Friday, 15 July 2016

It was a scorching Friday afternoon and Brannock decided to celebrate the end of the working week by heading downtown to get some lunch. He wanted to take me to Lafayette’s, one of the oldest and best-known Coney Island joints in the city.

As we sat eating our Coneys - hotdogs covered in chili meat sauce - a call came out over Brannock’s radio. There had been a shooting on Coram Street, a Seven Mile Bloods area in the 9th Precinct. It was just a few blocks away from where we had been the previous evening, searching for the man who had shot the nurse. As we listened to the details, a District unit started to shout over the radio, saying that they were chasing suspects on Chalmers - a street close to Coram.

‘This could be related to the Coram shooting,’ Brannock said, turning up the volume. Other customers continued to tuck into their Coney Dogs and paid no attention to the urgent yelling that was coming from the radio. ‘We’d better head over there.’

We screamed up Gratiot towards the 9th Precinct and quickly spotted a District unit parked at the side of a road. One officer was sat inside the vehicle and a second was standing on the street. In the rear of the police car were two black men. This was the unit that had put up the chase. The stern-looking but handcuffed men in the rear of the car were the runners.

Brannock brought down his window. ‘Was this chase linked to that shooting over on Coram?’ he asked.

‘Yeah,’ the cop on the street said. ‘When we turned up, people were pointing at a red car. We went after it and it just took off. It’s possible that they’ve thrown the gun as we chased after them.’

‘We’ll go take a look,’ Brannock told him.
We drove slowly along the route the car had taken, but with the grass so tall it would have been pure luck if we had found the gun. So instead, we made our way to Coram, to the scene of the shooting itself. It was pandemonium.

Half-a-dozen scout cars were parked at random angles across the street - three at either end of the Coram Road murder scene. Yellow police tape had been stretched across the road also, but no one seemed to be taking any notice of it. Young men and teenage girls were charging about, back and forth, screaming, shouting, crying. Older groups of women stood gathered on front porches, watching what was happening. Detroit police officers and homicide detectives were scattered around the scene, searching for any evidence that might have been dropped on the cracked tarmac, or else trying to gather and control the hordes of angry youths.

‘Jesus!’ Brannock said as we pulled up.

‘This doesn’t look good,’ I said.

As we stepped out of the car, and into the crushing heat, Brannock grabbed hold of a uniformed officer and asked her what had happened. The officer explained that two young men had been play-fighting in the street but another man had then shown up and shot one of the men dead.

Young men and women were arguing with each other, like two rival families. Suddenly they all lunged forward, as if to start fighting. A couple of cops rushed over, putting themselves in between the two warring groups.

Just to the left of the fight, there was a patch of scruffy wasteland - an old house plot. It was here that the man had been shot. He had already been rushed to hospital, but it was too late. He had died. Now all that was left were the two large groups, overcome with grief and anger.

Closer to where Brannock and I were standing, a teenage girl was walking in small
circles under a large maple tree. She was pulling at her hair with her clenched fists. ‘MY BROTHER! MY BROTHER!’ she cried, before letting out a piercing scream. The fighting groups paid no attention to her and continued to argue.

To our right, just on the outside of the crime-scene tape, an older black lady was stood on her porch. She was smiling and laughing loudly, and she danced a little as she watched the mayhem before her. It was surreal.

A bare-chested man in his early twenties stomped towards the crying girl. The guy was shouting and screaming out obscenities, thumping himself in the chest. The girl slapped him hard, across the face.

‘HE DEAD BECAUSE OF YO MOTHERFUCKERS!’ she screamed at him.

A couple of nearby cops ran over to separate the pair.

‘AIN’T NO NIGGA DEAD ‘CAUSE OF ME!’ he shouted back at her angrily.

‘FUCK YOU!’

The girl lunged forward, trying to hit him some more but was held back by a female cop. Whispers and Hollywood, who had been standing nearby, then ran over to hold back the man.

‘WASSUP? WASSUP? WASSUP? WASSUP? WASSUP?’ he shouted at them as they pushed him back, away from the girl. ‘THE FUCK Y’ALL WANNA DO? NIGGA, I’LL FIGHT EVERYBODY DOWN THERE!’

The girl and man staggered back towards the main groups, taking their argument with them. All around, various young men were quarrelling with cops, trying to push past them, trying to get through the crime-scene tape, ignoring their instructions.