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*A police drama
in three acts*



Here is a true-life suspense drama in three acts:

ACT ONE: It's a cold, gray day in January. About 100 angry people have gathered at 18th and Ashland. They are going to have a protest march.

Most are in their 20s, wearing the mismatched and scruffy clothing of the counter-culture. They are members of protest groups left over from the antiwar days. They'll be protesting something until they are 70. Some of them are very tough.

This time they are protesting police brutality. They say a friend was roughed up.

The police are at 18th and Ashland, and before the march begins the rules are spelled out by a police lieutenant with a bullhorn: The marchers must stay on the sidewalk, can't go in the streets, and must remain orderly.

The march begins but it doesn't stay peaceful. How the brawl starts isn't clear, but suddenly punches are being thrown, there's a tangle of arms and legs, people are falling down.

Somebody slams a police lieutenant on the head with his bullhorn. He goes down, blood gushing from a deep cut in his scalp. Another policeman is whacked by someone swinging a board.

It's a lively fight while it lasts, and the police get the worst of it. Eight cops, including a policewoman, end up in a hospital emergency room to get their cuts, bruises and welts treated.

And seven of the angry marchers are dragged into paddy wagons and hustled to the police station, where assault charges are placed against them. They put up bond and go home. The next stop will be court.

ACT TWO: Now it is a pleasant spring day in April. But the mood is grim in the courtroom of Judge Robert Sulski.

A preliminary hearing is being held to determine whether the seven protesters should stand trial for beating hell out of those cops.

Cop after cop takes the witness stand to tell what happened and point a finger at the defendants.

Here is some of the testimony:

Q—Officer, state your name and assignment.

A—Officer Arbuthnot, 12th District.

Q—Calling your attention to the 25th of January, 1975, at about 1:45 in the afternoon, were you on duty at the time?

A—Yes, I was.

Q—Did you have occasion to be in the vicinity of 18th and Ashland, in the City of Chicago?

A—Yes, I did.

Q—What, if anything, happened while you were at that location?

A—An incident where a fight broke out between the demonstrators and the police officers that were there.

Q—Did you see anyone on that date during that incident that you now see in court today?

A—Yes.

Q—Will you point them out, please.

A—There (pointing).

Q—Indicating for the record the defendant, Mr. Robert Oxley?

A—Yes.

Q — What, if anything, did you see Mr. Oxley do?

A — He had a wooden object in his hand when I first observed him. And he struck Sgt. Valle once that I see and then . . .

Q — Where did he strike Sgt. Valle, if you know?

A — I couldn't see. There was a lot of people around him and he was one that was involved.

Q — What else did you see Oxley do, if anything?

A — Well, he was kicking and punching Sgt. Valle and Lt. Brady, and then he jumped on the back of my partner.

Q — Was this man, Mr. Oxley, subsequently placed under arrest?

A — Yes, he was.

At the end of the hearing, Judge Sulski said: "Finding of probable cause on all charges." They would have to stand trial.

ACT THREE: This scene will be played out this very day. It will probably be over by the time you read this.

A prosecutor from the state's attorney's office will step up before a judge and announce that all the charges are being dropped against all of the people accused of beating the cops.

He doesn't want to drop them; he is sure he has a strong case. But he has no choice. He can't win.

Why? Remember that fellow Robert Oxley, from Act II? The one who was whacking a cop with a board, and kicking and punching and jumping on the backs of cops? That violent fellow identified in open court?

WELL, IT TURNS OUT THAT OXLEY is a police spy. He works for the police department.

He went through the police academy, and while he was waiting to go on the force as a regular cop, he infiltrated the protest group to spy on it.

That's what he was doing on the day when he is accused of knocking cops all over 18th and Ashland.

Just why he got so carried away with his undercover role isn't known. The police intelligence unit doesn't talk about such things. Maybe he was trying to provoke the brawl and cause arrests. Such things have happened.

He obviously wasn't supposed to get arrested and charged with a felony. But the cops who pinched him didn't know he was one of their own.

AND SO THE POLICE DEPARTMENT recently made a sheepish request of the state's attorney's office: Please drop the charges against Oxley; he's one of our undercover snoops.

The problem is, if the charges against Oxley are dropped, then the charges against the genuine protesters must be dropped, too. Once it came out that he worked for the police department, the entire case would collapse.

So everybody will walk out free. Oxley the spy and the people he infiltrated. Another triumph for Mitchell Ware, the politician-cop who is in charge of the mayor's spy squad.

In the beginning, I said this was a real-life drama. On second thought, I think it is a comedy.