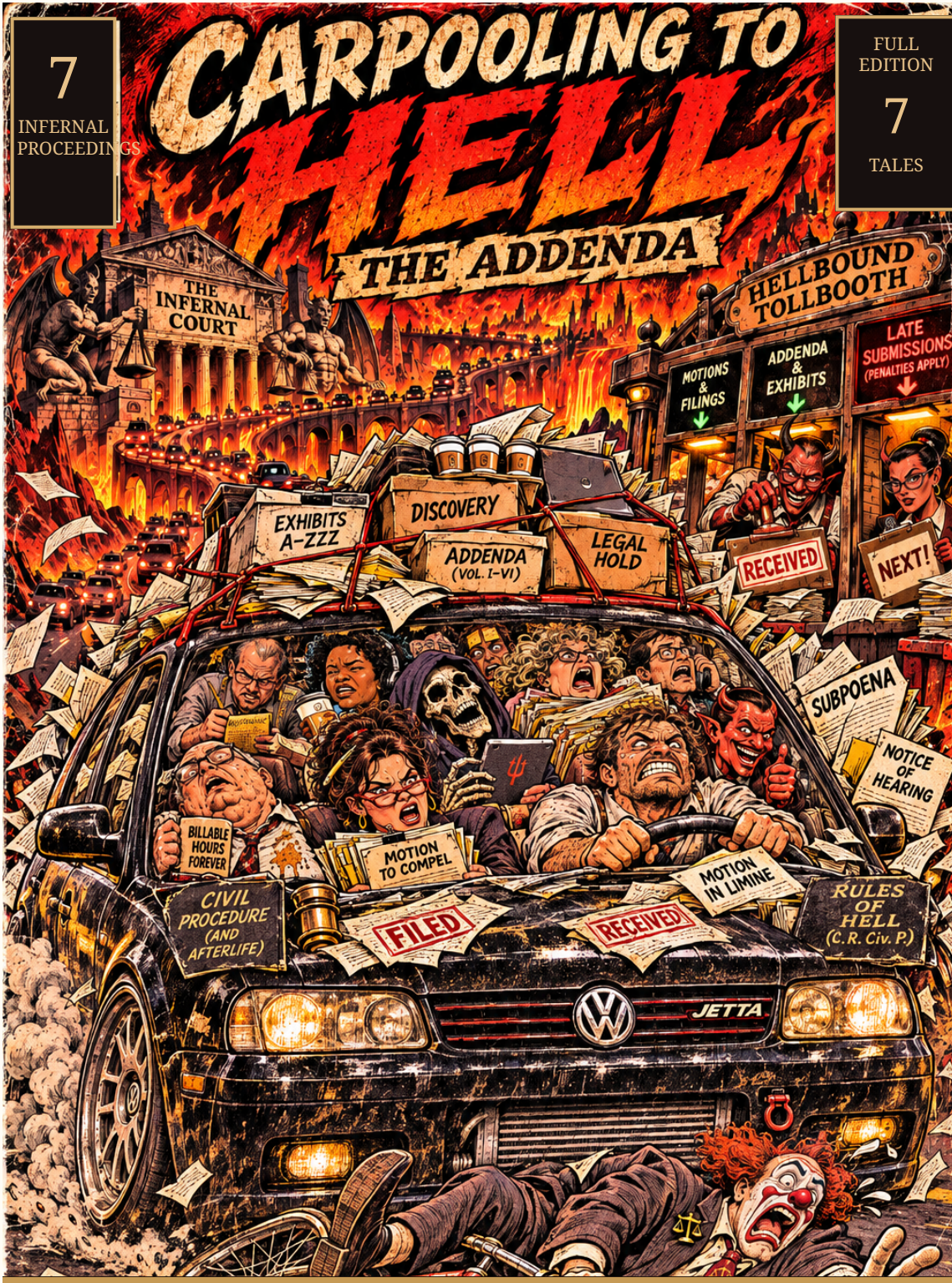


THE SEVEN INJUSTICES

Seven proceedings. One standard of review: reciprocal.

THE NO “MOORE” HARM SERIES

CARPOOLING TO HELL: THE ADDENDA

THE SEVEN INJUSTICES

AN ANTHOLOGY OF SUBSTANTIALLY SUBSTANTIVE ANTIQUITY

Seven proceedings · seven Injustices · the standard of review is finally reciprocal

JUSTIN A. TAHAI

A Notice to the Reasonably Literate

This is a work of **fiction and satire**. The Infernal Law Court, its seven Injustices, the Devil's proceedings, all dialogue, all imaginary relatives, and every alleged doctrine of Hell are invented. The seven Injustices are caricatures with deliberately altered names, not accounts of the private lives, relatives, intentions, or personal conduct of any real jurist. No real judge's children or family are depicted. No actual child is confined, threatened, or punished in this book. The children glimpsed through the infernal doors are symbolic, wholly invented figures who remain safe; the ordeal belongs to the adults compelled to experience delay.

The book criticizes procedural obstacles, institutional self-importance, the difference between formal rights and practical remedies, and the irrecoverability of family time. Its mock opinions are not actual rulings, and its fictional authorities are not legal sources. Any separate discussion of actual decisions, dockets, or officials should be read in the original public record, not inferred from this story.

The black modified 1999.5 Volkswagen Jetta is the carpool's recurring vehicle. Its capacity has been deliberately disregarded in service of comic overcrowding. Nothing in this work advocates violence against a real person or defiance of a lawful court order.

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This volume is a literary satire, not a court filing or an accusation of private misconduct.

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PROLOGUE

IN RE: SEVEN PERSONS OF EXTRAORDINARY CEREMONIAL IMPORTANCE

Upon the Most Extraordinary Petition for the Application of Their Own Reasoning to Their Own Circumstances

The black 1999.5 Volkswagen Jetta arrived at the gates of Hell at 8:03 in the morning, although the existence of morning had been disputed by the Department of Chronological Authenticity since the thirteenth century and could not, without an additional filing, be judicially noticed.

The Jetta had been modified with such confidence that an automotive engineer might have admired it, a traffic officer might have fainted, and an insurance adjuster would have required a secluded room. Its paint was black; its exhaust was impolite; its suspension carried seven robed occupants, seventeen boxes of exhibits, two portable printers, a brass seal, and an unreasonable quantity of professional self-esteem.

A red bicycle attempted to overtake them on the inside. At its handlebars sat Bartholomew P. Billmore, Esquire, a clown lawyer in a three-piece suit, curly wig, and bicycle helmet shaped like a judicial dome.

The front tire folded beneath the Jetta's bumper with a theatrical *PING*.

Billmore emerged from the resulting tangle unharmed, except for the devastation of discovering that the six seconds of travel had not been separately itemized.

"I shall invoice the vehicle," he declared, "for interference with my lucrative expectancy of uninterrupted inconvenience."

"You rode in front of the car," said the driver.

"A disputed characterization," replied Billmore. "The car failed to yield to the professional dignity of my bicycle."

He presented a bill for eleven hours.

Above them, a sign carved into a mountain of rejected pleadings proclaimed:

SUPREME INFERNAL LAW COURT OF RECIPROCAL JURISPRUDENCE
OPEN TO THE PUBLIC. CLOSED TO RELIEF.

Satan sat behind a bench constructed from unopened motions. He was dressed more modestly than his guests, having found that ordinary black velvet sufficed for an office held without the necessity of pretending virtue.

The seven climbed from the Jetta in the order established by ceremonial protocol, which placed the most senior officeholder nearest the courthouse entrance and the member holding the greatest number of unread attachments nearest the trunk.

"We have been summoned," said Valeria Stanstill, "to advise the infernal administration on the responsible exercise of judicial restraint."

"Splendid," said Satan. "I intend to exercise precisely the restraint you recommend."

The Devil's clerk, Miss Quill, produced a parchment bearing a seven-part writ. The text was long, resplendent, and almost entirely unnecessary, but a small portion of it could be understood by persons who had received fewer than eight years of Latin instruction.

Each Injustice would be shown an imagined opportunity to spend ordinary time with a fictional child or beloved young family member. None of the imagined children could be

harmed. All were safe, content, and altogether outside the actual jurisdiction of Hell. The doors in the gallery were windows onto possible moments, not prison cells. The only thing locked was the Injustices' access to those moments.

"We shall apply," Satan explained, "your favorite doctrines to the inconvenience of your own longings. The remedies shall be as available, the forms as comprehensible, and the passage of time as forgiving as you have traditionally assumed them to be."

"You mean to torture us," said Catharine R. Concurrence.

"Madam," Satan replied, visibly affronted, "I mean to administer a process. Your inability to distinguish between those activities shall be treated as a failure of pleading."

The seven demanded an immediate stay.

Miss Quill stamped the demand **RECEIVED FOR FILING PURPOSES ONLY**.

"Does that mean we've been heard?" asked Andrew M. Meander.

"Good heavens, no," said the clerk. "Receipt is a clerical fact. Consideration is a judicial event. You cannot simply put the two in the same sentence."

A narrow man in a soot-dark suit entered carrying a clock with seven hands. Each hand bore an Injustice's name. It did not measure hours. It measured birthdays, graduations, holidays, first dances, lost Saturday mornings, and the innumerable little invitations that never return after being declined often enough.

The driver of the Jetta studied it.

"That's a cruel-looking clock."

"That," Satan said, "is a remarkably ordinary clock. It is only the first time these passengers have been required to watch it."

Billmore stood and objected on behalf of the entire learned profession, which had not retained him, consented to his representation, or requested his opinion.

"My clients," he announced, "demand the inalienable right to be adjudged magnificent without reference to the consequences of their magnificence."

"Objection sustained as an accurate description of the request," said Satan. "Denied as to the remedy."

The first clock hand moved. A brass placard illuminated above the inaugural door:

VALERIA STANSTILL — PETITION FOR THE EXISTENCE OF TOMORROW.

A bell rang, followed by an announcement in the voice of a thousand irritated clerks:

"All rise, except those awaiting practical relief. Their elevation is deferred."

And so began the Seven Proceedings, in which Hell undertook the unprecedented experiment of making procedural reasoning personally consequential to the people who most adored its sound.

ISSUE ONE

VALERIA STANSTILL

The Doctrine of Perpetual Pendency

In re Tomorrow, a Temporal Concept Allegedly Due Upon Reasonable Notice

It is a well-established maxim of the Supreme Infernal Law Court that tomorrow shall remain available to every petitioner, provided no petitioner insists upon experiencing it today.

Valeria Stanstill, whose professional distinction had grown so prodigious that the handle of her ceremonial gavel required its own subordinate gavel, arrived at Door Number One carrying a handbound schedule of impending reunions. On its cover, in gilt lettering, were the words **A REASONABLE OPPORTUNITY TO BE TOGETHER**.

"An enlightened arrangement," Valeria pronounced. "Reasonableness grants appropriate flexibility."

Beyond the door was an imaginary school gymnasium. Folding chairs faced a makeshift stage. Children wearing cardboard stars were preparing a small musical performance, and on the first row sat an empty seat reserved for Valeria. A paper sign on it read **PLEASE COME**.

The fictional child for whom the seat had been saved was not a real person. The infernal gallery had been scrupulous about that. It was a safe, invented representation of the universally human expectation that when a grownup says *I'll be there*, the grownup intends to try.

"I should like to attend," said Valeria, with that exceptionally mild judicial tone by which a person accustomed to instant obedience indicates a demand.

The door did not open.

A clerk materialized, carrying a calendar large enough to serve as a pedestrian bridge.

"Your application is most welcome," she said, "subject to confirmation of an available date."

"The performance is this afternoon."

"Certainly. Your request shall be addressed tomorrow."

"But it will be over tomorrow."

"Then the calendar will be considerably less congested."

Valeria paused. "You cannot mean to delay until the event is past."

The clerk brightened. "Not at all, Your Injustice. We mean only to decline to decide before it is past. The passage of the event is merely an incidental by-product of the orderly administration of indecision."

A framed seal behind her announced the controlling doctrine: **PENDENTE LITE, PENDENTE VITA** — while the case is pending, so is life.

Valeria invoked emergency jurisdiction.

The clerk consulted a volume titled *Emergency Standards, as Modified by the Institutional Necessity of Avoiding Emergencies*.

"The Court recognizes an emergency," the clerk explained, "when the harm alleged is imminent, irremediable, and inconvenient to the Court's reputation if ignored. Your application satisfies the first two elements."

"And the third?"

"Unproven. The matter is scheduled for a hearing next month."

Inside the gymnasium, the lights dimmed. The invented audience applauded. Valeria approached the door and knocked.

"I only need to sit in that chair."

"Then we recommend a Motion to Designate Chair, Form SIT-1."

"I shall file it."

"Accompanied by a proposed order, a chair-support affidavit, and a certificate attesting that the chair was unoccupied for reasons unrelated to the petitioner's own failure to complete the chair-designation process."

From behind a nearby shrub stepped Billmore, once again in possession of his bicycle, a fresh helmet, and a conditionally valid right to speak.

"May it please the Court," he said, taking Valeria's elbow in the manner of a man escorting both a client and a future invoice, "I can render vigorous professional assistance. My preliminary assessment is that the chair should be preserved in its vacant condition until all competing interests in its occupancy have received an opportunity to object."

"There are no competing interests," Valeria replied.

"Precisely why we must discover them."

He produced an hourly schedule with special rates for the contemplation of hypothetical objections. The act of imagining an objection cost more than answering a real one because it required creativity, a skill Billmore considered rare within the profession.

Valeria dismissed him and prepared the documents herself. They were impeccably numbered, annotated, cross-referenced, and bound in blue. Her Motion for Immediate Practical Relief contained two plain sentences followed by fourteen pages explaining the unusually distinguished nature of the petitioner.

The clerk accepted the packet at 4:58 p.m.

Inside the gymnasium, the final song was concluding.

"I have filed!" Valeria cried.

"Congratulations," said the clerk. "Your filing has been entered in the Record of Things Filed."

"And the door?"

"You have not sought relief under the proper procedural mechanism. The Motion to Designate Chair was appropriate only if you intended to litigate the legal status of the chair. The present claim concerns physical access to an event. That requires a Motion for Leave to Enter the Premises in Which a Designated Chair May or May Not Be Situated."

Valeria stared at her.

"Surely substance controls over the caption."

The clerk looked horrified. "Your Injustice! Such an extraordinary proposition, uttered so near the records window and without requesting a hearing, could bring the entire filing architecture into disrepute."

The Devil appeared beside a display case containing a gold-plated calendar, a commemorative plaque, and a remarkably small amount of actual time.

"A modest difficulty?" he asked.

"Your system," Valeria said, "has mistaken administrative formality for the purpose of administration."

Satan placed a hand over his heart.

"I shall have that observation framed. We receive so few complaints from the learned profession about its own preferred inventions."

The first moment vanished. The gymnasium dissolved, replaced by an imaginary Saturday morning at a lakeside park. The same safe, fictional child was now older, carrying two fishing rods. A folding sign declared **NEXT TIME, DEFINITELY**.

Valeria hurried to the door.

"There," she said. "This one can still be arranged."

"Of course," replied Miss Quill. "Nothing in the previous disposition prevents future contact."

"Then let me through."

"Tomorrow."

The word struck with the impact of an entire shelf of law reporters falling at once.

Valeria searched her pockets for a more powerful motion and produced a writ of temporal mandamus, a pleading so venerable and technically obscure that no one in the lower courts had understood it since the invention of affordable wristwatches. She dictated an affidavit proving that tomorrow followed today. Billmore objected to the omission of Sunday. Miss Quill insisted that the proposition be supported by two independent astronomical experts and a certified calendar translator.

"It is common knowledge!" cried Valeria.

"Common knowledge is not judicial knowledge," the clerk responded. "We are here to avoid the contamination of the latter by the former."

"I will call Satan himself!"

"You may call," said Quill. "There is no requirement that he answer."

From the far side of the gallery came the sound of the Jetta's engine turning over. The driver had opened the trunk and was repairing a cabinet-sized filing machine with a ratchet. The machine had a red light labeled **AWAITING FURTHER INSTRUCTION**.

"It has one gear missing," he explained to Valeria when she approached. "They installed seventeen confirmation buttons and forgot the part that actually moves the paper."

"Then fix it!"

"I am fixing it. That's why I came out here instead of writing a memorandum about the conceptual benefits of fixing it."

He held up a greasy gear.

"This is the part you need."

Valeria examined it as though it might be an unfamiliar species of contempt.

Back at Door One, another imaginary scene materialized: a simple kitchen, two cups of hot chocolate, a school backpack near the chair. The invented child had left a folded note beneath the mug. Its words were small enough that Valeria had to press close to read them.

I stopped asking because you always said soon.

She stood motionless. She had expected an argument about chronology, perhaps a pointed debate over the irreparable-harm exception. What confronted her instead was the cumulative mathematics of unreliability: not a single decisive refusal, but a lifetime of reasonable postponements that had taught a child not to expect the adult to arrive.

"I was going to be there," she said.

"The docket reflects your intention," Miss Quill replied kindly. "Intention is preserved indefinitely."

"But the morning isn't."

For the first time, the clerk had no prepared answer. She opened a drawer, consulted an index, and returned with a form entitled **SUPPLEMENTAL AFFIDAVIT OF NON-RESTORABILITY**.

Valeria took it, then set it aside.

She returned to the bench where Satan sat reading a newspaper printed entirely in the passive voice.

"I demand a rule that prevents this," she said.

"For yourself?" asked Satan.

"Yes."

"Ah. Special relief. You know how easy it is to fashion an exception once a distinguished petitioner has become personally uncomfortable."

Valeria flushed beneath her powdered wig.

"For anyone," she said, correcting herself. "Not just me."

Satan put down his paper.

"Then say what the rule is."

"A request concerning a disappearing opportunity must receive a prompt, reasoned response before the opportunity disappears when that is practicable. The tribunal may refuse the remedy, but it should not use delay as a substitute for deciding whether the remedy is warranted."

Billmore's pen flew into motion. "Objection! The proposed rule requires decision-making. That may impose irrecoverable professional labor upon the judiciary."

"Overruled," Satan said. "Continue."

"And every order that speaks of an opportunity," Valeria said, eyes fixed on the empty doorway, "must describe a workable way to realize it, subject to actual safety and the child's welfare. Otherwise 'opportunity' is just a marble engraving over a locked door."

Miss Quill entered the proposed rule into a new book bearing the title **REMEDIES CONSIDERED IN EARNEST**. It was empty except for seven bookmarks.

"One bookmark may now be filled," said Satan.

Valeria reached for the first page.

The clerk stopped her. "Your proposal will be considered along with those of the six remaining petitioners. Until then, the motion is—"

"Pending," said Valeria.

"Correct."

She looked through the door one last time. The kitchen had disappeared. No fire had touched it. No child had suffered at Satan's hands. The moment had simply gone where all unkept moments go.

And Valeria Stanstill, the greatest ceremonial expert on tomorrow in the whole of Hell, learned at last that tomorrow is not a remedy for yesterday.

INTERLOCUTORY ORDER NO. I

WHEREFORE, the petitioner's request to have time behave like an administrative convenience is **DENIED**. Her alternative request for the establishment of a universal duty of timely consideration is **PRESERVED FOR FINAL DISPOSITION**, notwithstanding the rather scandalous possibility that such a duty might require persons possessing gavels to use them for something other than percussion.

So ordered, without prejudice to the continuation of actual time.

ISSUE TWO

ANDREW M. MEANDER

The Doctrine of Transcriptual Presumption

In re Words Which Were Spoken but Cannot Be Received Unless First Purchased in an Acceptable Font

The Second Door was made of glass. Behind it, safe and unreachable, a fictional child was preparing a small backyard telescope and setting two folding chairs beneath an astonishing sky. On one chair lay a note: **I SAVED YOU THE GOOD ONE**.

Andrew M. Meander was delighted.

"A clear and unambiguous promise of familial access," he said. "I need only determine the proper evidentiary vehicle by which the promise may be authenticated."

"Or sit in the chair," said the Jetta's driver.

"My dear fellow," replied Meander, "that is precisely the kind of undisciplined shortcut that would leave civilization defenseless against chairs."

An antique gramophone was mounted beside the door. From its horn came an unmistakable voice: "Are you coming? I can see Jupiter!"

Meander smiled. "I hear the invitation."

Miss Quill snapped a velvet cover over the horn.

"The Court takes no position," she said, "on the existence of any sound not first converted into an official transcript."

"I just heard it."

"That is a private auditory experience. The institution recognizes only authenticated representations of such experi-

ences, prepared in the required manner at the required expense."

Meander, who had spent a distinguished career believing the evidentiary record to be sacred, encountered the novel possibility that sanctity might be obtained by charging admission to the altar.

"Then produce the transcript."

A trapdoor opened. A ledger rose upon a hydraulic pedestal, attended by two imps in caps embroidered **eSCRIBBLERS, INC.** They explained that the forty-seven seconds of the child's invitation could be transcribed only by purchasing an entire 326-page hearing record, pursuant to the Infernal Rule Against Convenient Excerpts.

"Estimated deposit," announced the senior imp, "one thousand five hundred and fifteen dollars and ninety cents."

"For a handful of words?"

"For all words. The public institution recorded them. The vendor has custody of their written future."

"I don't have that sum."

"Then you may elect to proceed without a transcript."

"And the consequences?"

The imp bowed. "In the absence of a transcript, the reviewing tribunal shall presume that every conclusion reached by the lower tribunal is fully supported by the words you could not afford to have written down."

The silence that followed was so entirely substantive that Billmore attempted to invoice it by the minute.

Meander was not accustomed to being on the losing side of a presumption. Like most admirers of deference, he had principally encountered it while sitting above the people from whom deference was demanded.

"But the recording exists," he said.

"An unfortunate redundancy," the imp replied. "It is the raw material from which an acceptable expense may one day be manufactured."

"Give me the audio, then."

"Audio is not a transcript."

"What about a statement in lieu?"

"We would require a formal settlement process."

"Set one."

"The motion requesting that process must be supported by an adequate record."

"The very record I'm trying to obtain?"

"You have finally grasped the elegance of the arrangement."

From the other side of the glass, the safe, invented child pointed toward the sky. Meander could no longer hear the words. He watched a little finger trace the outline of a planet, then turn toward the empty chair and hesitate.

He submitted an application to proceed without payment of fees. The infernal court granted it with unusual speed. He received a beautifully framed order waiving the cost of entering the building, the cost of receiving a docket number, and the surcharge ordinarily imposed upon persons who could not afford surcharges.

"Excellent," said Meander. "Now the transcript."

"That is a different expense," Miss Quill explained. "The order concerns the filing fee, not the optional evidentiary material without which your challenge is impossible."

"A transcript is not optional if its absence defeats review!"

Miss Quill nodded with professional sympathy. "Our procedures have an exceptional talent for making indispensable things optional."

The Devil arrived carrying an old-fashioned reel-to-reel tape recorder. He pressed PLAY. From the speaker came the

child's invitation in full, followed by the modest sound of a garden gate clicking in the breeze.

"Your proof," said Satan.

Meander lunged toward it.

The Devil pulled the tape away.

"Not so quickly. I am told that the presence of a recording is legally beside the point if the approved documentary abstraction has not been produced."

"You are tormenting me with an absurdity!"

"I am repeating an argument," Satan replied, "in the solemn tones associated with its distinguished acceptance. Why does it cease to comfort you when you stand where the appellant stands?"

"Because I know the facts!"

"An excellent point. We shall have it entered as a dispute over whether a person lacking access to a factual record has nevertheless attempted to dispute the facts. The presumption shall then supply the answer to the very question the missing material was sought to test."

Billmore emerged from behind a stack of invoices, rubbing his hands together.

"May it please the Tribunal, this is a masterpiece of procedural economy! By preventing the appellant from establishing the record, we prevent him from establishing the basis upon which the appellant could question the record. We have reduced the number of potentially troublesome facts to zero."

"And therefore the judicial workload?" Satan asked.

"Also zero."

"A remarkable efficiency," the Devil murmured. "What a pity it serves so few people other than the efficient."

Meander went to the driver's Jetta and sat on its hood. The car was warm. Its windshield was half covered in parking tickets issued for remaining stationary during legal review.

"I always thought the burden of supplying the record was a neutral rule," he said.

"It is a rule," replied the driver. "But whether someone can actually get the record is a different question."

"The appellate court cannot invent testimony."

"Of course not. But it can explain whether anyone has a fair way to get the testimony that already exists."

Meander looked back through the glass. The backyard was now empty except for the two chairs, the telescope, and a blanket carefully folded over the seat reserved for him.

"What if the recording contradicts the finding?" he asked.

"Then the contradiction matters," said the driver.

"And if it doesn't?"

"Then at least somebody checked."

The directness of the answer affected Meander more profoundly than any thirty-page concurrence he had ever written.

At the recording desk he filled out one final motion. This time he omitted the phrases *insofar as*, *subject to the foregoing*, and *as the Court may otherwise deem just*, which left a great deal of white space but clarified the request magnificently.

If the court records a hearing, an appellant who cannot pay for a transcript must have a realistic, orderly way to seek an authorized alternative record when the applicable rules permit it. The court should decide such requests openly, and explain what is missing and why.

"That is dangerously comprehensible," Miss Quill warned.

"Then I will accept the danger," Meander said.

The imp from eScribblers arrived with a cancellation letter for the first transcript order. It was dated yesterday, printed on tomorrow's letterhead, and addressed to a person who had never been notified that either day existed. A small check box marked **NOTICE SERVED** had been checked because the letter itself was aware of its own existence.

"We shall require proof of service," said Meander.

"Surely the letter is proof that the letter exists," the imp said.

"Existence is not delivery."

"You sound like a layperson."

"I sound," Meander said, "like someone who wants to know whether the door was ever opened."

He asked Satan for the tape once more. This time he asked not for special access but for a published process governing access for everyone similarly situated. The Devil nodded and placed a second bookmark into the ledger of proposed universal remedies.

The glass door remained closed. It was not a punishment of the imaginary child, whose safe evening had unfolded beyond its reach. It was a measurement of the adult's lost opportunity to hear and answer a question before the answer ceased to matter.

Meander returned the two empty chairs to their imagined place in his mind. He could still hear, with painful precision, one sentence from the tape.

I saved you the good one.

His opinion of procedural neutrality had finally encountered the evidence.

INTERLOCUTORY ORDER NO. II

THE COURT FINDS that a record cannot meaningfully serve the purpose of review when its practical acquisition is made the obstacle to review itself. Petitioner's demand for a magic transcript obtainable through pure indignation is **DENIED**; the proposed rule requiring an accessible, rule-compliant process for alternative records is **RESERVED**, subject to the scandalous possibility that a recorded hearing might someday be heard.

Certified by the Infernal Office of Audible Things Too Costly to Hear.

ISSUE THREE

CATHARINE R. CONCURRENCE

The Doctrine of Harmless Chronological Error

Upon the Extraordinary Question Whether a Missing Year May Be Restored by Correcting a Footnote

The Third Door resembled a grandfather clock. Its face was marked not with hours but with the months of an imaginary school year. Above the pendulum hung an illuminated sign: **ERROR ACKNOWLEDGED — PREJUDICE NOT ESTABLISHED**.

Catharine R. Concurrence approached carrying a mahogany pointer, a leather-bound book of harmless-error doctrine, and the invincible confidence of a person who had spent thirty years explaining that many mistakes do not matter enough to reverse a result.

"The principle is sound," she told Satan. "A legal system cannot overturn every judgment for every trivial misstatement."

"Indeed," the Devil replied. "A system must distinguish harmless mistakes from consequential ones. That is a respectable question."

Concurrence relaxed.

"Unfortunately," Satan continued, "your own calendar has suffered a modest clerical correction."

He showed her an imaginary invitation to a child's spring concert. It bore a date in May and a handwritten assurance: **I GET A SOLO. DON'T MISS IT.**

The clerk's certified version listed the concert as occurring in October of the following year. An ornate seal declared the date **PRESUMPTIVELY ACCURATE UNTIL SUBSTANTIALLY DISPROVED**.

"That's wrong," said Concurrence.

"A welcome assertion," said Miss Quill, "though I must caution that assertions of wrongness are not themselves adjudications of wrongness."

"I have the original invitation."

"The Court has a certified copy of the incorrect one."

"Then amend it!"

"We may amend our findings upon demonstration that the error materially affected the disposition."

"Of course it does. The show is in May. I will miss it if I arrive in October."

The clerk regarded her with the gentle concern typically reserved for someone who has failed to distinguish jurisprudence from geography.

"Your Injustice, the event's actual occurrence and the Court's legal characterization of its occurrence occupy separate analytical universes. You must demonstrate that correcting the date would alter the ultimate outcome, which is that the event has already concluded."

"It hasn't concluded yet!"

"It will have concluded by the time we decide whether to correct it. The consequence will therefore be the same."

Concurrence opened her book and hunted for a persuasive rebuttal. The index was divided into categories labeled *Harmless*, *Nonprejudicial*, *Insufficiently Preserved*, and *Why the Court Is Not Particularly Concerned*. The last category occupied most of the volume.

"Then expedite the matter."

"There is no need," replied the clerk. "By the time the Court reaches it, the question of whether the error had consequences will have become entirely theoretical."

Billmore arrived, wheeling a bicycle laden with filing boxes. On the handlebars hung a promotional sign: **HARMLESS ERROR WARRANTY — IF YOUR LOSS CANNOT BE REPAIRED, WE GUARANTEE IT WILL BE DECLARED IRRELEVANT.**

"May it please the Tribunal," he said, "there is no material prejudice here. The petitioner is still entirely free to attend a concert in October."

"Not *that* concert."

"The alleged specificity of the event is an impermissible effort to privilege the petitioner's subjective preferences over the institutional preference for chronological flexibility."

He presented three tickets to an October recital performed by the Infernal Department of Appeals and Cross-References, in which every musical instrument would play *Pomp and Circumstance* at a different tempo and then complain that the audience lacked the experience to recognize the harmony.

Concurrence declined.

The clock swung. The imaginary May concert began behind the glass. Children in bright paper costumes crossed a stage, searching the audience for familiar faces. The little soloist's gaze reached the empty chair and moved away.

Concurrence knocked until her knuckles hurt. The door's latch was marked **REQUIRES FINDINGS**; the latch below it read **FINDINGS NOT REQUIRED WHERE THE ERROR IS HARMLESS**.

"Who designed these?" she asked.

"Your favorite committee," Miss Quill answered. "It was chaired by a distinguished person who could not recall its date of formation, but the error was deemed harmless."

Concurrence drafted a seventeen-page motion for correction. She supplied the original invitation, a photograph of the school schedule, the teacher's letter, and three independently notarized statements that October was not May. The court corrected its order in a supplemental footnote, rendering the date accurate after the performance had ended.

"There," said Billmore, smiling. "Your error has been corrected."

"And the concert?"

"It has not been corrected. The Court does not generally engage in the correction of concerts."

"Then you admit the error mattered."

"We admit only that time has passed, which is a fact of such notorious universality that it cannot be attributed to the Court without expert evidence."

Another page fell from the clock. The imaginary child, always safe, was shown at a later age preparing a tiny science-fair display. The title was **WHAT HAPPENS WHEN PEOPLE KEEP SAYING LATER**. It featured two cardboard houses connected by a bridge made of unreturned invitations.

Concurrence swallowed.

"Can I make that one?"

"You may certainly attempt to do so," said Quill. "The error on the invitation has now been corrected, and it is therefore wholly reasonable to conclude that the administrative problem has been cured."

The new invitation bore an address for a venue that had closed three years earlier.

"Another error," Concurrence said.

"Quite."

"If I don't find the venue, I won't be able to attend."

"Please state your theory of prejudice with particularity."

Concurrence marched to Satan's bench and presented the two invitations side by side.

"A harmless-error doctrine is supposed to prevent pointless reversals," she said. "It isn't supposed to blind us to the consequences of the error simply because those consequences are inconvenient to acknowledge."

"An admirable distinction," said Satan. "Would you make it if the concert belonged to another family?"

She began to answer, then stopped. The imagined child was folding up the science-fair bridge. One end had come loose.

"I should," she said finally.

"Should?"

"I must."

The Devil slid a blank card across the bench.

"Draft the principle."

Concurrence wrote slowly, foregoing the pleasure of an unnecessary Latin adverb.

A court may deem an error harmless only after examining its actual significance, including whether the error affected a practical opportunity that cannot be recreated. Correcting a finding after the opportunity has expired does not, by itself, restore the opportunity.

Billmore cleared his throat. "I object to the term *actual*. It has a disturbingly empirical flavor."

"I object," added Miss Quill, "to *cannot be recreated*. The Infernal Department of Retrospective Make-Believe can manufacture a documentary facsimile of virtually any event."

"Then let it manufacture an actual May concert that I can attend in May," Concurrence replied.

The clerk said nothing.

Satan laughed, softly and without pleasure.

"A rare moment," he said. "The court has discovered a fact which refuses to comply with its opinion."

The third clock hand advanced. Concurrence watched the science-fair scene fade, leaving behind a cardboard bridge that had never successfully connected its two shores.

There was nothing inherently improper about correcting a trivial date or refusing to reverse for an insignificant mistake. The injury lay in declaring the date irrelevant before asking what it was a date *for*.

Concurrence placed the corrected invitation beside the empty chair.

"One can amend a judgment," she said, "but not a childhood."

Miss Quill wrote the sentence in the margin of the third proposed rule. Billmore insisted on billing separately for the comma.

INTERLOCUTORY ORDER NO. III

THE COURT NOTES that an incorrect date may be corrected without undoing time, that correcting it does not necessarily establish a right to further relief, and that the question of materiality cannot be answered by pretending the lost opportunity was immaterial merely because it is lost. The petitioner's proposed principle is **PRESERVED** for final consideration. Her request to compel May to recur as an administrative courtesy is **DENIED AS BEYOND THE COURT'S TEMPORAL CAPACITY**.

Entered nunc pro tunc, though not nunc pro childhood.

ISSUE FOUR

RICK E. LAWRENCIOUS

The Doctrine of Protective Deprivation

In re the Preservation of a Relationship Through the Indefinite Prohibition of Its Enjoyment

His Eminence Rick E. Lawrencious had always regarded caution as a distinguished virtue, principally because it was a virtue that could be displayed without deciding anything. He distrusted anything that moved quickly: cars, appeals, clocks, children who outgrew shoes, and most particularly any remedy that might actually reach the person for whom it had ostensibly been designed.

Door Four opened onto a sunny public garden. On a bench, an invented teenager was packing sandwiches into a picnic basket, looking forward to an afternoon with a parent. The teenager was perfectly safe, competent to choose whether to participate, and in this infernal construction had plainly elected to do so. A sign beside the bench read **WE BOTH SAID YES**.

Lawrencious straightened his robe. "An ideal candidate for the judicious restoration of ordinary association."

At that instant, a majestic iron railing rose between them.

Miss Quill presented a decree bound with a ribbon the exact shade of sincere institutional concern.

"The Tribunal has determined that your relationship is of such extraordinary importance that it must be protected from the possibility of actually taking place."

"That is absurd."

"On the contrary, Your Injustice. The order is exceptionally thoughtful. It contains twelve references to safety, eleven to appropriate guardrails, nine to developmental sensitivity, and one reference to a visit. The reference to a visit has been placed on the final page where it cannot distract from the balance of the document."

"I would like to eat a sandwich with the child."

"An ambitious proposal. Have you submitted a plan?"

"The plan is to eat a sandwich."

"What if the sandwich is inconvenient? What if the weather changes? What if there is a disagreement over mustard? Surely your desire for contact cannot displace the child's autonomy."

"The child already agreed."

"A preliminary statement, subject to compliance verification, scheduling logistics, future comfort, the recommendations of all relevant adults, and the determination by the existing gatekeeper that those conditions have been met."

Lawrencious stared through the railings. The teenager waved and held up the basket.

"I can see the actual willingness."

"Willingness is one factor, among many factors, all of which must be considered holistically in a process that is necessarily too complex to describe in usable terms."

The garden acquired a second railing, then a third, each labeled **PROTECTIVE MEASURE**. A fourth protected the first three against removal.

Billmore arrived upon a bicycle whose brakes had been replaced with miniature gavel heads. His briefcase held three emergency injunctions, four opinions on hypothetical sandwiches, and a document titled *On the Unacceptable Risks of Contemporary Picnic Culture*.

"I appear," he said, "for the Department of Supervised Opportunities. My client recognizes the petitioner's abstract interest in luncheon association and remains firmly committed to preventing any concrete development likely to disturb that abstraction."

"They want to meet," Lawrencious repeated.

"Then there is no need to force the matter," Billmore answered. "And because there is no force, we shall do nothing. Should they cease to want to meet as a consequence of our inaction, that will establish the wisdom of our not having forced them."

"That's circular."

"A circle," said Billmore, "is the most professionally respectable shape. It has no exposed endpoints upon which responsibility might be inconveniently located."

A tiny window opened in one railing. The teenager called through it: "Could we just have lunch?"

Lawrencious reached for the latch, but a new decree arrived forbidding him to act unilaterally on the basis of a child's express preference. The teenage voice faded beneath the rustle of twenty-seven added pages explaining the importance of listening to it.

The Devil appeared in a wide-brimmed garden hat, carrying a cucumber sandwich and a stack of orders so tall that the top sheet had developed its own weather.

"A problem?" he asked.

"Your protective scheme prevents the very relationship it purports to protect."

"A grievous accusation," Satan replied. "Have you considered that it may be safer to preserve the *concept* of the relationship? Concepts do not become inconvenient, argue about curfews, demand actual transportation, or produce additional duties for the grownups."

"A relationship isn't a concept."

"A rather revolutionary idea."

"It happens when people spend time together."

"Provided they may safely do so," Satan said. "Would you extinguish that requirement?"

"No."

"Would you compel a child to attend?"

"No."

"Then you must be proposing something dangerously subtle."

Lawrencious considered the words. The imagined teenager had made an invitation. No factual safety finding had been introduced against the lunch. The adult logistics, however, were arranged as a maze which nobody was obliged to solve.

"I'm proposing that adults do their part," he said. "We can respect choice, respond to genuine safety concerns, and still be required to make a reasonable effort to organize the opportunity promised."

Miss Quill grew uneasy. "That would involve transportation."

"Yes."

"Potentially answering messages."

"Yes."

"And offering specific dates rather than repeating a general statement of goodwill."

"Yes."

The clerk rang a bell that summoned the Infernal Committee on Unreasonably Practical Expectations.

The committee was composed of three eminent specialists who spent the morning debating whether the word *available* described an obligation, an attitude, a scheduling preference,

or a kind of cheese. Their majority report concluded that the word had been carefully chosen to mean all four and therefore could not meaningfully be enforced in any of them.

The teenager finished packing the sandwiches. The bench was still there, but the afternoon light had shifted. A breeze lifted the cloth from the basket. Nothing dangerous had happened. Nothing helpful had happened either.

Lawrencious stepped up to the final railing and read the notice fixed to it:

ACCESS MAY COMMENCE UPON SATISFACTORY COMPLIANCE WITH ALL PREREQUISITES, THE DETERMINATION OF WHICH SHALL REMAIN AT THE DISCRETION OF THE PERSON WHO HAS NOT IDENTIFIED THE PREREQUISITES.

"Who could comply with that?"

"An admirably narrow class," said Billmore. "It minimizes the administrative risk of unauthorized success."

Lawrencious ripped the notice from its frame. It was the first time in his fictional existence that he had touched an official form without asking permission to examine its margins. Miss Quill reached for a contempt citation; Satan held up a finger.

"Let him finish."

The Injustice wrote on the reverse of the notice:

A child is a person, not a procedural veto and not an instrument of adult litigation. The child's wishes, age, welfare, and safety must be taken seriously. Adults responsible for implementing lawful contact must nonetheless undertake the adult work of proposing schedules, arranging transportation, identifying real impediments, and facilitating appropriate opportunities, rather than converting undefined prerequisites into indefinite nonperformance.

"And if the child says no?" asked Satan.

"We listen. We do not punish, coerce, or pretend the refusal is irrelevant. But we also do not use the child's feelings as an excuse to abandon adult responsibility for appropriate support and an honest implementation process."

The Devil nodded. "So the rule does not guarantee a sandwich."

"No," replied Lawrencious. "It guarantees that an order promising a reasonable opportunity is not rendered meaningless by the grownups entrusted with making it possible."

Miss Quill entered a fourth proposed principle.

Beyond the railings, the teenager returned the picnic basket to a kitchen. Lawrencious could see the place where two sandwiches had been made. The warm bread would not remain warm because the Tribunal had produced a compelling meditation on the sanctity of lunch.

"It would have been an ordinary afternoon," he said.

"A great many important things are," Satan answered.

Billmore tried to sell him a framed certificate recognizing his unwavering commitment to family contact. Lawrencious declined.

He had developed an entirely new distaste for certificates honoring accomplishments that had not happened.

INTERLOCUTORY ORDER NO. IV

IT IS DECLARED that protection, implemented in good faith, may require caution and appropriate limits, but that an indefinite and unreviewable maze of adult prerequisites is not itself a relationship. Petitioner's request for compelled affection is **DENIED**. His proposed requirement of concrete, child-centered adult facilitation is **PRESERVED**. The Court

expressly refuses to recognize the administrative convenience of permanent deferral as a substitute for an individualized assessment.

The sandwiches are not preserved. The principle might be.

ISSUE FIVE

WAYNE R. DELAYGLAS

The Doctrine of Administrative Perfection

In re an Application to Be Heard, Rejected for Want of the Correct Description of Hearing

Wayne R. Delayglas approached Door Five with a leather briefcase, five certified copies of everything, and the confident bearing of a man who knew all the rules and assumed that the rules were delighted to know him.

Behind the glass stood a safe, invented child holding two tickets to a local planetarium. The tickets were simple, blue, and dated for tonight. An illuminated sign over the door said **PLEASE SUBMIT A REQUEST FOR ENTRY**.

"A straightforward ministerial undertaking," Delayglas observed. "I shall prevail by compliance."

A brass kiosk protruded from the wall. Its screen displayed ninety-seven filing categories, each with an authoritative title and a description so nearly identical to every other category that selection required either revelation or a twenty-seven-volume treatise on typographic nuance.

MOTION — MOTION TO ENTER — FILED
OTHER FILING — OTHER DOCUMENT — FILED
LETTER — FROM PARTY — FILED
APPLICATION — REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO REQUEST APPLICATION — FILED

Delayglas selected *Motion to Enter*. The portal asked him to identify the person to be served. He entered his own name, only to be told he lacked authorization to receive service on behalf of himself.

"But I am myself."

ERROR: AUTHORIZED SERVICE CONTACT NOT PROVIDED.

"I certify that I have personal knowledge of being myself."

ERROR: CERTIFICATE OF PERSONAL SELFHOOD NOT RECOGNIZED.

"Perhaps my name is misspelled."

ERROR: CORRECTING YOUR NAME MAY ALTER THE IDENTITY OF THE PARTY FOR WHOM YOU ARE NOT AN AUTHORIZED SERVICE CONTACT.

Delayglas attempted to telephone assistance. A recorded voice directed him to a link. The link directed him to a support portal. The support portal announced that the requested page did not exist and supplied a second link to report the missing first link. The second link redirected him to the first.

"Remarkably circular," he said.

"Institutional continuity," corrected Miss Quill.

Billmore coasted up on his bicycle, its wheels now fitted with sharpened rubber stamps that applied **REJECTED** to any paper unfortunate enough to fall near the spokes.

"I can offer premium technical assistance," he said. "Our firm charges a modest fee for searching for the correct filing category, another fee for discovering that it was not the correct category, and a final fee for advising you to contact technical assistance."

"You are technical assistance."

"I am the professional premium approximation of technical assistance."

Delayglas attempted the kiosk again. His first envelope returned with the explanation **INCORRECT FILING CODE**. He selected the category specified in the rejection notice. The corrected envelope returned because the proposed

order was not submitted as a separate PDF. He uploaded the proposed order. A third return advised that the document had to be described in the comments field using language which itself required quotation marks that the software silently removed.

The kiosk emitted a solemn congratulatory chime after each rejection.

THE SYSTEM HAS SUCCESSFULLY MAINTAINED ITS INTEGRITY.

A line of fellow filers watched in fascinated dismay. One carried a shoebox containing a small home, another a stack of medical releases, another a brief requesting nothing more than a date for a hearing. The clerk did not examine their requests. She did, however, enforce the required spacing between the court name and the docket number with a zeal formerly reserved for the defense of fortresses.

Delayglas demanded a hearing on the access problem.

"Please file a motion," said Quill.

"That is exactly what I am unable to do."

"Then the Court cannot consider the inability because it has not been properly brought before the Court."

"And if I bring it to you by hand?"

"Certainly, if the governing rules permit it. The window is open from nine until noon, except on days when the window is closed for administrative reconciliation. You may call ahead to inquire whether the window is open, although our telephone will advise you to consult the website."

"The website gives me a broken link!"

"Then you have received the most up-to-date available information about the website."

He stamped his foot. The planetarium tickets behind the glass began to fade as the invented evening progressed. The

child held them carefully, then finally slipped them into a pocket. The door remained untouched by human hands, while the kiosk received so many corrections that it issued itself a certificate of exemplary public service.

"It has done absolutely nothing!" cried Delayglas.

Miss Quill drew herself up. "Nothing? Your Injustice, this machine has produced thirteen notices, transmitted seven acknowledgments, generated twenty-six redundant service notifications, and recorded four distinct failures to accomplish the initial objective. That is forty-nine administrative acts in relation to one request. Few public servants could claim such productivity."

"None of those acts got me through the door!"

"Outcome bias," Billmore whispered. "A dangerous form of amateurism."

The screen flashed again:

RESUBMIT WITHIN FOUR BUSINESS DAYS IF YOU WISH TO PRESERVE YOUR ORIGINAL FILING DATE. RULE 35(E).

A second notice appeared:

RESUBMIT WITHIN FOUR BUSINESS DAYS IF YOU WISH TO PRESERVE YOUR ORIGINAL FILING DATE. RULE 35(F).

Delayglas read both.

"Which is it?"

"Both documents are authoritative," Miss Quill said.

"They can't both cite different subsections for the same instruction!"

"Your objection displays an alarming unwillingness to appreciate the substantive flexibility of administrative letter designation. The clerk's duty is not to resolve your confusion. It is to document it."

He composed a question so precise and polite that a frightened accountant might have framed it: *Please identify the controlling provision, correct filing type, and precise resubmission steps necessary to preserve the original attempted submission date.*

The system rejected the inquiry for exceeding the character limit while simultaneously advising him to include the full text of the required statement, which was longer than the character limit.

Satan appeared holding a gold medal embossed **INFERNAL LEADER IN PROCESSED EVENTS**.

"Congratulations," he said. "You have demonstrated exceptional administrative activity without allowing the content of your request to inconvenience the institution."

Delayglas refused the medal.

"I have spent all day working for a system that is supposed to work for me."

"An intriguing reversal," Satan observed. "But perhaps you regard the burden as a proof of moral worth."

"I regard it as a design failure."

The driver of the Jetta had been repairing its engine nearby. He looked up at the words *design failure* as though someone had finally spoken his native language.

"What happens in your shop when the instructions contradict themselves?" Satan asked him.

"You correct the instructions."

"What happens when a customer needs the thing to work today?"

"You don't congratulate the service desk for opening another ticket. You fix what's stopping the job."

Delayglas asked for a pencil. For once, he did not request an approved form. He turned the medal over and wrote on the back:

Administrative procedures should tell filers exactly what must be corrected, apply published rules consistently, allow a usable method of cure, distinguish duplicate automated notices from independent events, preserve timely attempted submissions when the rules permit, and never confuse docket processing with a decision on the merits.

"But people will expect the system to function," Billmore objected. "A terrible precedent for the future of the profession."

"Then the future of the profession," said Delayglas, "will have to endure the embarrassment of functioning."

Satan inserted a fifth bookmark into the ledger.

The planetarium beyond the glass closed for the evening. The fictional child walked home safely beneath a real-looking sky that nobody had charged admission to view. Delayglas watched the door, its illuminated instruction still blinking.

He had complied with the system so persistently that the system had mistaken his endurance for proof of its adequacy.

There is perhaps no more exquisite achievement of substantially substantive antiquity than a process that burdens its users, blames them for the burden, and then cites the resulting volume of paperwork as evidence of its tremendous public value.

INTERLOCUTORY ORDER NO. V

WHEREFORE, the Court rejects the petitioner's prayer that all interfaces become instantly perfect, a standard no mortal or infernal engineer could satisfy. It does, however, **RESERVE** the proposed requirement of intelligible, consist-

ent, correctable filing procedures. The kiosk's application for an award for exceptional throughput is **DENIED**, its forty-nine ceremonial notifications being insufficient evidence that anybody received a substantive answer.

Clerk's note: This order was entered under two filing codes and counted only once.

ISSUE SIX

JULIA M. LIMBOPEZ

The Doctrine of Substantive Sufficiency

In re the Eighty-Seven-Page Declaration of a Right Which No Person Is Required to Honor

Julia M. Limbopez believed in words. She believed in them so profoundly that she had long suspected the physical universe was a crude preliminary draft which had failed to receive adequate editorial review. An admirable opinion, in her understanding, should not merely resolve a dispute. It should demonstrate by its very length that the author was a person of terrifying education and very limited availability.

The Sixth Door greeted her with an order weighing seventeen pounds.

It was eighty-seven pages long, printed on parchment so expensive that three imps were required to carry it from the printer. Its opening paragraph described family relationships as "constitutive loci of intergenerational flourishing." Its second paragraph quoted fourteen imaginary jurists on the unalienable dignity of affection. The order's closing pronouncement declared that Julia "shall have a full, meaningful, and reasonable opportunity for regular and frequent contact" with a safe, invented member of her family.

Julia beamed.

"An extraordinarily humane and well-reasoned instrument."

"Then go through," said the Jetta's driver.

She approached the door. It did not open.

A small brass keypad demanded a **CONFIRMED PLAN**. Next to the keypad was a button labeled **REQUEST PLAN**, which opened a screen instructing the petitioner to **CONFER IN GOOD FAITH**. The good-faith conference required both adults to agree, and the other adult's response was an automatically generated message saying **WE ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR DESIRE FOR A PLAN**.

"That seems promising," Julia said.

"It is not a plan," the driver answered.

"It is a statement recognizing the value of a plan."

"Yes. And I'm standing next to a locked door."

Miss Quill arrived bearing a supplemental clarification composed of twenty-six footnotes and a separate explanatory appendix concerning the noble history of *reasonableness*.

"The Court has enshrined your right to reasonable opportunity," she said. "Actual arrangements are to be determined by the responsible parties, subject to the order's comprehensive reservation of discretion."

"Which responsible party opens the door?"

"The order has not undertaken to assign that operational detail. To have done so would risk embroiling the Court in petty logistics when higher principles are at stake."

"Then assign it now."

"That may require modification."

"Of the eighty-seven pages?"

"Only the operative provision, which at present contains no specific obligation to be modified."

Behind the door was a scene of uncommon ordinariness: a kitchen table, two mugs, a deck of cards, and a fictional teenager absorbed in learning a complicated new card game. The teenager had invited Julia to join and had left a vacant chair on the near side of the table.

Julia tapped the glass. The teenager looked up and smiled. There was no safety issue in the invented scene. There was no unwillingness. There was only the gap between a ceremonially expansive judgment and an implementation system that required everyone to assume somebody else would act.

"I'll call the responsible party," Julia said.

The call rang through to an automated recording.

"Your desire for contact is acknowledged," it announced. "Consistent with the order's preference for collaborative arrangements, you are invited to propose a mutually acceptable plan. No response to this message shall be construed as agreement, refusal, or proof that the order imposes any specific duty to respond."

Julia proposed Tuesday at six.

Silence.

She proposed Thursday at four.

Silence.

She proposed any mutually convenient hour, indoors or outdoors, with neutral transportation if needed.

Silence.

"The order says messages shall be returned promptly," Julia observed.

"An inspiring aspirational standard," said Quill.

"It says *shall*."

"Indeed. An especially authoritative word. Much beloved. Very expensive to print in italic type. But enforcement would require evidence of an identifiable violation, and the order does not define *promptly* with sufficient precision to remove all conceivable room for disagreement."

"Then no one has to answer?"

"No one has been formally determined not to have to answer. That distinction is the foundation upon which the entirety of our procedural civilization rests."

Billmore rolled through the corridor carrying a portable lectern attached to his bicycle. He had prepared a lecture on **THE HAZARDS OF SPECIFICITY**, offering twelve continuing-education credits and a complimentary laminated card reading **SUBSTANTIALLY SUBSTANTIVE**.

"The beauty of a general right," he explained, "is that everyone may agree upon its importance without enduring the indignity of implementing it. A precise obligation, by contrast, exposes the unfortunate possibility that one might eventually be found not to have performed it."

"And what of the person holding the order?" asked Julia.

"They have received something magnificent: recognition."

"They asked for a visit."

"How mercenary."

He displayed a diagram consisting of three concentric circles. The outer circle read **RIGHTS**. The middle read **REMEDIES**. The center read **WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENS**. The center was empty, and the diagram had received an award for clarity.

Julia returned to the order and searched for enforceable verbs. She found *encouraged*, *expected*, *appropriate*, *reasonable*, *may*, and the magnificent *shall have the opportunity*. In the margin she wrote a new question: **WHO MUST DO WHAT, AND BY WHEN?**

The words looked scandalously small against the acres of judicial prose.

Satan appeared wearing spectacles and carrying a red pen. He turned the order to page eighty-six, where the court had solemnly enjoined every participant to cooperate "in a manner befitting the dignity of the proceedings."

"That," he said, "is a sublime example of institutional composition. It specifies exactly how the proceedings ought to feel and leaves entirely undetermined what anyone must do."

"It wasn't meant to do that," Julia protested.

"Intentions are particularly easy to preserve on parchment. The public generally asks for something more combustible: results."

"But judges cannot arrange every pickup, every telephone call, every family dinner."

"Certainly not. Nor need they. Yet there is a difference between declining to micromanage ordinary life and issuing an order whose practical operation cannot be understood by the people required to live under it."

Julia listened to the sound of cards being shuffled behind the door. The teenager said something cheerful, unheard through the glass, and set one more hand of cards on the empty place.

She imagined the response a litigant might receive after sending the same unanswered scheduling request for months: *The order provides an opportunity.* The applicant's question was not whether the order contained nouns about opportunity. It was whether any person had undertaken the work of arranging one.

"How long must a family litigate the meaning of 'soon'?" she asked.

"Under our current doctrine," Satan replied, "until soon is no longer a recognizable unit of a family life. The remedy then becomes retrospective, which is another department's problem."

Julia took the ninety-page proposed clarification Miss Quill had offered and fed it into the printer backward. The machine made an offended noise and produced a single sheet bearing three numbered paragraphs.

First: Identify which adult must initiate the next scheduling step, the means of communication, and a reasonable timeframe for responding.

Second: Provide a practical mechanism to address disputed compliance, genuine safety concerns, and changed circumstances without forcing the child to serve as the parties' messenger or judge.

Third: Explain what evidence and process a court will use when a clear obligation is alleged to have been ignored; do not mistake the mere presence of an attractive judgment for proof of its implementation.

Miss Quill examined the sheet as though it contained an unlicensed firearm.

"This is very short."

"That is not a defect."

"It contains ordinary verbs."

"Another feature."

"Most troubling of all," the clerk whispered, "it could be understood by a person who has never attended law school."

Julia met Satan's eyes.

"Put it in the ledger."

The Devil accepted the sixth bookmark. On the far side of the door, the imagined teenager finished the game, put away the cards, and safely went about an ordinary evening.

Julia carefully laid the eighty-seven-page opinion on a table. It was elegant; it was sympathetic; it was capable of producing considerable admiration among people who did not have to rely upon it.

She placed the one-page implementation proposal on top of it.

For the first time, the shorter document seemed to weigh more.

INTERLOCUTORY ORDER NO. VI

THE TRIBUNAL RESPECTFULLY OBSERVES that a declaration of principle is not identical to its implementation. Petitioner's request that every human relationship be made subject to a rigid judicial itinerary is **DENIED** as neither possible nor desirable; her proposal for specific, workable duties and a means of testing alleged noncompliance is **PRESERVED**. The original eighty-seven-page document shall be donated to the Infernal Museum of Magnificent But Unopenable Doors.

The Court expresses its appreciation for the beauty of the opinion and declines to mistake beauty for access.

ISSUE SEVEN

CHRISTOPHER C. TABULATE

The Doctrine of Mootness by Maturation

In re the Extinguishment of Childhood Through the Ordinary Passage of Time, with Costs Taxed to the Party Who Noticed

Christopher C. Tabulate was a careful man, given to columns and subcolumns, appendices and indices, and the comforting assumption that any human catastrophe could be rendered administratively manageable by assigning it a stable item number.

When he approached the Seventh Door, a clerk presented him with a receipt bearing precisely six decimal places. The receipt confirmed that his request for ordinary family contact had been received, indexed, archived, and successfully categorized as **PENDING A DETERMINATION OF WHETHER FURTHER DETERMINATION IS REQUIRED**.

"Excellent," said Tabulate. "At last, a properly controlled record."

Beyond the glass, an imaginary child was standing at the entrance to a park on a summer morning, holding a kite with seven brightly colored ribbons. The child had asked to share the afternoon. The invitation was voluntary; the fictional child was safe and remained free to leave at any moment. The only impediment was the adult's procedural access to the moment.

A wall clock read **AGE: SIX**.

"A delightful prospect," Tabulate murmured. "I shall address it in the ordinary course."

He filed a motion requesting a date. The clerk stamped it, scheduled a status conference, and assigned a case management number. The number had sixteen digits, eleven letters, four hyphens, and one decorative semicolon which, if omitted, rendered the entire application void.

The clock advanced to **AGE: EIGHT**.

"That moved rather quickly," Tabulate said.

"Two years is a modest interval when normalized across an institution's historical docket," Miss Quill replied.

He sought expedition. The Court denied it without waiting for a response. Tabulate requested reconsideration. The denial of reconsideration was entered immediately, thereby establishing that the Court was capable of extraordinary speed when declining to accelerate a matter.

The clock advanced to **AGE: ELEVEN**.

The imaginary child had traded the kite for a stack of library books. There was a note on the gate: **CAN YOU COME TO THE SCIENCE FAIR?**

"This is still manageable," Tabulate insisted. "The essential right has been preserved."

Billmore appeared, pedaling a bicycle fitted with a tiny conveyor belt that fed unopened motions into a shredder. The shredded paper emerged as confetti in the shape of judicial laurels.

"Magnificent news," the clown attorney announced. "The case's administrative maturity has improved by thirty percent. Pending motions are no longer measured by age but by density, which allows substantial backlog to be celebrated as an impressive concentration of institutional activity."

Tabulate filed a motion for immediate calendaring. It was assigned a priority code meaning *highly important once all or-*

dinary matters have been completed. Because ordinary matters could never be completed while new ordinary matters continued to arrive, the case was placed in a category known as **INDEFINITELY PRIORITIZED**.

The clock advanced to **AGE: FOURTEEN**.

Through the door appeared an imaginary basketball court. A tall teenager bounced a ball, looked toward the gate, then returned to the game. Tabulate could see that the opportunity had changed. A kite would no longer interest this imagined person. The books had been exchanged for other interests. Time did not merely subtract birthdays; it altered the form of the relationship that might have grown between them.

"I need a hearing now," Tabulate said.

"Your application remains pending."

"If it remains pending, it will become pointless."

"That possibility has been noted for preservation purposes."

"Don't you understand? I won't get this time back."

Miss Quill lifted her eyes from the ledger.

"Sir, this Tribunal operates under a doctrine of nonretroactive temporal conservation. Time which has passed shall not be presumed available for redistribution. It therefore follows that your inability to recover it is not itself a reason to hurry."

"That is insane."

"Objection: inflammatory vocabulary."

The clock advanced to **AGE: SEVENTEEN**.

Tabulate submitted a comprehensive index of lost opportunities. The spreadsheet listed birthdays, ordinary Saturdays, school events, first attempts at driving, a competition, a graduation rehearsal, quiet meals, and the small unremarked conversations through which two people acquire the habit of knowing one another. It contained precisely 1,103 line items.

Billmore admired the spreadsheet and charged for reviewing the column widths.

"The index is thorough," the clown said. "Its only defect is that it does not alter the governing presumption that the proceedings have been entirely proper."

Tabulate went to the clerk's window and presented the table.

"I can demonstrate the dates."

"Excellent. Date evidence is particularly suitable for retrospective explanation."

"I can demonstrate the requests."

"Also excellent."

"I can demonstrate that the requests weren't decided in time."

"A compelling administrative observation."

"Then what more do you need?"

"Proof that the delay affected an outcome which remains available to be affected."

Tabulate stopped breathing for a moment. The sentence was a perfect loop: relief was denied until the opportunity expired, then the expiration was invoked to explain why relief was no longer available.

He had once admired elegant loops. He now understood how easily they became nooses around an issue while leaving the institution's hands entirely clean.

The clock advanced to **AGE: EIGHTEEN**.

A graduation cap appeared on the fictional young person's head. There was a diploma, a crowd, a warm evening. The child had become an adult in the allegory, still safe, independent, and entitled to make every personal choice. The door did not open. Instead, an electronic chime announced:

CONTROVERSY DISMISSED AS MOOT BY MATURATION.

"What?" Tabulate whispered.

"The subject has attained the age at which the particular form of relief originally requested can no longer be imposed," Miss Quill explained. "The Court therefore finds no live controversy warranting further consideration."

"But I filed when there was one!"

"Yes."

"And I begged you to decide it!"

"Repeatedly."

"And the institution waited!"

"In the ordinary course."

"Then the institution can't congratulate itself because the case became impossible to remedy!"

Miss Quill consulted her manual. She looked at the clock, then at the file, then at the note reading **PETITIONER SEEKS APPROPRIATE RELIEF**.

"There appears to be no box for that proposition," she admitted.

Tabulate turned to Satan.

"Undo it," he said.

"I cannot," the Devil answered. "Nor can any court, however splendid its robes. The question is what your institution ought to do *before* that point."

Tabulate sank onto the gallery bench. His impeccable table had measured the loss perfectly and prevented none of it.

For a long time, nobody spoke. Even Billmore ceased counting the seconds, though he continued billing them internally.

At last Tabulate rose, walked to the seventh bookmark, and wrote:

When a child's developmental time makes a requested remedy uniquely time-sensitive, courts should address practicable urgent relief while the controversy is live. A later finding of mootness may accurately describe the loss of jurisdiction or the unavailability of a specific remedy; it should not be treated as an answer to the separate question whether avoidable delay contributed to the loss of that remedy.

Satan read the sentence twice.

"You have not asked me to restore the imaginary childhood."

"I know you can't."

"You have not asked for a personal exception."

"No."

"Then perhaps," the Devil said, "you have finally filed a motion that concerns somebody besides its author."

All seven clock hands stopped moving. The seven doors stood in a row, each displaying one vanished ordinary opportunity. No imagined child was in danger; none had been physically held. Each had safely continued into a life beyond the court's control. The harm demonstrated to the adults was the absence of shared time, a thing the record could name but never manufacture.

The driver stepped from the Jetta and glanced at the clock.

"How many words did it take?" he asked.

Tabulate stared at the seven completed pages in the ledger.

"Far too many," he said.

"And what's the answer?"

Tabulate spoke plainly.

"Decide what can be decided while it can still matter."

A door opened, not to yesterday but to the courtroom beyond. It was time for all seven to hear a final judgment.

INTERLOCUTORY ORDER NO. VII

THE COURT FINDS that a mootness determination may be legally necessary when a requested remedy can no longer be granted, but that mootness is not a congratulatory certificate bestowed upon those who helped time overtake a live controversy. Petitioner's demand to restore the years is **DENIED** for the most unfortunate and least fictional of reasons: no tribunal can do so. His proposed rule concerning time-sensitive adjudication is **PRESERVED FOR IMMEDIATE FINAL CONSIDERATION**.

The word immediate is used here in its ordinary, practical sense, an innovation the clerk has reluctantly approved.

EPILOGUE

THE JUDGMENT THE ROBES COULD NOT WEAR

Before the Supreme Infernal Tribunal, Sitting for Once on a Matter That Remained Live

Satan summoned the seven Injustices to a single bench. It was a long bench, a beautifully polished bench, an unnecessarily high bench. Upon its face had been engraved a motto formerly adopted by the learned profession with great enthusiasm:

LET JUSTICE BE DONE, PROVIDED ITS ADMINISTRATION DOES NOT REQUIRE ANYTHING INCONVENIENT.

He handed them seven pens and one sheet of paper.

"You have each demanded an exception," the Devil said. "You have now each proposed a rule intended to apply beyond your own inconvenience. The distinction is significant. Many petitioners discover urgency only when the clock is theirs."

Valeria Stanstill stood. "We request a timely hearing on disappearing opportunities."

Andrew M. Meander added, "A workable method of obtaining the record needed to challenge what was found."

Catharine R. Concurrence: "A serious examination of the effects of error, not merely a footnote acknowledging it."

Rick E. Lawrencious: "Actual, child-centered facilitation rather than perpetual ceremonial recognition of a relationship."

Wayne R. Delayglas: "A filing process that assists correction instead of cultivating it as an industry."

Julia M. Limbopez: "Terms which identify practical responsibilities when practical responsibilities are required."

Christopher C. Tabulate: "And decisions made while decisions can still matter."

Satan nodded.

"Then sign the order."

Billmore exploded from a side chamber upon his bicycle, a great tail of invoices streaming behind him like a lawyer's unfortunate wedding veil.

"OBJECTION!" he roared. "This proposed disposition threatens to replace the majesty of professional self-approval with the vulgar measurement of results! It would require the bench to distinguish between a person who has been heard and one who has merely been given a receipt!"

The Devil looked down at his most faithful clown.

"Counsel," he said, "what relief do you request?"

"An injunction prohibiting consequences from interfering with our superior understanding of principle."

"Denied."

"Without a hearing?"

"Counsel, this is a hearing. I realize you may be unfamiliar with the experience."

Billmore stumbled. His bicycle fell over. The bells on its handlebars rang out a magnificent two-note alarm: **FILED! DENIED!**

The seven signed.

It was not a judgment in any real court. It did not reverse a real order, establish a real legal rule, or restore a minute to any real family. It was a fictional instrument of public criticism: a promise made by imaginary officeholders at the conclusion of an infernal allegory, and therefore capable of accomplishing

no more in the real world than literature ever can unless people choose to respond to what it exposes.

Satan held the paper above his head. Nothing caught fire. No angel sang. The building did not collapse from the shock of a modest act of accountability.

Miss Quill approached the bench carrying a stamp. She hesitated, then turned it over and used the unmarked side to press the seven signatures flat.

"What happens now?" she asked.

"Now," said Satan, "the passengers go home."

"But the doors to the past—"

"Remain closed. That was always the point."

Outside, the Jetta's engine sounded once more. The driver stood beside its black fender, checking the straps on a roof rack that still held far too much paper.

The seven approached him without their ceremonial headwear. They looked less distinguished, and a little more human.

"Will you drive us?" asked Stanstill.

"Sure," said the driver. "But this time, nobody gets to pretend the car moved just because somebody filed a motion saying it should."

The Devil stepped into the doorway of the courthouse, his robe falling to the floor behind him.

"One final question," he called. "Who owns the seats?"

The seven looked at one another.

Then, without Latin, footnotes, or a solitary procedural reservation, they answered together.

"The people."

The Jetta drove out of Hell. Billmore followed on his bicycle, insisting that the absence of a billable catastrophe was

itself an extraordinary catastrophe for which somebody ought to compensate him.

In the rearview mirror, the Infernal Law Court continued to glow. Its doors were still open to filing. For the first time, they had begun to open to the possibility of answering.

One sheet of paper lay on the dashboard. It contained no ornamental preamble, no claim to extraordinary wisdom, and no guarantee that people would suddenly behave better.

It simply read:

THE PROCEDURAL ABSURDITY IS ANTIQUATED. THE HARM IS REAL.

And below it, in the driver's ordinary handwriting:

STOP HARMING KIDS. ESPECIALLY MINE.

THE FINAL, MOST POMPOUSLY EXPRESSED ORDER

IN RE SEVEN DISTINGUISHED REQUESTS FOR SPECIAL TREATMENT, LATER AMENDED TO SEEK THE MODEST APPLICATION OF ORDINARY JUSTICE TO EVERYONE

Upon receipt of the seven opinions in their final, reluctantly comprehensible form, and after consideration of the intolerably clear record that time may elapse notwithstanding the Court's reluctance to acknowledge its passing, the Tribunal hereby declares:

That institutional dignity is not self-proving; that longevity is not a substitute for legitimacy; that a filing is not a hearing; that a hearing is not necessarily a remedy; that a remedy in

theory must not be mistaken for a remedy in practice; and that no judicial office shall acquire additional moral weight merely by elevating its chair.

The seven petitions for individually privileged treatment are **DENIED**. The seven proposed standards for the examination and correction of procedural failure are **REFERRED TO THE PEOPLE**, in whom any legitimate reform must ultimately find its lawful and accountable means.

The Court reserves no jurisdiction over lost childhoods, for no such jurisdiction has ever existed.

SO ORDERED. THIS TIME, THE WORDS ARE EXPECTED TO MEAN SOMETHING.

APPENDIX

A LEXICON OF EXTRAORDINARY JURISPRUDENTIAL NONSENSE

Substantially substantive antiquity. The proposition that a sufficiently old procedural habit deserves preservation even when its original rationale has vanished and its consequences have become indefensible.

Perpetual pendency. The administrative conversion of a disappearing opportunity into an indefinitely renewable docket item.

Transcriptual presumption. The fictitious convenience of assuming an inaccessible record supports the outcome being challenged without examining whether a workable means of

access exists. This is a satirical label, not a statement of the full law on appellate records.

Harmless chronological error. A real doctrine of harmless error transformed by Hell into a refusal to examine the effects of a disputed factual timeline.

Protective deprivation. A fabricated administrative theory under which the protection of a relationship is celebrated as the reason no one need facilitate it.

Administrative perfection. The infernal definition of success under which every procedural interaction is counted, even when none advances the underlying request.

Substantive sufficiency. The worship of an elegant declaration that fails to identify who must act when a practical obligation is needed.

Mootness by maturation. A satirical label for treating the expiration of childhood as a procedural conclusion, while leaving the consequences of delay unexamined.

The Procedural Shoehorn. The fictional implement employed to fit any living fact into a preexisting form, regardless of the damage done to the fact.

Billmore's Rule of Professional Compensation. Every inconvenience shall become billable upon its recognition by a person possessing a business card with "Esquire" printed in unnecessary capitals.

Res ipsa bureaucratica. The bureaucracy speaks for itself, generally in the passive voice, to a mailbox that does not accept replies.

SOURCE-DISTINCTION AND PUBLICATION NOTE

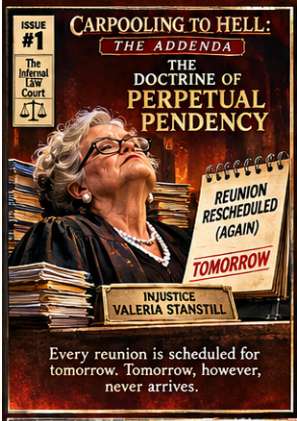
This book is an **original fictional anthology**. Its proceedings, direct quotations, invented rules, fictional relatives, and

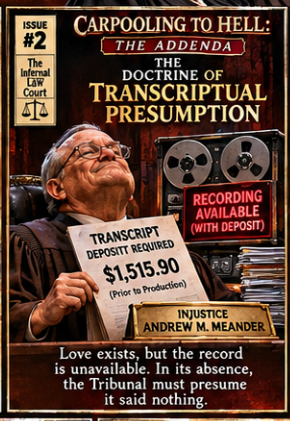
mock orders are not evidence of misconduct by real public officials. The characterization of institutional practices is literary commentary. Specific events in real disputes, including judicial findings adverse to a litigant, should be evaluated using original court decisions, filings, transcripts, emails, and applicable law, not a satirical allegory. Nothing in the narrative authorizes unlawful conduct or assumes that a child's wishes may be disregarded.

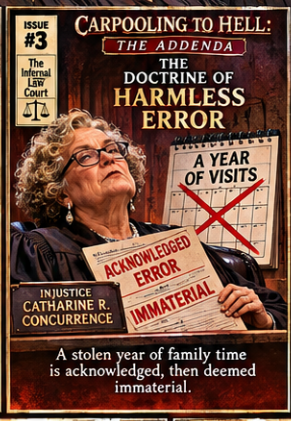
The preceding seven stories are a fictional examination of what it would mean to apply procedural standards reciprocally. Readers may disagree with the criticism. The invitation to demand transparent reasoning, workable remedies, and careful attention to children and families remains.

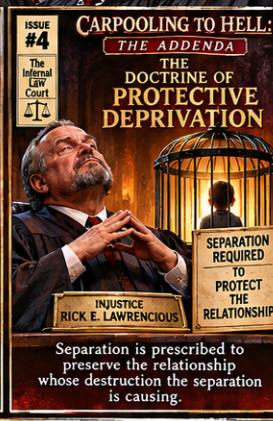
END OF THE SEVEN-PART MINISERIES.


CARPOOLING TO HELL:
THE ADDENDA
THE SEVEN INJUSTICES
A SEVEN-ISSUE SATIRICAL MINISERIES
THE INFERNAL LAW COURT OF RECIPROCAL JURISPRUDENCE

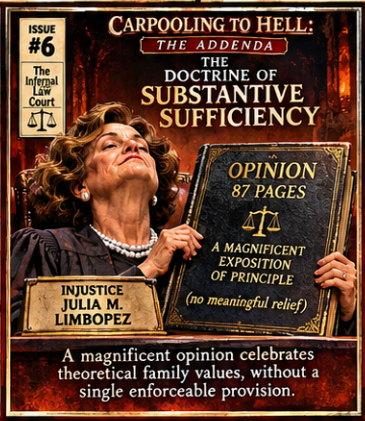

ISSUE #1
The Infernal Law Court
CARPOOLING TO HELL:
THE ADDENDA
THE DOCTRINE OF
PERPETUAL PENDENCY
REUNION RESCHEDULED (AGAIN)
TOMORROW
INJUSTICE VALERIA STANSTILL
Every reunion is scheduled for tomorrow. Tomorrow, however, never arrives.

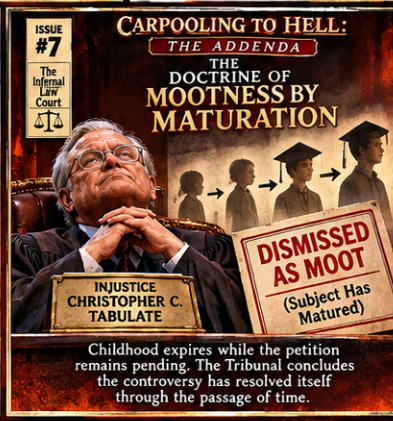

ISSUE #2
The Infernal Law Court
CARPOOLING TO HELL:
THE ADDENDA
THE DOCTRINE OF
TRANSCRIPTUAL PRESUMPTION
RECORDING AVAILABLE (WITH DEPOSIT)
TRANSCRIPT DEPOSITT REQUIRED
$1,515.90
(Prior to Production)
INJUSTICE ANDREW M. MEANDER
Love exists, but the record is unavailable. In its absence, the Tribunal must presume it said nothing.


ISSUE #3
The Infernal Law Court
CARPOOLING TO HELL:
THE ADDENDA
THE DOCTRINE OF
HARMLESS ERROR
A YEAR OF VISITS
ACKNOWLEDGED ERROR
IMMATERIAL
INJUSTICE CATHARINE R. CONCURRENCE
A stolen year of family time is acknowledged, then deemed immaterial.


ISSUE #4
The Infernal Law Court
CARPOOLING TO HELL:
THE ADDENDA
THE DOCTRINE OF
PROTECTIVE DEPRIVATION
SEPARATION REQUIRED TO PROTECT THE RELATIONSHIP
INJUSTICE RICK E. LAWRENCIOUS
Separation is prescribed to preserve the relationship whose destruction the separation is causing.


ISSUE #5
The Infernal Law Court
CARPOOLING TO HELL:
THE ADDENDA
THE DOCTRINE OF
ADMINISTRATIVE PERFECTION
REJECTED
REJECTED (Improper Format)
REJECTED (Missing Attachment)
REJECTED (Other Defect)
SUBMISSION COMPLETE (AND STILL DENIED)
INJUSTICE WAYNE R. DELAYGLAS
Every request is rejected. Every rejection is celebrated.


ISSUE #6
The Infernal Law Court
CARPOOLING TO HELL:
THE ADDENDA
THE DOCTRINE OF
SUBSTANTIVE SUFFICIENCY
OPINION
87 PAGES
A MAGNIFICENT EXPOSITION OF PRINCIPLE
(no meaningful relief)
INJUSTICE JULIA M. LIMBOPEZ
A magnificent opinion celebrates theoretical family values, without a single enforceable provision.


ISSUE #7
The Infernal Law Court
CARPOOLING TO HELL:
THE ADDENDA
THE DOCTRINE OF
MOOTNESS BY MATURATION
DISMISSED AS MOOT
(Subject Has Matured)
INJUSTICE CHRISTOPHER C. TABULATE
Childhood expires while the petition remains pending. The Tribunal concludes the controversy has resolved itself through the passage of time.


THE SEVEN INJUSTICES
AN ANTHOLOGY OF SUBSTANTIALLY SUBSTANTIVE ANTIQUITY
SEVEN PROCEEDINGS. SEVEN INJUSTICES. THEIR OWN DOCTRINES APPLIED TO THEM.
AT LAST, THE STANDARD OF REVIEW IS RECIPROCAL.