

From Champ To Chump

by

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*Ozone Park, Queens NY, 1975,* I kneeled on the punk's head wishing a passerby to call it in. Off duty and out here to get laid; I didn't have hand cuffs. My prisoner's car, a rusty Cadillac, was nose in into the disputed parking space. The victim leaned against his truck; his eyes were glassy and his arm dangled impossibly with the hand facing outward. The hash marks on his face where the tire iron had struck swelled red.

Three green and white patrol units screamed onto scene with lights and sirens. Holding my badge high I shouted, "Brown, Four-Five. Brown. Four-Five."

Patrolmen cuffed the assailant and pulled him to his feet. He was Italian, young and dirty and his hair was uncut and greasy. His over coat was flea bitten; his necktie out of date. Dapper is not what you would call this guy.

"He's a wannabe mob guy," said one uniform.

"That's right, ain't it, John?" asked the other of the punk.

“Fuck your mother,” Wannabe John spewed at me.

I blew off the steam of having my hot date ruined by taking John’s slimy hair in hand and slamming his face repeatedly into the hood of the patrol unit. The blues pulled me away. Blood smeared all over the guinea’s face and drained down to his dirty white shirt.

“Tough guy with my hands cuffed,” he gurgled.

“Take ‘em off. I’ll put you down again.”

“Fuck your mother and your sister. I’ll see you again.”

I hooked a right hand into Wannabe John’s liver. I heard a pop. Then I stuck his head into the side window of the patrol unit. I heard a whimper. The mook slumped to the ground in a pile and I took the pose Muhammad Ali showed over Sonny Liston in Lewiston, Maine in ‘64. I was the champ.

At the One-Oh-Two precinct I got back slaps from every man. Wannabe John was a notorious low life felon in the making; he was on every detective’s radar. A sergeant handed me a two dollar cigar. A flask came out and went around. I regaled the room with the tale of the take down.

At Our Lady of Mercy, the victim's arm had been plastered and his cracked skull bandaged. Together we met with the Assistant DA. He got our stories straight and, smiling, promised a quick conviction if the accused didn't take a plea deal. We shook hands all around. I headed back to New York with sweet dreams of a commendation though I had missed out on a sure fire piece of fine ass.

Two weeks later word came the case was going to trial. I couldn't figure that but took a day off my cases and rode the F train to Sutphin Blvd and the Queens County Courthouse. There, the prosecutor hashed out my testimony and promised the victim was corroborative. It was a slam dunk. Wannabe John was going up river.

Then, the day before opening arguments, Earl Warens called me to his office at police HQ, Manhattan. A deputy chief was there. I didn't know him and we weren't introduced.

The top brass said, "First time in eighteen years the Mob has opened the books for the man you're to testify against. He's made and they'll do everything to keep him out of prison. This poses a mortal danger to the victim." Then, without blinking, he added, " And this department is keen on maintaining the status quo with street level organized crime. This comes down from on high. We don't want a conviction."

I looked at Earl. He nodded; I was dismissed.

At trial I replied twelve times, "I don't remember" to questions posed. The truck driver with his arm still cast replied the same way twenty-six times. The judge dismissed the case with a crack of his gavel. The prosecutor flipped his stack of legal briefs into the air and stormed out. Newly made man John, nattily dressed in a herringbone suit, cocked a finger gun at me and pulled the trigger.