

An excerpt from. . .

Doves Migration

by
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As Alfred waited for his grandson, Tad was fighting for his life across town in the alley behind Jake's with Daniel Hobbs looking on. After Daniel picked up Tad, the two of them waited in the shadows of the alley being informed that Gilbert would be there after midnight. Just as they had thought, Gilbert, along with a fellow worker at the Ice Company, showed up soon after the church bell chimed twelve. As the two Irishmen came into the passageway, Tad walked out in plain view.

"O'Flaherty, I've got a proposition for you," he called to him.

"Oh yeah! And what would that be, your Lordship?" Gilbert remarked snidely.

"Give me back my money and stay the hell away from Miranda, and I won't make any trouble for you."

"The hell I will, you cheating bastard! As a matter of fact, that fair little lassie is far too good for the likes of you, so I think I'll be winning her from ya too."

Infuriated, Tad charged at Gilbert, but expecting his assailant, Gilbert easily stepped to the side, causing Tad to lunge into the wall of Jake's. Gilbert's friend laughed, goading Tad into a rage as he stumbled to regain his bearings. Grasping hold of a jagged piece of board, Tad swung the board at Gilbert and his friend.

"I'll wipe that smile off your damned face, you slimy bastard!" Tad yelled, taking Gilbert by surprise and clipping him in the ribs, which caused the wind to be knocked out of him. Hunched over, Tad punched him in the face, throwing the man onto a rusted iron tub used by the brewery to discard empty whiskey bottles.

"Get up, you son of a bitch," Tad said derisively, hovering over the stunned man, not noticing that Gilbert's friend had pulled an ice pick from inside his weathered coat and was inching his way closer to Tad to strike.

"Tad, watch your back!" Daniel yelled.

Jerking around just as the man lunged, Tad began struggling for control of the pick. Feeling his forearm slashed by the tip of it, Tad managed to knee his assailant in the groin while still struggling over control of the tool. Suddenly the man yelped as the pick pierced through his side. Seeing the stranger's eyes widen, Tad looked down in disbelief, as Gilbert, who had regained his bearings, struck him over the head with a bottle, causing him to fall to the ground.

Then Gilbert turned and looked at Daniel who had done nothing up to this point to defend his friend. "This wasn't part of the deal," he shouted. "Hell, me mate could have been killed!"

"Yeah well, who the hell told you to flap your jaws? What in the hell did you expect, when you threatened to go after his woman, you stupid son of a bitch?" Daniel shouted back at the outraged Gilbert while walking over to him. "All you had to do was promise him a chance to get his money back and we could have wiped him clean of next month's spending money too," Daniel snarled.

"Just how in the hell was I to know his Lordship would react like that?" Gilbert said, frustrated. "You want to keep robbing your friend, find some other patsy to do yer dirty work! I'm through with this shit."

“You’re through when I tell you, you are. Do I need to remind you that your job hangs in the balance?”

“Look, I’ve done everything you asked, but this has gone too far. Winning at cards is one thing, but me and Dave here could have been killed tonight. You can shove that job right up yer arse!”

“Is that so? Well, what if I had to notify the authorities that you and Dave here got in some brawl and you stabbed and killed him?”

“Yeah well, Dave ain’t dead now is he? Just a wee nick is all.” Before Gilbert finished his sentence, Daniel grabbed the ice pick while he stood on the injured man’s chest and glared at the stunned Gilbert.

“Oh I assure you that can be rectified,” he snarled, lunging at his prey and shoving the ice pick into the injured man’s body a second time under the ribcage while he struggled to be freed. A chilling moan rang out in the darkened alley, and Gilbert, realizing that Daniel had just killed his friend, lunged at him.

“Jesus, Mary and Joseph, you killed him ya cold-blooded bastard.”

Yanking the ice pick from the mortally-wounded, bloodied man’s body, Daniel pointed it at Gilbert replying cold and callously, “Just like I said, I came across you killing this poor bastard. Now who do you think the constable is going to believe--a law abiding citizen or some hot-headed Irishman who has built up a reputation for brawling? Why just last night you were thrown out of this fine establishment.” Daniel paused, nodding toward the building behind him.

Glaring back at him, inching his way closer, waiting for the appropriate moment to jump Daniel, Gilbert goaded him, stalling for time. “Yeah, well I think I’ll take my chances or kill you myself, you rotten bastard.”

“Have you forgotten I’ve got the pick?” Daniel arrogantly waved the ice pick in front of him, snidely grinning. “You’re a betting man. What do you think your odds are? Before you step any further though, you might want to keep in mind that I know where that feisty little tart sister of yours lives and works. And I can assure you, if you even so much as step another foot closer after I finish you off, I’ll go after that whore-sister of yours next. When I’m finished with Margaret-Anne, no one will be able to identify her remains.”

The two men, hearing Tad moan, looked at him and Daniel, taking advantage of the situation, cleverly called out as Tad started to regain consciousness and looked around. “I’m warning you, come any closer and I’ll kill you. What Honeycutt did to your friend was in self defense.”

“Why you lying bastard!” yelled Gilbert, while Tad managed to get to his feet.

Keeping up the pretense that Tad had killed his assailant, seeing that Tad was coming to, Daniel said, “Lower your voice, man! Do you want the whole town hearing you? Think how it will go for you, when I announce that I witnessed you trying to kill an upright citizen like Honeycutt here. You got a death wish, do you? Like I said, I saw the whole thing. My friend here was only defending himself when this thug pulled out an ice pick and tried to kill him. Honeycutt never intended to kill the poor bastard. It was an accident I tell you!”

Daniel’s words were convincing as he looked at the outraged Irishmen. “Do you think going after Honeycutt now is going to help your friend?”

Dazed, Tad rubbed the back of his head and glanced at the man not five feet in front of him. As he looked at the lifeless body of his friend lying in a pool of blood, Daniel’s words began to register. Not only had he just killed a man, but also his friend was trying to protect him.

Shaking his head in disbelief, Gilbert understood perfectly just how deceitful and cunning Daniel was. There was no chance the authorities would ever believe the truth against two of its leading citizens.

“Defend his Lordship’s honor good and proper. The two of ya deserve one another,” Gilbert sneered, before turning and running down the alley and out of sight while he still had the chance.

Looking at the dazed Tad, Daniel said urgently, "Get a hold of yourself man, before someone finds out you killed him."

"Killed him? You just said it was an accident!" Tad mumbled, trying to get to his feet.

"Who the hell's going to believe it was an accident, except some ignorant Irishmen? Let's face the facts, you and O'Flaherty made quite a scene last night, old boy. Just how long do you think the other guys will keep their mouth shut about you dealing off the bottom of the deck when murder is involved? Let's face it, you do not want the constables to investigate this man's murder. Even if you can convince a jury it was an accident, your reputation will be destroyed."

"What are you saying . . . dealing off the bottom of the deck? Why you know that's preposterous." Tad's head throbbed with pain as he tried to understand what his friend was saying.

"Bullshit, we all saw you. Why do you think I knocked over the table as I did? We've been friends for a long time and I was not about to let your reputation be destroyed over some foolish act. Now pull yourself together and help me get rid of his body, before you're found out."

It was clear to Tad that he had fooled no one last night, and realizing there was no point in trying to defend his actions, he started to walk over to Daniel, while rubbing the back of his neck. Feeling stickiness on his neck, he was shocked at seeing his own blood on his hands. "How the hell did I get cut?" Tad asked confused.

"Gilbert hit you from behind with a bottle after you stabbed his mate." Daniel mumbled, as he lifted the man's feet. "Grab his arms and help me to get him out of here."

Gazing down at the lifeless body, Tad recalled how he had struggled with the dead man over the ice pick. Shocked and reacting to Daniel's commands Tad bent over to take the dead man's arms in his, a cold shiver running up his spine upon seeing the lifeless stare in the man's eyes. "I don't even know his name . . ." he mumbled.

"David Sullivan. He worked with Gilbert at father's Ice Company," Daniel said frantically, looking about the alley trying to think how to get out of there without being caught, knowing time was of the essence. Urgently he whispered, "Listen up Tad, I need to go get the coach. We can't just carry a dead man out onto the street. Pull yourself together and I'll be right back."

Without waiting for a reply, Daniel turned and went after his rig while Tad, stupefied, continued to gaze at the man he believed he had just murdered.

The gravity of the situation finally hit home and suddenly realizing that he could in fact be hung, Tad began to tidy himself up by tucking his shirt into his trousers and pulling his hair off his face. While straightening his scarf, he became aware that his forearm ached. Looking at his arm he realized the sleeve of his coat had been slashed.

Raising the sleeve high enough, he saw his forearm was bleeding along with his head. Quickly he untied his scarf and wrapped it tightly around the gash to help minimize the bleeding.

By then, Daniel had returned with the coach and jumped down from the buckboard, saying, "Help get him inside. We'll drop him in the Hudson. No one will be the wiser."

Nodding his reply, Tad assisted his friend, grateful that Daniel was there to get him out of such a jam.

Within two hours, Tad was back in front of his grandparent's home after disposing David Sullivan's body in the Hudson River and thanking his friend profusely.

"Hell Honeycutt, if the roles were reversed I'm sure you would have done the same. For the next few weeks though I'd stay away from Jake's just in case O'Flaherty tries to make trouble for you. With pay due him, it works in our favor, so I'll keep an eye out for the bastard and persuade him to get the hell out of New York once and for all."

"Give him anything he wants, understand? Just see to it he never returns."

"Oh, I'll take care of O'Flaherty alright. You can count on that," Daniel said ruefully. "That drunken Irish mouth can't be trusted."

“Hobbs, you promised. No more bloodshed. Just get O’Flaherty out of New York. Hell, anywhere he wants to go, and let me put this behind us.”

“Us?” Daniel asked indignantly. “Look Tad, I’m not the one who killed the poor son of a bitch, so don’t be saying *us*. I’m here to assist a friend, nothing more.”

“Yes of course . . . just promise me no more bloodshed.”

“Fine. But first I have got to find him. You still haven’t said how the hell you are going to come up with that kind of money? I can’t cover that kind of expense without Father becoming suspicious.”

Shaking his throbbing head, Tad said, “Just find the miserable bastard and I’ll take care of the rest.” Then grasping Daniel’s hand in his, thanking him again for his help, Tad slowly edged his way off the buckboard, noticing the light from his grandfather’s study. Hoping it wasn’t his father, Tad made his way up the steps, ready to confess what he had done if necessary, to get the money he needed to make this hellish nightmare go away.

Alfred, standing at the entrance of his study, noticing the blood on his grandson’s neck and hands, ran to him out of concern. “Christ all-mighty Tad, what in the hell has happened? Are you badly hurt? Should I send for the doctor?”

“No. I’ll be fine,” he said, pausing for a moment. Tad nodded toward the study. “Is Father inside?”

“No. I sent him up hours ago. I needed to discuss something with you.” Alfred’s voice trailed off, helping Tad inside the study. Seeing the gash just above the nape of Tad’s neck where he had been hit with the whiskey bottle, Alfred asked again, “What the hell happened to you? You look like the devil.”

Sarcastically, Tad replied, while taking a seat where Michael had been hours before. “No truer statement has ever been said. Grandfather, I am the devil! Or at least one of his followers, that’s for damned sure.”

“You’re talking nonsense, Tad. Just tell me what happened to you tonight?” Alfred muttered sternly, while taking his seat next to his grandson. “I demand the truth Thaddeus, or so help me God . . .”

“Not even God almighty himself can change what I’ve done tonight,” Tad said, despondently looking at his grandfather, sullen and full of self-contempt. “The finest education, or the finest breeding couldn’t prevent me from turning out to be the despicable man I’ve become. Grandfather I’ve lied, cheated at cards and gotten caught, and now have committed murder.” Seeing the blood drain from his grandfather’s face, Tad hastily added. “And if that wasn’t bad enough, I’m such a coward, I covered up my crimes by bringing a friend in as an accessory. Not to protect the family’s honor, mind you, but out of fear of being found out, or worse being strung up at the end of a noose.”

Realizing his grandson was not speaking out of delirium from his wound, Alfred sat horrified at his confession and as calmly as he could manage, said, “Start at the beginning Tad, and don’t leave anything out.”

After hearing everything, including how he thought Daniel had saved him from certain imprisonment and shame, Tad looked at his grandfather, waiting for the elder Honeycutt to decide what needed to be done next.

“As foolish as you have acted and as unfortunate as that poor man’s death was, you did not commit murder. Your friend Hobbs was right, it was an accident. You were merely defending yourself. Thank God, Daniel had the foresight to remove the body. No need to bring unwanted and unnecessary gossip down on your good name.”

“My good name indeed.” Tad sarcastically chuckled, shaking his head. “How many times I’ve heard that Grandfather, and after what I’ve told you, all you can think of is my good name.

Don't you see? I'm neither decent nor worthy of being a Honeycutt. I'm not like you and father. Hell, the way I look at it, I would have been better off if Daniel would have let Gilbert kill me."

"That will be enough, Tad." Alfred said sternly. "This evening I waited up for you, for the sole purpose to discuss with you things from my past that I have done, which I'm not proud of. Considering the lateness of the hour and everything that you have gone through tonight, that will have to wait until tomorrow. You are obviously distraught, with good reason, and before anyone else sees you, I want you to go upstairs and clean yourself up while I gather some medical supplies. All of your clothing, every last stitch needs to be disposed of. Understood?"

"Yes, Grandfather." Tad's voice was barely above a whisper as he stood up and looked at Alfred.

"Tad, what happened tonight was dreadful. Make no mistake about it. However, you must remember the death of that man was in self-defense. The way I see it, you have two choices here. You can choose to be swallowed up by self-hate and become bitter, or you can learn from this mistake. The choice is yours. Personally, I hope you choose the later. Either way, I will deal with Daniel from here out regarding this matter. With you moving in with your father, perhaps it would be wise to break all ties with your friends for the time being."

Nodding his response, Tad left his grandfather's study and promptly climbed the stairs as he had done so often in the past. This time however, the cold icy stare of David Sullivan's lifeless eyes accompanied him with his every step. Unable to block out the image from his mind, upon entering his bedchamber, Tad immediately disrobed and began cleaning the dried blood from his wounded arm. Rubbing the open gash repeatedly, he felt nothing. Even when he reopened the wound and fresh blood trickled down his wrist onto his fingers, Tad still felt nothing.

It was as if this were all a bad dream, not really happening. With blood dripping onto the wood floor, Tad in shock, stared at his reflection in the mirror about the dry sink, reliving the events in his mind repeatedly, still unable to accept that he had killed another. So engrossed in his tormented thoughts, Tad never heard Alfred enter his room.

"Christ Tad, what in the hell have you done?" Alfred whispered coarsely at his grandson while trying to stop the bleeding of Tad's wound. "Sit down and let me take care of that cut before you get it infected."

Dazed, Tad nodded and sat on the edge of his bed looking at his blood-soaked arm, unable to fully understand what his grandfather was doing or saying. Everything appeared to be happening to someone else rather than him. After Alfred had dressed his wound and helped clothe him in a night shirt, Tad obligingly lay his head on the pillow as he was instructed, all the while the haunting eyes of David Sullivan never left his tormented mind. Time stood still for the younger Honeycutt as he stared at the ceiling, not even aware that Alfred had left his room. The only sound Tad heard was the gasp Sullivan made as the ice pick entered his body, and then the crashing sound of the bottle as he was struck from behind by Gilbert.

"Gilbert," Tad whispered, recalling how his nemesis had threatened to steal Miranda from him. Anger stirred inside him at that thought. Tad sat up in bed. Despite his throbbing head, he crept across the darkened room without making a sound. Without the need for light, he made his way around his bed, past the wardrobe to the corner of the room where he pressed a lever on the side of a dumbwaiter. Within seconds, he walked through a service passage that led him directly into Miranda's room through the dumbwaiter in her room.

As a child, Tad had used this passage to hide from his nanny, and now he found it quite beneficial to gain access into Miranda's room whenever he wished, which turned out to be often.

Once safely inside her room, he moved freely with stealth precision as he gazed down at the unsuspecting Miranda as she slept soundly. His eyes traced her petite frame with the aid of the moonlight that softly filtered into her room as she lay under the thin linen sheet.

Slowly he crept closer to her until he could feel her breath on his face. How he yearned to touch her creamy skin that glistened on this humid late-spring evening. However, noticing her stir slightly, Tad retreated to the corner of her room where he knew she would not be able to see him even if she happened to awaken.

From the very first night that Miranda had come to live with his grandparents, Tad was intrigued. Not only because she was a Southerner--which was extremely fascinating in itself—but because Miranda appeared completely uninterested in him. Unlike others who gushed over him, which repulsed him. This pristine, Southern Belle, seeming not at all impressed with his good looks, charms or family position, appeared to be equal to his perceptiveness and shrewdness, which in itself Tad found irresistible.

After their first meeting, Tad was determined to win her heart, yet over the years, despite everything he had tried, nothing had worked, until the other day when Miranda actually returned his affection. By this time, Tad had found himself hopelessly in love with her and now that he had begun to win her heart, he was determined not to lose it to some Irishman that he viewed beneath her.

As Tad stood watching Miranda sleep, he recalled their passionate embrace in the garden that afternoon. Never had he desired any other woman, or wanted to protect another as when she trembled in his arms. Recalling now her lips on his, he vowed that no one or nothing was going to prevent him from getting what he wanted, and that was Miranda.

The only one who stood between having the desire of his heart was Gilbert O'Flaherty. No matter what he had promised his grandfather, Tad was determined to find and hush his enemy forever. Even if he had to kill again.