, or therapeutic arrangements.

The Shoehorn opened one.

“Suppose an order provides that a parent shall have a right and opportunity for contact.”

“Yes?”

“And the practical arrangements necessary to exercise that right remain disputed.”

“Those issues may require clarification or enforcement.”

“Excellent. Now suppose clarification is repeatedly sought, and the months continue passing.”

Lawrence frowned.

“The procedural posture would matter.”

“Of course. It always matters. But might the child's actual experience matter as well?”

“Certainly.”

“Then why,” demanded the Shoehorn, “does the legal profession so frequently conduct its debates as though a child were a stationary exhibit that could be preserved indefinitely while adults resolved matters of administrative convenience?”

The bus stopped.

A wooden sign stood outside:

THE GUARDIAN AD LITEM MEMORIAL PARK

Independent Investigation Encouraged. Actual Availability Subject to Further Order.

Lawrence examined the sign.

“I have considerable experience with these matters.”

“Which,” replied the Shoehorn, “is precisely why you cannot plead the innocent ignorance of a newcomer.”

The Devil approached with a child's calendar.

“Justice Lawrence, may I ask a question?”

“Certainly.”

“How does one restore a missed birthday?”

“One cannot literally restore the date.”

“A missed holiday?”

“Likewise.”

“An entire school year?”

“No.”

“A child's lost opportunity to develop an ordinary, secure relationship with a parent?”

Lawrence hesitated.

“That is complicated.”

“Yes,” said the Devil. “I find that human beings employ that word whenever the moral consequences of their administrative choices become unpleasant.”

The Shoehorn stepped forward.

“Complexity does not eliminate the duty of careful adjudication. Nor does the difficulty of enforcement excuse a refusal to consider whether additional directions are necessary.”

A screen illuminated.

It displayed a fictional order granting a parent regular contact.

Below it appeared the implementation record:

Contact requested.

Scheduling disputed.

Clarification requested.

Time elapsed.

Further clarification requested.

Additional time elapsed.

Child's preferences invoked.

Adult responsibilities unresolved.

Lawrence regarded the screen.

"The child's wishes must be considered."

"Certainly," said the Shoehorn. "A teenager is a human being, not a parcel to be shipped between households. But the child's genuine wishes and welfare should not become an excuse for adults to abdicate responsibilities assigned to them by lawful orders."

The Devil agreed.

"Even my demons have to schedule their own appointments."

The Shoehorn continued.

"A child should never be compelled to carry the full administrative, emotional, and adversarial burden of adult litigation. That is why the law employs parents, guardians, counselors, and courts in the first place."

Lawrence appeared troubled.

"Surely nobody suggests the system is perfect."

"Perfection is not the standard. **Reasonable competence, lawful decision-making, meaningful process, and an honest assessment of foreseeable consequences would be an excellent beginning.**"

The Devil produced a commemorative award.

FOR DISTINGUISHED SERVICE TO THE CONCEPT OF ACCESS WITHOUT THE INCONVENIENCE OF IMPLEMENTATION

Lawrence refused it.

“An offensive caricature.”

“Then reject the caricature,” replied the Shoehorn, “by defending practices that produce something better.”

At the fourth stop, Lawrence was assigned to the Office of Practical Parental Rights.

Its mission was neither to favor mothers nor fathers, neither to presume abuse nor dismiss it, but to ensure that child-related disputes received careful, timely consideration supported by the law and evidence.

The clerk requested leave to file a supplemental pleading *nunc pro tunc*—retroactively restoring every birthday, holiday, missed call, and ordinary afternoon a child had already lived without a parent.

"Denied as beyond the jurisdiction of time itself," ruled the Devil. "No tribunal can order the calendar to return what it has consumed."

Lawrence objected that judges must balance safety and welfare, and not every request for contact could be granted.

"Sustained," said the Shoehorn. "Safety matters, evidence matters, the child's voice matters, and law matters. But the best-interests standard is a legal obligation to weigh them—not a decorative Latin flourish to be embroidered on the bench while adults argue about who will make the telephone call."

"What would satisfy you?"

"An order that is clear enough to follow, a process for addressing genuine disputes, and a court prepared to examine whether the stated rules are being implemented. You are not charged with guaranteeing parental affection. You are charged with taking the law seriously enough to tell the difference between an enforceable obligation and an aspirational greeting card."

PROPOSED FINDING NO. 4: The best interests of children are not advanced by relegating the mechanism of contact to an indefinite negotiation that the child must somehow administer.

The Shoehorn delivered its ruling.

> **The best interests of a child are not satisfied by repeating the phrase 'best interests of the child' with increasing solemnity. The governing standard requires its actual application to the circumstances presented.**

Lawrence requested a written explanation.

The Shoehorn supplied one immediately.

He appeared surprised.

“See?” said the Devil. “It can be done.”

ROUTE STOP FIVE / SEVEN

Wayne R. Douglas

FIVE

The Associate Injustice and the Grand Calendar of Convenient Irreversibility

Wayne R. Douglas boarded with an air of professional familiarity.

His actual judicial experience included serving as a regional scheduling judge for York County courts, presiding over treatment and mental-health dockets, and participating in Maine's Family Law Advisory Commission.

The Shoehorn inspected his credentials.

“Justice Douglas, you appear exceptionally well qualified to discuss scheduling.”

Douglas nodded.

“Calendaring is a complex administrative responsibility.”

“Splendid. Then we should examine a particular scheduling problem.”

The bus approached an enormous clock tower.

Its face displayed no hours.

Only children's ages.

A child turned ten.

Then eleven.

Then twelve.

Every time the hands advanced, an enormous voice announced:

THE MATTER REMAINS PENDING.

The Shoehorn turned toward Douglas.

“Tell me, Justice, what is the statute of limitations on childhood?”

“There isn't one in that sense.”

“Correct. Childhood expires naturally, regardless of whether a judge has finished considering a motion.”

Douglas examined the clock.

“Courts have competing demands.”

“And families have competing obligations. Yet one side of that equation seems repeatedly expected to endure hardship without the institutional privilege of excusing itself.”

The clock accelerated.

A parent submitted a request.

The request awaited processing.

The parent followed up.

A hearing had not been scheduled.

More paperwork arrived.

Another month passed.

The court's calendar remained intact.

The child's calendar did not.

Douglas frowned.

“Delay alone does not establish judicial error.”

“Absolutely correct,” replied the Shoehorn. “Neither does a complicated docket establish that every delay is harmless. The lawful and factual circumstances must be examined.”

The Devil emerged from the clock tower.

"Justice Douglas, I have been reviewing the local definition of urgency."

"And?"

"It appears to depend substantially upon whose schedule is inconvenienced."

Douglas objected.

"That is an unfair generalization."

"Quite possibly," said the Devil. "But your fictional assignment is to demonstrate why it should remain one."

The Shoehorn unfolded a massive scheduling chart.

At its top:

JUSTICE DELAYED IS SOMETIMES JUSTICE DENIED

Below it:

> *Unless the delay can be characterized as ordinary administrative processing, in which case the immediate consequences may be deferred for further examination.*

Douglas rubbed his forehead.

"That's not a legal standard."

"Exactly. Yet it is an excellent caricature of what happens when institutional calendars become more important than the interests those calendars exist to protect."

The Shoehorn continued.

"The issue is not whether judges should abandon due process to accelerate proceedings. The issue is whether they recognize that procedural delay can itself alter the practical stakes. When a case affects a developing child, time is not merely a scheduling consideration. It may be an essential component of the remedy."

The Devil produced a box.

Inside were hundreds of expired calendar pages.

“What are these?”

“Lost opportunities,” said the Devil.

“Can they be restored?”

“No.”

“Can a later judgment compensate for every lost moment?”

“Not necessarily.”

“Then perhaps,” the Shoehorn interrupted, “we ought not speak of delay as though it were a professionally harmless byproduct of courthouse operations.”

Douglas sat down.

For the first time, he looked genuinely exhausted.

The Shoehorn made its final submission.

“**An institution that cannot reliably distinguish urgent, perishable interests from routine administrative business risks becoming a monument to the passage of time rather than an instrument for doing justice within it.**”

The clerk offered Douglas a hypothetical. Two petitions had been received the same morning. One concerned replacement upholstery for the judicial conference room. The other concerned whether an expiring parental opportunity could be preserved pending a hearing.

"Which should be prioritized?" asked the clerk.

"That depends upon lawful standards and the facts," replied Douglas.

"Correct," said the Shoehorn. "Now explain why the same institution that can promptly determine when a ceremonial event shall be held sometimes seems incapable of furnishing an intelligible timetable when the matter at

issue is whether a child's next birthday will pass before anyone even hears the motion."

The Devil produced the *Doctrine of Administrative Thermodynamics*: institutional delay tends to increase unless external accountability applies force. It was not precedent, he admitted. It was just an observation made while watching the queue.

Douglas requested the relevant authority.

The Shoehorn supplied the only authority that could not be rescheduled: a calendar with pages already torn away.

"An appellate court may defer to some findings," it said, "but no court possesses equitable power to add a month back to a child's life. Nor may the words *ordinary course* operate as a force majeure clause against time."

> **PROPOSED FINDING NO. 5: An order issued after the relevant opportunity has passed may still be lawful, but the inability to restore that opportunity must be taken seriously rather than celebrated as successful docket control.**

The fifth stop appeared:

THE DEPARTMENT OF HEARINGS THAT STILL MATTER

Douglas received his assignment.

He would develop a scheduling process that considered the practical consequences of delay, respected procedural safeguards, identified genuine urgency, and recorded the reasons for decisions affecting perishable interests.

“That sounds like difficult work.”

“Of course,” said the Shoehorn.

“Why?”

"Because justice is work. Not a title."

The Devil offered him a commemorative calendar.

Every page was marked:

TODAY MATTERS.

Douglas accepted it without comment.

ROUTE STOP SIX / SEVEN

Julia M. Lipez

SIX

The Associate Injustice, Appellate Magnificence, and the $1,515.90 Admission Fee

Julia M. Lipez boarded carrying a formidable appellate résumé.

Before joining Maine's Supreme Judicial Court, she served as an Assistant United States Attorney and later Appellate Chief in the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Maine.

She had also served on Maine's eCourts Organizational Change Management Committee.

The Shoehorn was delighted.

"An appellate specialist with electronic-court experience. At last, someone uniquely positioned to appreciate the absurdity of an appeal without accessible evidence."

Lipez raised an eyebrow.

"I assume you have a particular issue in mind."

"Several. But let us begin with three hundred twenty-six minutes."

The bus stopped outside an enormous appellate courthouse.

Its entrance contained a single turnstile.

Above it:

MEANINGFUL REVIEW

Below:

PAY FIRST

A fictional clerk approached.

“One transcript, please,” said the Shoehorn.

“One thousand five hundred fifteen dollars and ninety cents.”

“Is that the cost of the appeal?”

“No. Just the estimated transcription deposit.”

“And if the litigant cannot pay?”

“The appeal may proceed without a transcript.”

The Shoehorn turned to Lipez.

“Isn't that magnificent? We have achieved the remarkable procedural innovation of requiring litigants to demonstrate errors from a record they may be unable to afford.”

Lipez considered the problem.

“An appellate record must be assembled according to governing rules.”

“Precisely. So the proper questions include what record alternatives are available, what standards govern assistance, and whether the proceeding remains meaningfully reviewable.”

The clerk interrupted.

“Your request for an alternative has also been denied.”

“On what grounds?”

“Please refer to the order.”

“Which order?”

“The one you are attempting to challenge.”

The Devil appeared behind the counter.

"This is outstanding," he said. "It is like charging a condemned soul for a copy of the indictment and then telling him he should have preserved his objections more carefully."

Lipez looked irritated.

"That is not an accurate statement of appellate law."

"Correct," replied the Shoehorn. "It is satire. Your task is to explain why the real-world procedures sufficiently protect meaningful review."

The bus continued.

Outside, electronic filing stations stretched into the distance.

Every machine displayed:

YOUR FILING HAS BEEN RECEIVED.

Beside it:

YOUR FILING HAS BEEN REJECTED.

A third announced:

THE DOCUMENT WAS FILED BUT WILL NOT NECESSARILY BE PRESENTED FOR ACTION.

The Shoehorn displayed the documented June 23, 2026 Law Court order in *Yor-26-118*.

The order denied relief requested to that date and authorized the clerk to docket future submissions without presenting them for consideration, except for the stated reconsideration category.

The order was institutional action; the fictional scene made no claim that Lipez personally wrote it.

"Justice Lipez," said the Shoehorn, "there is a distinction between preventing abusive motion practice and creating the appearance that a litigant may continue depositing documents into a process that no longer permits their presentation."

Lipez responded carefully.

“Courts may lawfully regulate repetitive filings.”

“Of course. But what remedy remains for a materially new issue, an unresolved implementation problem, or an error that arises outside the scope of an existing appeal? The answer depends on jurisdiction and procedure. The public deserves an intelligible explanation rather than a ritual incantation of finality.”

The Devil inspected another automated notice.

“I have a question.”

“Yes?” said Lipez.

“Why do lawyers use the word *meaningful* so often when discussing procedures whose meaning ordinary people are expected to discover through expensive litigation?”

The Shoehorn laughed.

“An excellent question. Perhaps it should be certified.”

Lipez then requested leave to argue in the alternative. If no transcript could be procured, perhaps another lawful form of record might suffice. If no alternative was available, perhaps the court could identify the precise legal consequence before assigning the litigant the impossible task of disproving a finding from memory.

"You are attempting to amend the question," said the fictional clerk.

"Good," replied the Shoehorn. "She is beginning to understand appellate practice. An intelligent appeal asks what the controlling rules actually permit, not what the bureaucracy's most pessimistic email happened to imply."

The Devil examined the invoice. "A hearing can last five hours. A bill can arrive in ten minutes. A father's right to challenge an error can then be described as fully preserved while the machinery required to present that error remains beyond his means."

"That does not establish an automatic entitlement to public funding," Lipez replied.

"Sustained. Neither does the absence of an automatic entitlement answer whether the legally authorized alternatives have been considered, or whether the record is adequate for the questions the court must decide. One does not dispose of a constitutional concern by triumphantly defeating a remedy that nobody claimed was automatic."

The Shoehorn drew a distinction between a *record of proceedings* and a *record of reasons*: the former allowed a reviewing body to examine what occurred; the latter explained how the reviewing body exercised its lawful authority. A system confident in both should not be mortally offended when a litigant requests them.

> **PROPOSED FINDING NO. 6: An appeal must not be represented as meaningfully reviewable merely because the docket continues to exist after the usable record has become inaccessible. The applicable rules, available alternatives, and the scope of review must be addressed as they actually are.**

The sixth stop appeared.

THE APPELLATE RECORD RECONSTRUCTION FACILITY

Lipez was assigned to examine whether appellate and electronic-filing systems provided intelligible, accessible paths for litigants to preserve and present issues under applicable law.

The Shoehorn delivered its holding.

> **"The right to seek appellate review is not made meaningful merely by the continued existence of a courthouse, a docket number, and a procedural mechanism that the litigant cannot effectively use. Practical accessibility must be evaluated under the governing legal standards, not inferred from the system's own assurances."**

Lipez requested a transcript of the proceeding.

The Devil handed her an invoice.

$1,515.90.

She stared at it.

The Shoehorn smiled.

"Now perhaps we can discuss alternatives."

ROUTE STOP SEVEN / SEVEN

Christopher C. Taub

The Newest Associate Injustice and the Inheritance of Institutional Magnificence

Christopher C. Taub arrived last.

Not because he was late.

Because he was new.

Having spent years in Maine's Attorney General's Office, including service as Chief Deputy Attorney General, Taub joined the Supreme Judicial Court on April 6, 2026.

The Shoehorn examined his résumé.

“Welcome, Justice Taub.”

“Thank you.”

“You're the newest member of this distinguished institution.”

“Yes.”

“Excellent. Then you have the opportunity to evaluate its inherited practices without claiming authorship of every historical decision.”

Taub looked relieved.

“That seems fair.”

"Unfortunately," replied the Shoehorn, "it does not exempt you from responsibility for what happens after you join."

The bus entered a magnificent building marked:

THE OFFICE OF INHERITED PROCEDURAL DEFECTS

Inside stood a gigantic machine.

Its gears were labeled:

Judicial Deference.

Administrative Finality.

Procedural Compliance.

Institutional Reputation.

Professional Courtesy.

And, buried beneath an enormous steel housing:

Public Accountability.

Taub examined the mechanism.

"It appears to require maintenance."

"An excellent observation."

"Who designed it?"

"Your predecessors."

"Who operates it?"

"Your institution."

"Who is responsible for fixing it?"

A silence descended.

Taub turned toward the driver.

"Presumably the appropriate administrative authorities."

The Shoehorn made a sound resembling a hydraulic failure.

"There it is. The sacred doctrine of institutional responsibility diffusion. Everybody possesses authority. Nobody possesses ownership of the problem."

Taub objected.

"That is an unfair characterization of a complex organization."

"Then consider a more precise formulation: within any complex organization, responsibility must be allocated according to actual authority. The fact that no single officer controls everything does not justify treating systemic failures as ownerless."

The Devil emerged carrying a folder.

"Justice Taub, you come from government litigation."

"Yes."

"Then you are familiar with the distinction between defending an institution's lawful position and defending every practice simply because the institution happens to engage in it."

Taub nodded.

"Certainly."

"Splendid. Because the second is a regrettably common form of professional cranio-rectal entrenchment."

The Shoehorn opened the final compartment of its case.

Inside was the original passenger manifest.

Seven names.

Seven public offices.

Seven sets of institutional responsibilities.

Taub studied them.

"I was not on the Court when some of these events occurred."

"Correct," said the Shoehorn. "And this satire does not assign you retroactive responsibility for them."

"Then why am I here?"

"Because public responsibility does not end with identifying who created a defect. It includes deciding what to do after learning that the defect may exist."

Taub looked at the enormous machine.

"What would you have us do?"

The Shoehorn responded.

"Investigate credible problems. Examine the evidence. Distinguish legitimate adverse rulings from administrative failures. Apply the governing law. Explain the decisions. Correct what can lawfully be corrected. And stop treating the public's demand for competent administration as a personal affront."

The Devil nodded approvingly.

"How extraordinarily radical."

Taub examined the machine again.

"This will require cooperation."

"Yes."

"Resources."

"Probably."

"Policy decisions."

"Certainly."

"And institutional willingness to acknowledge problems."

The newest Associate produced a memorandum of inherited responsibility. It argued that no justice could fairly be held personally

liable for administrative problems arising before that justice joined the bench.

"Quite right," said the Shoehorn. "We strike any suggestion of retroactive personal guilt. But we deny the related motion to treat inherited practices as permanently exempt from reconsideration."

"Is that not joint and several liability?" Taub asked.

"No. It is the considerably less exotic proposition that an officeholder's present duties do not disappear because an institutional defect may be older than the officeholder's appointment. Historical responsibility and present capacity to improve a process are different issues. Please do not merge them simply because both are inconvenient."

The Devil offered an amicus brief from the future. Its entire argument was one sentence long: *If everybody agrees the machine is broken, the next duty is to decide who fixes it.*

"Does the brief cite authority?" Taub asked.

"Only common sense," said the Shoehorn. "A perilous but occasionally permissible source."

> **PROPOSED FINDING NO. 7: An official who did not create a problem need not confess to creating it; an official empowered to help remedy a known problem should at least be prepared to explain the lawful limits of that authority.**

The Shoehorn leaned forward.

"Now you understand why we brought the bus."

The final stop appeared.

THE RESTORATION OF PUBLIC TRUST

Taub stepped down.

His assignment was not to answer for every prior decision but to exercise his present authority with independence, candor, and an unwillingness to confuse inherited practice with demonstrated wisdom.

He looked back toward the bus.

"What happens if the institution resists reform?"

The Shoehorn smiled.

"Then the people will continue asking questions."

"And if we disagree with them?"

"Then explain why."

"And if they disagree with our explanations?"

"Welcome to public service."

FINAL STOP

The Seven Return to the Bench

The last appeal is to the public

The Devil summoned all seven passengers for a final proceeding.

Stanfill.

Mead.

Connors.

Lawrence.

Douglas.

Lipez.

Taub.

They assembled in a courtroom stripped of every unnecessary ornament of professional self-importance.

No elevated bench.

No private entrance.

No special seating.

No automatic presumption that criticism was contemptuous.

The Devil addressed them.

“You have all been accused, in this work of fiction, of suffering from a dreadful condition.”

The Chief frowned.

"Substantively Substantial Cranio-Rectal Entrenchment?"

"Precisely."

"That is not a recognized medical diagnosis."

"Nor," replied the Shoehorn, "is institutional infallibility a recognized constitutional doctrine."

The Devil continued.

"This proceeding has not established that each member of this Court personally caused every problem identified. It has not manufactured findings of individual misconduct. It has examined something more fundamental."

He pointed toward the seven chairs.

"The responsibilities of public authority."

The Chief stood.

"We are independent judicial officers."

"Yes."

Mead stood.

"We must administer rules."

"Yes."

Connors stood.

"We must preserve impartiality."

"Yes."

Lawrence stood.

"We must protect children's welfare."

"Yes."

Douglas stood.

"We must manage judicial proceedings."

"Yes."

Lipez stood.

"We must apply the governing standards of appellate review."

"Yes."

Taub stood.

"We must exercise independent judgment."

The Devil smiled.

"**Then what the hell is everyone arguing about?**"

The Shoehorn climbed onto the center table.

Its final argument required no profanity.

No threats.

No spectacular rhetorical flourishes.

Just the elementary proposition around which the entire bus ride had been organized.

"Public authority exists for public purposes. Judicial independence protects lawful and impartial decision-making. It does not transform institutional practices into sacred objects immune from criticism, examination, or reform.

"The people are not required to believe that every ruling is correct.

"They are not required to believe that every administrative practice is reasonable.

"They are not required to treat years of procedural activity as proof that substantive justice has been accomplished.

"And they are not required to applaud a public institution merely because the institution has announced that its own performance is satisfactory."

The Chief looked toward her colleagues.

The Associates looked toward the Chief.

For once, there was no immediate chorus of agreement.

The Devil announced that the matter had reached the stage traditionally reserved for conclusion of law, a procedure in which the tribunal would attempt, against formidable odds, to make the conclusions follow from the facts.

"Before judgment," said the Shoehorn, "the Court should address the defense of *That's How We Have Always Done It*."

The seven passengers stirred. This was evidently their favorite precedent.

"The defense fails," continued the Shoehorn, "because custom is not a statute, repetition is not proof, and institutional age does not transform inconvenience into constitutional necessity. It also fails under the elementary doctrine of *contra pompam*: where the public purpose and the ceremonial self-image of a public office are in conflict, the ceremony must yield."

"Is *contra pompam* genuine Latin?" asked the Chief.

"It is genuine enough for a fictional tribunal and considerably more intelligible than some actual opinions. The principle is straightforward. An institution may protect lawful adjudication. It may not elevate its own comfort above the people it was created to serve."

The Shoehorn submitted the final question presented: *Whether a government may satisfy its responsibility to children by producing an ever-increasing quantity of records documenting why no timely remedy has yet been provided.*

The Devil answered in the only language the parties appeared willing to recognize.

HELD: NO.

The Devil opened the final judgment.

IN RE: THE OLIGARCHY OF INJUSTICE

2026 HELL 7

The Court of Infernal Public Accountability, having considered the record, the applicable principles of public service, and the extraordinary quantity of professional self-importance presented, enters the following declaration:

First. Judicial independence shall not be confused with institutional immunity from public examination.

Second. Procedural regularity shall not be mistaken for substantive justice without examination of its practical effect.

Third. The dignity of judicial office derives from faithful performance of public duties, not compulsory public admiration.

Fourth. A reasoned adverse decision is not inherently unjust. But neither is an institutional decision inherently wise merely because it was issued under judicial authority.

Fifth. The passage of time shall not be treated as a harmless administrative abstraction when the interests at stake are irrecoverable.

Sixth. Public accountability shall not require proof of personal malice before the public may legitimately demand improvement of failing institutions.

Seventh. The people shall remain entitled to question, criticize, investigate, publish, advocate, and pursue lawful reform of the institutions established to serve them.

The Devil closed the judgment.

“Any objections?”

The Chief looked around.

Mead checked the electronic docket.

Connors considered the applicable standards of impartiality.

Lawrence examined the child-welfare implications.

Douglas checked the calendar.

Lipez reviewed the record.

Taub studied the requested relief.

For once, nobody could reasonably claim that the questions had not been presented.

The Shoehorn made its final observation.

"**A learned profession that refuses to learn has retained the title while abandoning the obligation.**"

The Devil nodded.

"Case closed?"

The Shoehorn shook its head.

"Absolutely not."

"Why?"

"Because substantive justice isn't accomplished by writing a satisfying conclusion."

It pointed toward the courthouse doors.

"It's accomplished by doing the work."

The driver returned to the bus.

On the windshield, the destination changed for the last time.

SUBSTANTIVE JUSTICE

THROUGH PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY

NO MORE PROCEDURAL EXCUSES.

NO MORE INSTITUTIONAL IMPUNITY.

THE SEATS BELONG TO THE PEOPLE.

The Shoehorn settled into the passenger seat.

"Do you think they'll appreciate the constructive criticism?"

The driver laughed.

"Not a fucking chance."

"Do you think they'll finally correct the problems?"

"That's up to them."

"And if they don't?"

The driver started the engine.

"Then we'll keep the record."

The Devil watched the short bus disappear over the horizon.

For the first time in several thousand years, he felt something approaching professional embarrassment.

Not because seven judicial officers had been criticized.

But because the most radical demand presented to them had been that public institutions should actually serve the public.

He shook his head.

"God help us," he muttered.

Then he considered the evidence, the ceremonies, the endless procedures, and the increasingly impressive technology for making ordinary people navigate extraordinary obstacles.

"On second thought," he added, "maybe send an engineer."

THE END

The Procedural Shoehorn will return.

Stop harming kids. Especially mine.

AFTER THE FINAL STOP

Author's Source Note

Fiction, public records and attribution

This is fictional, deliberately provocative political and legal satire. Dialogue, infernal proceedings, and character reactions are invented. The justices' identities and professional histories are publicly documented. The Connors disciplinary matter was dismissed, with differing panel reasoning. The project chronology documents the cited Law Court order and procedural disputes; it does not establish that every named justice participated in any particular decision or personally engaged in misconduct.

Terms such as *in-bred*, *in-cahouts*, *in-comprehensible*, *in-justices*, and *oligarchy of harming children* are used as fictional literary and institutional criticism, not as assertions about anyone's family ancestry, personal medical circumstances, secret collusion, or proven intent to harm children. Judicial acts, appointments, public opinions, and recorded filing events should be independently evaluated from their primary sources.

DOCUMENTARY ANCHORS

Source Register

Public materials and the case record behind the satire

01 — The judicial roster and official biographies

Maine Judicial Branch, “Supreme Court Justices.” Names and professional biographies of the Chief Justice and six Associate Justices.

https://www.courts.maine.gov/courts/sjc/justices.html

02 — The Chief Justice’s State of the Judiciary

Maine Judicial Branch, “The State of the Judiciary,” presented by Chief Justice Valerie Stanfill on February 12, 2026. Source for the Board-of-Governors framing and stated administrative priorities.

https://www.courts.maine.gov/courts/sjc/soj/2026-soj.pdf

03 — The Connors disciplinary proceeding

In re Catherine R. Connors, 2026 ME 21 (Feb. 26, 2026), Jud-24-3. The specially constituted panel dismissed the report. The majority and concurring panel members gave different reasons; two concurred in dismissal while concluding a rule violation had occurred without warranting formal discipline.

https://www.courts.maine.gov/courts/sjc/lawcourt/2026/26me021.pdf

04 — Supreme Judicial Court’s institutional role

Maine Judicial Branch, “Supreme Judicial Court.” The Court hears appeals and governs the Judicial Branch; the published description distinguishes those functions.

https://www.courts.maine.gov/courts/sjc/

05 — Family-law and appeal chronology

User-supplied Master Timeline v16B (June 23, 2026) as preserved in Master Timeline v17B and later volumes, including the described June 23, 2026 order in Yor-26-118 and related transcript/e-filing events. This privately supplied chronology is a source-navigation aid, not an independent adjudication. Original orders and native records control.

06 — Personal and fictional material

The Devil, driver, bus, Shoehorn, purported dialogue, invented holdings, and infernal assignments are fictional devices. The opinions and criticisms are literary commentary, not factual findings against the named individuals.

SUBSTANTIVE JUSTICE THROUGH PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY

The seats belong to the people.