

SHOES MAKE THE MAN

HAROLD A. DAVIS

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JOE McCARTHY knew that he was too good-natured. He had always been that way. He blamed it on his size. Even when he'd been a kid, he'd been extra large for his age. Not being of the bullying type, he'd learned to shrug and smile when youths smaller than himself tried to get tough. He'd never been able to convince himself that it was sporting to hit an opponent he knew he could lick with one hand tied behind his back.

It had been just as bad when he was grown. The school-day-nickname of Happy had seemed to fit him even more than before. Huge, weighing almost two hundred and fifty pounds that was all muscle, he had gone cheerfully on his way, determined to achieve his one ambition.

But now, for probably the first time in his life, he wasn't smiling. He swung out of city hall, limping just a trifle—in his good-natured way, he had permitted a clerk to sell him a pair of shoes that were too small—his round moonlike features set into as close an imitation to a scowl as he could manage.

A small man, head down to escape the slight rain that was falling, crashed into him.

Automatically, Joe McCarthy stepped back and smiled. "Pardon me," he grinned.

The small man looked up, a curse on his lips. The curse died, as he saw Joe McCarthy's size. He scuttled on swiftly.

The scowl returned to Joe McCarthy's round features. There it was again, the habit of a lifetime, a habit he couldn't seem to break. Even when the other fellow was in the wrong, he couldn't get mad and tear into him like most people would. No, he had to back up and apologize.

Joe McCarthy's big ears reddened slightly; doggedly he limped on.

That habit of his, that habit of always smiling, of never getting mad, was going to cost him the one job he had ever wanted—was going to balk an ambition he had since he was ten.

His lips tightened a moment, only to relax again as he thought how much Police Commissioner Pike had resembled a bantam rooster in strutting about his office. The smile faded and the red spread from his ears to his moonlike face, as he recalled Commissioner Pike's words. The commissioner had put it bluntly, and the words he'd used had ended hope for Joe McCarthy.

"I like you, Joe. Everyone likes you," Commissioner Pike had rasped. "But that's just the trouble. You've never gotten mad in your life. You never will. And cops in this town have got to be hard. You're not hard. You're too good-humored to ever be a cop under me."

It wasn't fair, Joe McCarthy reflected with as much bitterness as he could muster. The rain fell unheeded in his face. He was unconscious of the night sounds around him.

How did commissioner Pike know he wouldn't make a good cop? The commissioner had admitted Joe had been the most promising rookie ever to go through the police school.

"But training and technical knowledge don't count at all if you won't get tough once in a while," Pike had thundered. "It takes tough cops to deal with killers and dope smugglers like Zeke Francisco. But if Zeke ever pulled a gun on you, you'd probably just smile and apologize."

Joe McCarthy muttered to himself. Perhaps the commissioner was right. He might smile and apologize if some hood pulled a gun, but it wouldn't be because he was afraid or anything like that. It would be because he would feel sorry that he'd have to hurt the guy. And especially for Zeke. He'd known Zeke all his life.

"Show me just once that you are hard, that you can get tough, and I'll put you at the head of the eligibility list," had been Pike's parting shot. "Go get Zeke Francisco, for example, and I'll put you in uniform tomorrow. But until you get over being quite so good-natured, I'd see that you never get on the cops."

Joe McCarthy's huge, hammerlike fists closed into hard knuckles. Those knuckles could knock Zeke Francisco end for end. Joe knew it. But that wouldn't be fair either. Zeke was a little guy.

And where did the commissioner get off telling him to try to get something on Zeke? Everyone on the force

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had tried it in vain, hadn't they?

Zeke was smart. Naturally he'd be able to outwit a good-natured giant who couldn't even realize an ambition to be a policeman.

RAIN had made the sidewalk slippery. Joe's feet almost went out from under him as he started to step from the curb. A little toe barked against the hard pavement.

For a moment Joe McCarthy thought a red-hot iron had been placed against that foot. A terrific sheet of pain seemed to flash through his body, to hit him so hard that it left him breathless.

He'd hit a corn, not an insignificant, futile little corn, but one of the soft type, big enough to go with his huge feet.

There was just an instant when Joe McCarthy thought he was going to get mad for once, just a flash when he wished he could get his gigantic hands on the clerk who had sold him shoes too small for him.

Then, slowly, his big mouth split in a wry grin. The shoe clerk had been such a little fellow, and had been so obviously trying hard to please. It had seemed a small, good-natured act to buy the shoes, even when it had been apparent that they were too tight.

But maybe it wasn't right to be good-natured, maybe Police Commissioner Pike had been right in saying everyone took advantage of a big, good-humored giant.

A slow, sullen anger started to burn inside Joe McCarthy's stevedore-sized chest. He looked around him quickly.

Without surprise, he realized that he'd walked from the business district, that unconsciously he'd been moving toward the apartment house where Zeke Francisco had his headquarters. Ever since he'd left city hall, he'd known he would have to go talk to Zeke, have to see if he could show that he could be tough. But he'd known Zeke ever since the other had been a skinny kid; he couldn't be hard with him.

He started forward rapidly. Once more his feet slipped, again he hit that aching corn.

A whole torrent of words came from Joe McCarthy's lips, words that he didn't even remember that he knew.

A shoe clerk would take advantage of him, would he? Zeke Francisco was a tough guy was he?

Giant fists reached down, yanked the offending shoes from his feet, hurled them over a nearby fence. In his stocking feet, Joe McCarthy plunged onward.

Afterward, Joe knew that it was all a mistake, that he just couldn't keep on being mad at anyone. He'd known that before. It had just slipped his mind for a moment.

Once the offending shoes were off, his feet felt easier. The cold rain eased the aching sore of that corn. He hadn't walked a block before he was feeling sheepish.

When he was eighteen, a shrewd manager had seen him sparring with some friends. That manager had tried to make a fighter out of him, had assured him that with his build and speed, he could become a world's champion.

Joe had learned to box, had learned all the tricks of the ring. But the manager had gotten him only one fight.

"You ain't got kilter instinct," he had raged, after Joe had won a scrap on points, without letting himself get hit. But he should have put the opponent away in the first round.

The manager was right, Joe agreed dolefully. He didn't have the killer instinct. He never would have it. Commissioner Pike was right, too. He'd never make a cop. It was true that cops had to be tough once in a while.

Someone should get tough with Zeke Francisco, too. Joe knew that. Everyone, it seemed, knew that Zeke was bringing dope over the border, somehow, and that some of that dope was going to school kids. And that was bad!

But although everyone knew all about Zeke, no one had ever been able to prove it. Zeke's apartment had been raided time after time. His automobile had been stopped at the border, had almost been taken apart several times. Zeke, himself, had been stripped to the skin in futile searches.

Always, it had ended with Zeke giving a Bronx cheer to the customs officials and to the cops. He always would—

A CAR swished by, throwing rain and mud over Joe McCarthy's big form. He looked up quickly, then wished at once that he was some place else.

The car had braked to a halt, directly in front of an ornate apartment house. Three men were getting out of it, three nattily dressed men, with derby hats set jauntily on their heads. One of the men was laughing.

"There he is. There's Happy McCarthy," the man jeered.

Joe McCarthy groaned. It was Zeke Francisco, naturally. Zeke had always tried to make life miserable for

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him. Zeke who, as a kid, had known he could hit Joe McCarthy in safety, because Joe wouldn't hit back. Zeke who, now that he was grown, still knew he could sneer and insult in safety.

For just an instant, Joe was tempted to turn and walk the other way. Then his head came up, his eyes narrowed slightly.

"Old Happy McCarthy, the boy who never had a fight," Zeke Francisco leered. "Imagine Bantam Pike sending you out to get something on me."

Without conscious motion, Joe McCarthy knew he was walking forward. His ears were ringing slightly. Zeke's words showed that he already knew of Joe's conversation with Commissioner Pike, showed that there must be a leak somewhere in the police department.

Joe was proud of that police department, even if he couldn't be a member. For there to be a leak there—

Zeke Francisco stuck his jaw forward. "Hit me, Joe," he invited smoothly.

Joe McCarthy stopped. His big shoulders rose and fell. Behind Zeke, he could see the other two men grinning wisely, amused at a picture of a giant who wouldn't fight. Joe knew that he was flushing, knew that he should do something, but he couldn't. Habit of a lifetime held him back.

Zeke Francisco knew that also. The little man was smiling broadly.

"I always could walk over this guy," he boasted. He stepped forward. He stepped directly on Joe McCarthy's bare, unprotected corn.

Joe McCarthy thought he had known how a corn could pain when he'd barked his foot against a curb a few minutes earlier. Now he knew he was mistaken.

He had never experienced such a flaming, red agony in his life before. A sheet of fire seemed to soar into his brain and explode.

Joe McCarthy did not know that his face changed then, that he no longer looked like a good-natured giant. He couldn't know just how frightening it was to see round, good-humored features turn into a mask of fury, while a huge, two hundred-and-fifty-pound form leaned forward.

Zeke Francisco gave a little squeal and tried to jump back. A gun dashed to his hand. Zeke's two companions turned pale; they also went for their guns.

Sight of those guns changed something in Joe McCarthy then. He had never looked into the business end of a pistol before. Sight of Zeke Francisco's face even more than the sight of the guns changed him.

Zeke was scared, and a scared rat turns killer. He was ready for murder.

Joe McCarthy forgot all about knowing Zeke as a kid, forgot that the other was small. He remembered only that Zeke was a criminal, that everyone knew he was responsible for making dope addicts out of children. In that moment, Joe became a cop.

And for the first time in his twenty-two years, Joe McCarthy felt the odds were about even, that it might be all right to fight.

A strange, unrecognized bellow came from him. He leaped forward, huge arms swinging.

Blam!

Zeke Francisco fired, even as Joe McCarthy leaped. The bullet caught the young giant through one shoulder. Compared with the pain of his tortured corn, he didn't even feel it.

One huge hand went up, came down directly on top of Zeke Francisco's derby. The derby smashed down over his face, but Zeke didn't know that. He went down unconscious.

Zeke's two companions were firing also, but they had been knocked close together; they were firing wildly. Even so, hot lead creased Joe McCarthy's ribs, tore a gaping wound in his scalp.

Twice more his huge arm lifted and fell. Each time it came down on a derby.

Then there was strange silence. Joe McCarthy was wavering on his feet, but sprawled around him were the limp figures of Zeke Francisco and his two pals. Their smashed derbies gave them a queer bedraggled look.

For a moment more Joe McCarthy swayed aimlessly; then he also went down.

IT WAS pleasant in the hospital. Joe found himself smiling almost as soon as he recovered his senses~

A small, bantamlike man beside him smiled back. Joe thought that rather strange. Police Commissioner Pike had never smiled at him before.

"You did it, Joe. You did it!" Pike exclaimed jubilantly. "You not only showed you could get tough, but you got the goods on Zeke Francisco and his pals as well. Who would have thought of looking for false tops in derby

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hats as hiding places for dope."

Joe McCarthy's big mouth opened, then closed. There were times when it wasn't wise to talk too much. He hadn't thought of those derbies as hiding places for dope either.

"An'...an' I can be a cop now ?" he asked at last.

Commissioner Pike's smile was larger. "Tomorrow," he promised. "And now is there anything I can do for you before I go away and let you sleep?"

Joe McCarthy's moon-round face beamed. He was still good-natured. He knew he always would be. But he knew now, also, that there were times when a man had to get tough. And he wouldn't forget that, or he wouldn't if—

"Yes, commissioner," he said happily, "If it isn't too much trouble, I...I lost a pair of shoes near the corner where Zeke lives. If...if it isn't too much trouble, I'd like to have someone get those shoes back for me."

Clothes might make some men, but Joe McCarthy knew that for him—shoes, too tight shoes—would be sufficient.

THE END.