

~ Fiction ~

**David Hunter**

*Do Doves Really Sleep In The Sand?*

*"I wonder..." Johnson said, tinkering with the trigger of the shotgun mounted in the locked holder between us. I know the safety is on, but I've told him a thousand times not to do it. He's one of those dumbass college graduate cops who know everything.*

"You wonder *what*?" I asked.

"Do doves really sleep in the sand?"

"I wouldn't think so. Doves nest above ground"

"I guess you've shot a lot of doves in your life," Johnson said.

"Hell no! I haven't been hunting since I got into police work. Why would you say that, Johnson?"

"Your entire generation was caught up in the macho thing. I just thought..."

"Johnson, do you own a mountain bike and spend weekends riding around in those little elastic shorts?"

"No. Why do you ask?"

"Because your whole generation is into it, maybe?"

The boy grows silent and has the good grace to know he's been hoisted on his own petard. He says, "Touché."

"Why did you ask the question in the first place, rookie?"

"What question?"

"You were speculating as to whether doves actually sleep in the sand, why?"

"Oh yeah. My dad was listening to some of those old cassette tapes of his this morning. Kramer, did I ever tell you that he still had an old eight-track system when I was little? He still doesn't own any music on a disk."

"The eight-track tape system had excellent sound and was a lot sturdier than cassette tapes. Now, Johnson—*focus*. Why were you asking me about doves sleeping in the sand?"

I swing up Joe Lewis Road for a sweep through Monkey Village. It's a federal housing project. The real name is Montgomery Village but we've always called it Monkey Village as long as I can remember; and I remember a lot.

"Dad was playing this ancient song by Bob Dylan called 'Blowin' in the Wind.' There was a verse about a white dove sleeping in the sand. I just wondered if doves really sleep in the sand."

I pull up to a stop sign, turn and stare at Johnson like a stain on the rug. He's wearing some kind of Greek fraternity pin as a tie tack. I still have my old blue pig tie tack. The one that stands for "pride, integrity and guts." I've been wearing it since 1979 when I pinned on my badge.

“Bob Dylan is not fucking *ancient*, Johnson! He was still writing some of his best stuff when I was humping the boonies in ‘Nam.”

“That was like, what, three or four wars ago, Kramer?”

“That’s FTO, *fucking Field Training Officer* Kramer to you, rookie.”

I jerk away from the stop sign and it throws Johnson back, catching his finger in the trigger guard of the shotgun. He puts the knuckle in his mouth for a second.

“Geez, *FTO Kramer*. I didn’t mean it as an insult. I was just trying to point out that it was a long time ago.”

“Ancient is like *thousands* of years, Johnson. Not thirty or forty.”

“Monkey alert!” Johnson suddenly yells. “Two of them at the end of the block prying up a storm drain cover!”

I immediately see them. Since I’ve been a cop, kids in this project have pried tons of storm drain grates up. They break them up, sell them to the foundry and the foundry turns them into new storm drain grates. It’s killer work to break cast iron. Legitimate work is easier, but the kids keep doing it.

We bail out of the cruiser and the three kids run, two white kids and a black kid. The black kid stumbles, so I make him as my prey. Johnson is already closing on another. All these new cops lift weights at the Fraternal Order of Police gym, then go play tennis or handball.

They don’t smoke, either. When I started, there would always be a layer of smoke at roll call and everyone would have a cup of coffee. These new kids drink *diet sodas*, for God’s sake.

I’m actually gaining on the kid when I step on something slick—a flattened beer can maybe—and turn my ankle. I go down hard and know I’ve lost skin on one knee and an elbow. I’m limping back to the cruiser when Johnson comes back with a redheaded kid of sixteen or so. He’s crying and Johnson isn’t even winded.

“You all right, Kramer?” Johnson asks.

“Yeah, I’m fine.”

“You’ve torn your pants. You want to transport this one to the house so you can change?”

“No. It’s only a couple of hours until we go in. I’ve worked in clothes more ragged than this. I’ll call the wagon to pick up this big-time thief.”

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I turn the cruiser loose a little as we head up Chapman Highway for a look at the far end of our beat. Of course, these new vehicles with all the gadgets for pollution control are nothing like what we used to have.

My first cruiser was a 1980 Chevelle that would pin you to the seat when you put your foot in it. The new ones drive a lot smoother though.

I spot the drift of the old Ford ahead just as the rookie says, “Drunk driver alert!”

“On my radar,” I say, kicking it in the ass and closing on the old Ford. The rookie is already typing in the plate number as I hit the blues and bump the siren once. It looks like the driver may rabbit on me, but after looking in the rearview mirror a couple of times, he pulls over to the shoulder.

“Unit 2714, we’ll be out behind a white ninety-one Ford—tag number GIF-321.”

“It’s a stolen tag,” Johnson says, reading the computer screen.

“Wonder why he didn’t run?” I say. “Driver, put both hands out the window where I can see them,” I say over the intercom. The sound echoes off the buildings on both sides of the highway.

We open the doors and stand beside the cruiser, but I keep the microphone in my hand. “Driver, open the car door with your right hand and push it open. Keep your hands where I can see them.”

The driver complies. He is short and stocky, dressed in blue jeans and a long-sleeved denim shirt. Thirty, maybe thirty-five years old. He looks more disgusted than scared.

“Put your hands behind your head, driver. Walk backwards towards us. Do it now!”

The man complies and I drop the mike in the seat. A proper felony technique would be to put him face downward on the ground, but there are two of us, we have good light, and I decide to cut a corner. I know better, but I do it anyway.

With my Glock .40-caliber by my leg, I approach the man. Johnson is moving parallel with me, his weapon slightly raised. Rookies are good and scared. That’s the way it should be.

When we are in place, I slide my pistol back into the holster and do a quick pat down of our man—beginning under the arms, sliding down to the belt, reaching around in the front, then down the outside of his legs and up the inside to the groin area. No lumps or bulges.

“Now, keep your hands behind your head. I’m going to move you against the car. Do exactly what I tell you. Understand, my friend?”

“Yeah.” The man has a deep voice. He still appears more bored than anything else.

Grabbing his hands and gripping them tightly, I take his belt in the other hand and move him to the side of his old Ford. I kick his legs apart and back like I’ve done a thousand times before. Then things unwind.

The man suddenly drops to a crouch at the same moment I hear something whistle past my ear. The man screams as there is a sound like kindling wood breaking.

The sound is from the shattered bone in his wrist. The whistling from the collapsible baton Johnson carries. I still have an old PR-24 baton because it has served me well for thirty-five years.

As the man whimpers and groans, his face against the side of his car, I see the knife I missed in his sleeve when I patted him down. It’s on the ground beside him and Johnson picks it up.

It’s what we used to call a “Black Beauty” when I was a rookie. The blade is spring-loaded in the grip and pops out at the touch of a button. Johnson has probably never seen one. I have two or three in my collection at home.

“Good work, Johnson,” I say through a dry mouth. Later I will find that the man we stopped had a parole violation and enough warrants to send him back to the walls for the rest of his life. Apparently he just wanted to kill a cop before he went back. I had drawn the black ball this time around.

I take the prisoner back to the cruiser and cuff him to the rear door handle to wait for the ambulance my partner is calling and I feel bad about the way I treated the rookie.

I remember when I first went out, how the remaining Korean War vets and the occasional World War II vet made fun of my associates degree in criminal justice and my time as a military police officer. I hadn’t thought about it in a long time.

Within five minutes, a supervisor, an ambulance and a television crew have arrived. I stay out of the way and let the supervisor and the rookie talk to the cameras. I’ve talked to more cameras than I care to remember. It’s Johnson’s collar. He deserves it. I’ve decided to put him in for a commendation.

We are an hour past shift change as we head into the house. Paperwork takes a lot of time. I plan to get Johnson into the station soon enough to see himself interviewed on the six o'clock news. It will be his first time.

He is drinking a diet cola that some civilian brought him at the scene. I'm sipping a cold cup of coffee I got myself from a market across the street. He seems pleased with himself and should be.

"Officer Johnson?"

He seems startled. I've never called him *officer* before. "Yes, FTO Kramer?"

"Doves *don't* sleep in the sand. Bob Dylan was a good poet and songwriter, but he didn't know dick about doves. His real name was Robert Zimmerman.

"He was a city boy from Duluth, Minnesota who wanted to be like a guy named Woody Guthrie. He just needed a word that rhymed with *man* when he was writing 'Blowin' in the Wind.' He used 'sleeps in the sand.'"

"You seem to know a lot about him," Johnson says.

"He's not much older than I am and there was a time when I wanted to be a musician, just like Dylan."

"What happened?" Johnson asked.

"I took a graduation trip to Vietnam and then life happened."

"All I ever wanted to be was a cop," Johnson says. "I was lucky, I guess."

"Talk to me in twenty years and let me know if you change your mind."

"I'll do that."

I can tell he's humoring me, though. I'm almost sixty. Today he saved my life from a stupid, rookie mistake. In twenty years, if I live that long, I'll be nearly eighty. And who gives a damn about what an eighty-year-old ex-cop thinks, anyway?