

POT CITY '77

by

Greg Smith

The mark would be in an assembly of dealers selling loosies on William and Stone Streets. He would be our first guy. Sitting in the unmarked unit and drinking bad coffee from cardboard cups, Mike argued Billy Martin should sit down Reggie Jackson for the late summer push for the pennant. I was con. Mr. October was due to heat it up. With the two way radio off, we killed time.

A sleek blonde in an above the knees tight skirt shimmied by when that skunky sweet scent signaled the first arrival. He was white, twenty-five and wore dirty jeans and a dirtier Mets cap. Long brown hair flowed out

from his hat and a droopy mustache covered his lip. He was skinny but walked with a jaunt; the reefer he openly carried made him the big dog. He took up position against a lamp post and snuffed out the joint. He unfurled a plastic sandwich baggy that was thick with marijuana cigarettes and drop the halfie into it. Then he tucked it up under her shirt. Mike and I scrunched in the car for a low profile. The cramped position would get me meaner than usual.

Two black guys came next. They were walking straight and jiving in low tones. One had big Afro hair with comb tucked into the back of the bush. He had sunglasses and a green paisley vest over a dark blue rayon shirt. The other was slick with a thin mustache and separate goatee. His suit was sharp with wide lapels. Both wore felony shoes. They acknowledged the white kid but kept to their conversation.

Two more pushers showed up. A white guy and a Puerto Rican. They were scurvy and unshaved. They didn't talk or look at anyone else. They just lined up on the curb and arranged their clothing so the hidden pocket

was positioned for easy access. They were chum; it had to be one of the first three.

Eleven-thirty sharp the front doors of Lehman Brothers opened wide and humanity flooded out into the daylight. Male, female, young and old, everyone was determined to make the most of their lunch hour. The brokers in expensive suits and slick hair cuts turned west to Beaver St. for steak and Martinis. They got their's delivered. Of the rest, back office types wearing cheap suits, secretaries in double knit dresses or runners and mailroom boys in mismatched slacks and dress shirts and too wide ties, a few headed for the cheap eats on Pearl St. while the bulk made bee lines for the open air bazaar down the crooked sidewalk of Stone St. The dealers beckoned them into their line. They proffered three or four joints in one hand and snatched dollar bills with the other. It was a frenzy of dealing. Hands reached over heads reaching for bones; dollars disappeared. Maybe a hundred people were in line to get theirs. The whole of Wall St. would get stoned .

“It’s got to be Slick,” I said.

We got outside. My knee had gone numb. I shook life back into it. I gestured Mike to approach from the front; I’d flank. He attached his badge to his suit coat pocket and made wide arc to a forty-five degree angle on Slick. I edged onto the sidewalk and took small steps toward our prey.

The Hispanic dealer saw heat first and starting packing up shop in a hurry. Customers in his line got anxious, bewildered looks. Then Mike waded in and tossed bodies aside. That got everyones attention but I was right behind Slick. He turned for a getaway and I hooked him to the gut, then to the jaw. The crowd broke and scattered like gerbils. Mike was beside me and we half carried our guy to the unit. Mike cuffed him and searched him turning up the baggy of marijuana cigarettes but no weapons. A wad of dollars Mike stuffed in his pocket. I didn’t complain. Slick was getting his senses back. He might want to squawk so I hooked him hard this time. His eyes rolled back and he passed out.

Together we tossed him into the car and rolled out of there code two to the Bronx.

Two days roving Manhattan cop spots; it was easy pickings. The whole town stank of Mary Jane. We took the prime rib and left the chuck. We scored six. The other teams each scored five. That made sixteen slabs on ice. I salivated as I headed into the Four-Two. I had to sign in. Mike went to his district. We were to meet that evening for the festivities.

As I crossed 50 St. I was stopped again by that smell. It was coming from a street level apartment. The window was open and I gently parted the curtains to see a young woman in her nighty on the couch smoking a bone. First, my blood boiled; then I thought a female might add some flavor to our cookout. I nixed that; it'd make things contentious. Surely the boys would fuck her before putting her on the grill. I blew her a silent kiss and went back to my commute. I caught more whiffs as I passed through Times Square; I shrugged them off.

At my desk the first call I caught was a missing persons. A mother

hadn't seen her son in forty-eight hours. Not enough for an inquiry but she sounded sincerely distressed so I told her to come in and see me. I gave her my name, Detective Sergeant B. K. Brown.

I kicked back and picked my teeth. The case load on my desk wasn't going to get lighter today. Cronin from the Narcotics Squad stopped by to ask what I'd heard about street dealers getting shaken down and disappearing. I kept a straight face and waved him off. This caper wasn't my idea but I was sure enjoying it.

Mrs. Rozelle Dawson(nee Parmetier) appeared soon enough and explained her son, Martin, had left their apartment in the Chelsea Addition public housing project for work two mornings past and he hadn't returned..She spoke with the sophistication of an education but her hands were rough and cracked. She wore a frayed, out of date dress that was spotless and perfectly pressed Her faux pearls gleamed.

She told me Martin's father, her husband, had been killed on

McNamara's Line in '66 and her first son was murdered in '75. She told me with deep crevices in her face, huge eyes and a dreadful grimace that Martin worked days as a clerk on Wall St. to help her keep his two sisters in college while he studied for his Graduate Degree nights at City College. Her whole being moved in slow motion to fill my request for a photograph. A tear streamed out an eye as she drew it from her black spangled purse and handed it to me. There no doubt. Martin was Slick from the action at William and Stone Sts. He was dressed in a cap and gown and holding a diploma from Baruch College. He was beaming and Mrs. Rozelle Dawson was on top of the world wearing the same threadbare perfectly pressed dress she wore this day. I gotta say...I got a lump in my throat. Then I gave her the brush off.

Capt. Damarcus held court. It was his idea; he'd drafted the detectives and patrolmen. He held a plastic cup of cheap champagne and toasted the inaugural 'Smoke the Dealers not the Pot' party. I'd signed on immediately. But when I looked at Slick handcuffed, waist chained and

gagged along with the fifteen others I saw the world weary Mrs Dawson taking another hit for the team. A notion noodled through my thick skull. Some of these would be career criminals but none of them as of now had any real records. They were just kids trying to get along in tough times. My comrades would want retribution but I'd have them over the same barrel. I whispered Mike my plan; he said, "Whatever you say, B. K,"

Another bottle of champagne popped. Vigilantes got drunk. I eased over to the line of prisoners. Fear glared in their eyes. The lock that anchored the waist chain to the wall was standard issue. I popped it. Then the other end.

"Hey, what's Brown doing?"

I took a hold of the center man's waist chain and pulled forward. At first, there was resistance. Then there was momentum. I led the charge at the cadre of PD. Sixteen men in handcuffs and chains swarmed and collapsed into the group. It was flailing and head butting. Mike

blackjacked the cops that got out of the fray. In the end I pronounced we'd have to live with smelling Pot City. Even if it was on the front porch of Gracie Mansion. This was its era.