

THE DAY OF JUDGEMENT

Vortex

"Wake up, Jan. There's someone knocking on the front door."

"My dear woman, what are you talking about?"

"There's someone thumping on the front door. Listen."

"I do believe you are right. I wonder who it is."

"It sounds aggressive to me."

"Let me go and see. A person who was really aggressive wouldn't knock on the door at all."

"I don't think you should go. Who knows what nut-case may wish to settle some score with a judge?"

"I've been a judge for six years and no-one has ever molested or threatened me so far, Elize. I feel I can safely go."

"I hope you're right. Do be careful. Take that hockey-stick behind the cupboard. I'll bring up the rear."

"That's good of you, my dear."

Jan walked cautiously into the hall. The banging on the door had ceased. Then it started again.

"Who is that there? What do you want, at this hour of the morning?"

"We are the police."

"The police?"

"Yes."

"Why on earth are you knocking on my door at this hour? Do you realise that it is a judge that you are disturbing in this stupid, unseemly manner?"

"Yes sir: we know that. Could you please open the door — sir?"

Jan walked to the door, and pulled it open angrily.

"You **knew** I was a judge! Well, that makes your behaviour all the more disgusting, all the more intolerable. Are you mad? One doesn't bang on people's doors at 4 a.m., you know: it just isn't done. And I'm afraid to say that it is **especially** not done as far as judges are concerned. What is your name?"

"My name is Captain Snyman, sir, and I am acting on instructions that have come straight from the Minister of Justice and Police."

"Oh they have, have they? And what fine instructions are these, pray?"

"Did you not read yesterday's papers, sir?"

"No, as a matter of fact I didn't. I spent half the day at an important engagement at the club."

By now Elize was standing next to him, white with astonishment and anger.

"In answer to a challenge from a diplomat from overseas, the Minister had said, last week in Parliament,

that the judges of the South African courts lived under exactly the same laws and regulations as all the people who appeared before them. Then two days ago, in response to a further challenge from overseas, the Minister angrily promised to make sure that judges receive no preferential treatment of any kind whatsoever. And he ordered local police authorities to work out the implications of his instruction."

"You must be joking."

"I assure you I am not, sir."

"Anyhow, what 'preferential treatment' do I receive?"

"Colonel de Villiers has instructed me to say this: Judge Smithson does not live under the same laws as black citizens."

"Well, who said I did?"

"Nobody, sir. But the Minister has now said that you must. That is why I have knocked on your door at this hour."

"This is ridiculous."

Elize could contain her fury no longer:

"I've never heard anything so absurd. What is this — an April Fool's trick? As a person not directly involved, I must say I am appalled and very angry."

"But madam, you are involved. It is you that we have come about." He then turned, and beckoned three policemen, who had been hidden in the darkness, to come into the light. They took hold of Mrs Smithson. "Me? This gets crazier and crazier."

"Snyman, please stop this nonsense. Tell your men to take their hands off my wife. My God this scene is assuming the proportions of a sick nightmare. What do you think you are up to?"

"Colonel de Villiers has looked into Mrs Smithson's papers, and he finds that she comes from a farm in the Northern Transvaal."

"Well, what's significant about that?"

"And she has lived in this city for less than ten years."

"And so?"

"So she has no right to remain in the town, and will have to go back to the northern Transvaal."

"You must be out of your mind. And when in your opinion must she depart on this charming little journey?"

"Now sir. We must take her to the van now."

"What you are suggesting is totally barbaric and uncivilized."

"You have just repeated, Judge, the very words of the foreign diplomat's which so angered our Minister."