

Coldman Hawkins Couldn't Play Sax (12/16/03)

Coldman Hawkins couldn't play the sax worth shit. He'd tried, you can imagine. With a name like that. His parents were from Harlem; they grew up in the days of the Cotton Club's glory...quite a while back that was, wasn't it? They loved the tenor. But, thought Coldman, why'd they have to go and do this misspelt naming thing. It made me more than a name of love. It was a name of expectation, of consequence, a heavy chain. Coldman couldn't really be sore at his folks. He kinda liked the catchiness of the name. Besides his folks were good people, and they'd given him a shot at life. Not like many he'd known; not like the folks of Tommy or Ike or even Teesha's. Teesha was Coldman's sidekick, at least to the extent that a 16 year old running the streets, an unemployed graffiti artist could be said to have a sidekick, a woman. Teesha was 23. She worked.

Coldman did not pack anything, except, and not all the time, his case of spray cans. No carving set or switchblade, no instant power macho steel tubed whamo bamo, no Zippos, or hippos, or Saturday night, Monday night or Tuesday not specials. They were all around him. In his face, in his nose, in his ears. Ike said, "man you got to have a piece, if only for protection. Nigga you don't have to hit anybody with it; but it could save yer life." Coldman looked at Ike straight in the eye and said: "you are just a fool, son. If they gonna kill you they gonna kill you."

Ike wasn't impressed. He pulled a gigantic 44 magnum out of an inner pocket of his bulky overcoat. Then he retrieved a 380 pocket piece that fit in the palm of his hand from his waist belt and showed it to the Cold man. "Now that there is a nice little piece a work," he said.

"What'd you rob to pay for those things," retorted Coldman cynically. He knew Ike wasn't a thief, but he also knew that Ike's job as a hotel desk clerk didn't give him a lot of spending money for toys.

Ike took the bait. "Steal? I didn't steal anything, except for the guns, of course." They both laughed.

A police cruiser slowed in front of the alley they were standing in between the two apartment buildings. "Aw shit", this was Coldman. "You get down into that passage there under the building. I'll talk with them. See what kind of trouble those guns are going to get you in?"

Coldman turned toward the alley entrance being careful to show his two empty hands and a casual friendly expression on his face. Ike ducked into the passage. The cop car stopped at the mouth of the alley and two of New York's finest jumped out, not real hasty, but not slowly either. Cold sauntered toward them casually; not fast, not menacing, just leaving the scene or trying to.

"Where you goin sonny?" said the large Irish one.

"Back inside," responded Cold. "You know that I live here."

“Indeed we do.” It was Colin the beat cop. He was usually on foot. Friendly guy. Not too many white cops would accept a street beat in Harlem without kicking up a fuss. Colin was one of the few that wouldn’t hassle you; he actually seemed to think all people were created equal. He might still become a target sometime, but Cold hoped the street would know enough to keep him alive. He liked Colin.

“So who was the guy who ducked out, Coldman?” “Oh him? That’s Ike. He was expected at home an hour ago. Couldn’t afford time to talk. I told him to ‘move on’. What do ya think of that?”

“Not a bad joke, Coldman? With that kind of cleverness I might be able to help you get into the academy.”

“You kiddin Colin. I ain’t even graduated from school. No way.”

“Well I guess I was half kiddin ya. But ya could finish up a GED and I wouldn’t mind helping out.”

“I appreciate it.” said Coldman. He didnt know what else to say. He didn’t want to be a smart ass and say what he thought of the cops and everything they stood for...whose law and order to control who for what purposes. And besides he liked Colin and he did feel complemented. So he just stood there and struggled to be sincere. “Thanks.”

“Maybe you didn’t hear but the reason we stopped”. Colin waved his flashlight toward his partner who was standing by the car about 15 feet away, but in earshot...”is that someone just robbed the corner store down there. Couldn’t ha been more than 15 minutes ago. I sure hope it wasn’t yer fine friend Ike. I think yer above me suspcions yerself.”

“Ike? Not likely him,” Coldman said earnestly. “He’s streetwise but he’s not that kind.”

“So you would tell a cop if it was Ike then? Of if you thought it might be? Don’t take me for a fool.“

Coldman was offended. Of course he wouldn’t turn in a friend or even someone else. But still he wouldn’t have offered information at all if he wasn’t being sincere. It was his respect for the decency of this Irish cop that impelled his response, and here he was already betrayed. Even telling the truth to help Ike, even talking casually with this cop could raise eyebrows in the hood. No doubt someone would be watching almost anything that went on.

“So that’s what you think,” retorted Coldman, a bit on edge. “That I’m taking you for a fool.”

Colin’s face darkened. The ruddy red-white beer complexion turned into an embarrassed blush and frown. “No, that’s not what I think, Coldman. I’m sorry if I offended you.” Coldman’s composure returned to him as the blush left the cop’s face.

