

NIGHT COURT.

By James Collins.

Ace and Mickey, two 16-year-old Bronx gang members, were having a very bad day. The local police knew them and they were often harassed. Today they completed booking and fingerprinting and were sitting in a holding cell in the 44th precinct. The bad news was the charge was singing in the streets. This ludicrous charge plus their age meant they were in for much worse inside the New York City prison system. Ace had been through the system and was frantically looking for an angle. Mickey was scared to death and shaking.

A prison van transported prisoners from the individual precincts to Night Court in Manhattan. The 44th was the first pickup in the Bronx and then the van went to each of the other 10 precincts in turn. As they sat handcuffed in the van, it appeared they were the only ones from the 44th. Ace had an idea and told Mickey, "Just do what I do and follow my lead, scowl at everybody and look tough and mean."

"Okay, you're in charge. I won't say a word."

At the next precinct, the pickup collected three drunks who staggered into the van. They spotted the two young guys in the back of the van and asked, "What are you in for?"

Ace scowled at them and in a threatening voice growled, "They claim we killed a cop. We didn't do anything. The knife wasn't even ours." Silence gripped the space and the three drunks moved to the front of the van and didn't look at them again.

At the next pickup five bleeding thugs elbowed each other as they forced their way into the space.

"Be careful the two killers in the back wasted a cop tonight and it was very gruesome. They used big knives." Now everyone was crowded together in the front of the van, while Ace and Mickey had a large space around them as if they had the plague.

When the van pulled into the basement of Night Court on Center Street, the front of the van was jammed while the back seemed spacious. Ace held Mickey back as the police emptied the van so that they would be the last to leave. In this way all those collected in the Bronx went into the big holding cell first and told the miscreants from Manhattan, Brooklyn and Queens that two cop killers were in their midst. All the time in the main holding cell, Ace and Mickey scowled at everyone while everyone smiled at them to stay on their good side. Nobody wanted to mess with cop killers.

Night court started about 10 o'clock and all those arrested throughout the five boroughs sat in multiple rows in front of the judge who would be hearing all the cases.

The New York City police focus on various criminal disciplines every day. By observing the lineup in night court, you can tell which group had their attention that day. Prostitutes, gamblers, protesters, dope dealers, pimps, bunko artists and pickpockets each had their special day. Today focused on stickups, assaults and bank robbers. Everything else was minor in comparison.

Case-by-case, the court attendant identified the docket number, identified the miscreants and specified the charges. The judge assigned serious cases to regular court and decided how large the bail was. The lawyers and bail bondsmen all fidgeted at the defense tables. Some looked bored some appeared frustrated and all were aggravated. In the prisoner bay, Ace and Mickey still scowled at everyone; the seats on either side of both were empty, and everyone around them still smiled at them.

Tonight the aggravated judge charged high bail for relatively simple crimes. However, the list of crimes continued to grow, in both numbers and severity. All the miscreants were aware this was not to be a good night.

40 min. into the festivities, the attendant called a docket number for an arrest in the 44th precinct in the Bronx. Ace and Mickey paled. The attendant called out their names. They rose and walked to the defense table and all the rest of the miscreants leaned forward to find out what was going to happen to the killers. Then the attendant read the charges.

SINGING IN THE STREETS — — MISDEMEANOR

Howls and screams of indignation from the criminal Bay tossed the court into an uproar. The judge was pounding his gavel on the desk and shouting for order or he would have everybody locked up for a week.

Eventually, the hubbub quieted down and the judge passed his verdict.

"We are sitting here tonight with dozens and dozens of serious cases and you bring us two teenagers for singing in the streets. I want to see the police officer who locked them up at the end of court in my chambers. Case dismissed.

Ace and Mickey literally ran down the aisle, racing to the doors at the back of the courtroom, which would lead them to the subway. Now they were smiling and laughing and all the prisoners were scowling, cursing, and hollering hoping they could get their hands on them. It turned out not to be such a bad day after all.

THE END