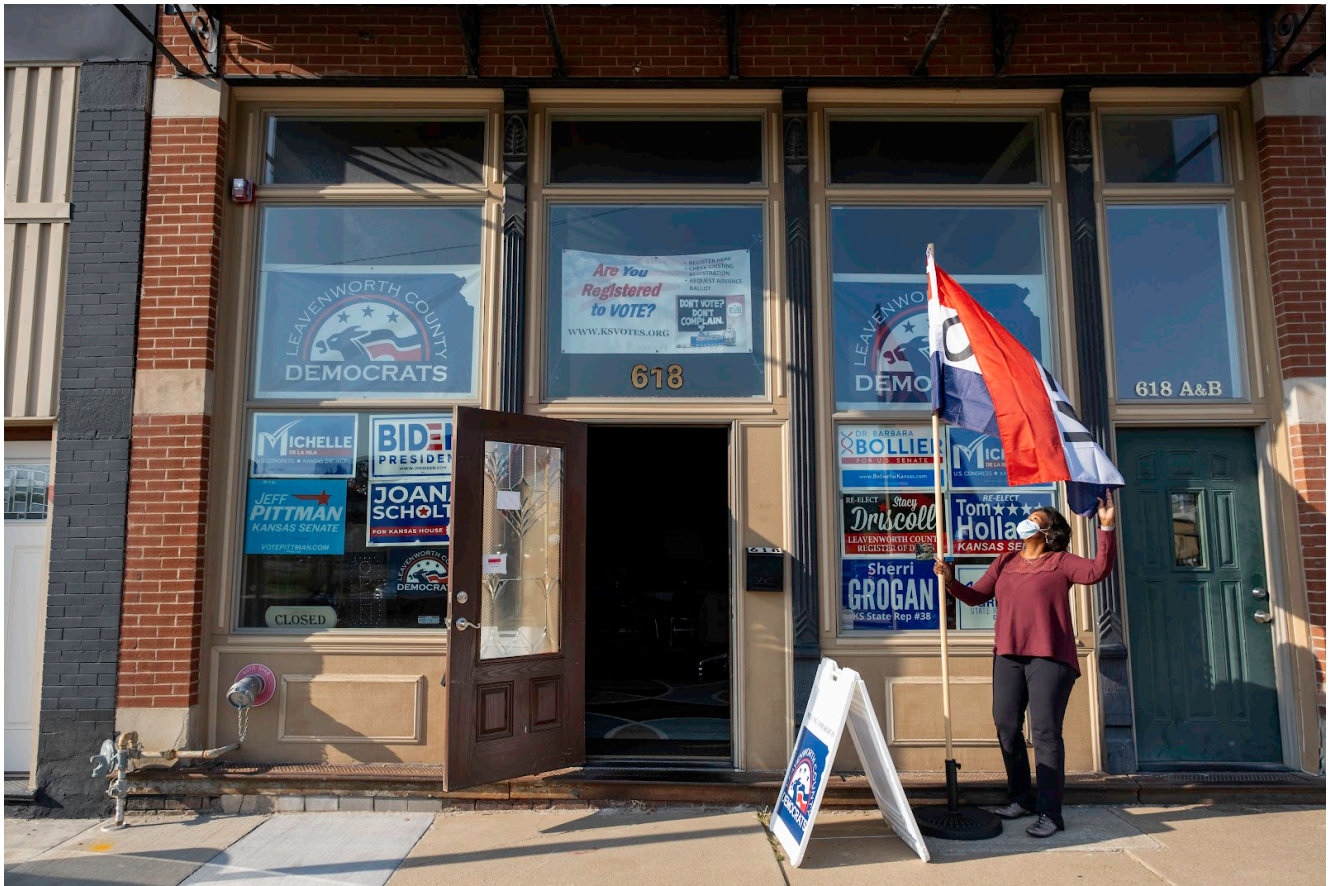


New Photo Essay by Arin Yoon: “Standing Up for Change”



Joana Scholtz wears her VOTE necklace on September 25, 2020 in Leavenworth, Kansas.



Joana Scholtz sets up the “open” flag at the Democratic party’s headquarters on September 24, 2020 in Leavenworth, Kansas, in preparation for an evening of phone banking by an all volunteer staff.



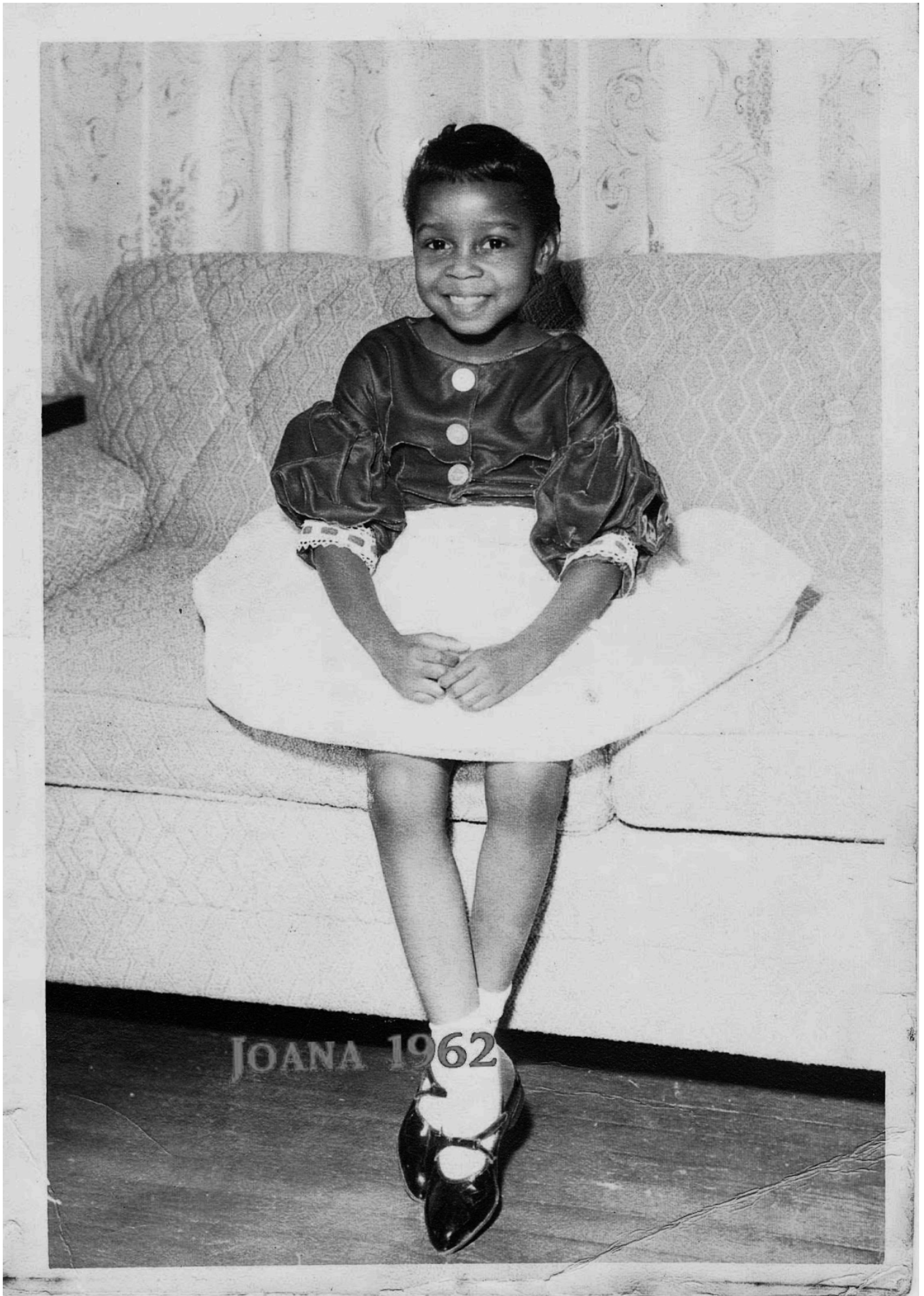
L: Joana Scholtz points out the political leanings in different neighborhoods of District 40, outlined in red, on a map that shows how the borders have been gerrymandered, on September 22, 2020 at campaign headquarters in Leavenworth, Kansas.

R: Joana Scholtz discusses her next steps in a Zoom meeting with her staff which she refers to as her “Kitchen Cabinet” on September 22, 2020 at campaign headquarters in Leavenworth,

Kansas.

My first encounter with Joana Scholtz was as I ran after her (and her husband, Rik Jackson) as they were exiting campaign headquarters and about to enter their car. I was on assignment photographing football fans on the first day of the NFL season and I was on the lookout for people decked out in the red and yellow Kansas City Chiefs gear. Rik graciously obliged to be photographed and as we got to talking, Joana said she was running for the Kansas House of Representatives in District 40. I was excited to meet a political candidate and was surprised at how down to earth she was. I had always felt like politicians were out of reach, but with Joana, I felt like we could talk for hours.

I called her up not long after that chance meeting and asked her if I could document her campaign for a photojournalism workshop and to my surprise, she agreed and opened up her life to me. In that week, I learned a lot about local politics, what it means when a district is so clearly gerrymandered, and what a grassroots campaign looks and feels like. We recently caught up via Zoom and talked about her career in the military and foray into politics and her personal experiences as a Black officer in the Army in the 1980s.



*Joana at the age of five in 1962 in Chicago, Illinois.
Courtesy of Joana Scholtz.*

Born in Mississippi, granddaughter of sharecroppers, at the age of four, Joana moved with her siblings and mom to Chicago with the Second Great Migration. Joana recalls, "When I was in college, I was going to be an Education major then I found out at the end of first semester that when you graduated and actually got a job that the salary was so low that you qualified for food stamps. And, you know, after my mother and my stepfather got divorced, we were living on welfare in the projects, getting food stamps and I was always embarrassed by that. So there is no way I was going to get a college education and wind up back on food stamps."

So, in 1979, as a sophomore at Knox College, she joined the ROTC and was commissioned as an intelligence officer because she knew that the military was one of the few professions where men and women were paid the same amount. That sealed the deal.



Joana Scholtz on ROTC maneuvers exercise at Knox College in 1979 in Galesburg, Illinois. Courtesy of Joana Scholtz.



Joana Scholtz and her best friend Lenore Ivy at their Captain promotion ceremony while attending the Officer Advanced Course at the Military Intelligence Center and School in July 1983 at Fort Huachuca, Arizona. Courtesy of Joana Scholtz.

Joana found community and mentorship with other Black officers. "I think as a general rule, people do seek their own just for the comfort and the support of somebody who understands your journey." She soon realized that many of her Black peers were being "recycled" through the Officer Basic Course and saw it as a systemic problem. "Military intelligence was a really segregated branch. They were not necessarily welcoming to Black officers. There was a lot of fear of failure from the Black officers. And there was a lot of frustration because there wasn't a lot of feedback. Although Jim Crow was over and the military was integrated, people's minds weren't necessarily integrated." Being a woman in the military also brought about its own challenges. "You dealt with a lot of sexual harassment. In 1979, there were no sexual harassment laws. And when a woman complained, it was often blamed on the woman. And she was either blackballed or sent to another unit. The consequences were for women because you were in a male environment."



Joana Scholtz with her Combined Arms Services and Staff School group in 1996 at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Courtesy of Joana Scholtz.

When asked about her greatest accomplishment while in the military, she says, "You know a lot of people would look at awards as a greatest achievement. But for me, my greatest achievement was getting beyond the self, getting beyond my own struggle, getting beyond looking at what I needed to achieve to realize that leadership is about taking care of people. For me, that was my biggest growth and my biggest achievement- to realize that my soldiers really did come first. As an officer, you gotta be successful. You gotta meet all of these criteria and goals and standards and whatnot. That's just part of being an officer, but really understanding that it's the people you lead, whether it's wartime or in peacetime, it's how you accomplish the mission as a group. And how people feel when they finish accomplishing the mission. If I have a soldier who

works for me and he or she is no better off after working for me, then I haven't done my job."



Joana and Steven Scholtz on their wedding day on December 19, 1985 in Lyngby, Germany. Courtesy of Joana Scholtz.

In 1983, Joana met Steven Scholtz, who was her sponsor when she arrived in Germany. "From the moment we met, we knew each other. We started hanging out on the weekends and we would always talk about who we were going to date and then we kind of realized we weren't dating anybody but each other. We got married in 1985. Back then there were very few couples where the woman was Black and the man was White. And I remember the first time we walked into a Hail and Farewell, the whole room hushed. Other times, people who would be talking to us and they would be like, 'Where's your wife? Where's your husband?' They were more uneasy than we were."



L: Joana Scholtz speaks with women at a luncheon with the Leavenworth-Lansing Chamber of Commerce Women's Division on September 22, 2020 at the Community Center in Leavenworth, Kansas.

R: Joana Scholtz reaches out and briefly squeezes the hand of one of her constituents during the luncheon with the Leavenworth-Lansing Chamber of Commerce Women's Division on September 22, 2020 at the Community Center in Leavenworth, Kansas.

Joana became pregnant with her son Alex in 1987. "Steven and I had made a pact before we got married, that if we had a child while we were on active duty, one of us would get out. I assumed it would be him. I had no idea he assumed it would be me. And so when we actually had the conversation when I was

about five or six months pregnant and he said, 'Well, when are you going to let them know you're resigning your Commission?' and I thought, 'What do you mean? I was waiting for you.' And so we flipped the coin. I mean, I totally trusted him and he totally trusted me. So we had to have a tiebreaker. We often had to go to the flip of the coin. I couldn't believe I lost the toss. But, if you lose the toss, you've got to honor it. Maternity leave was six weeks. And the military really wasn't equipped. I don't think the military had thought through the consequences of having women, in their prime childbearing ages, and the effect on mission readiness." Joana got out on December 31, 1987 and eventually went on to work in education in 1998, as a teacher and then as an instructional facilitator. Steven passed away in 2016 only 17 months after being diagnosed with terminal brain cancer.



Joana Scholtz waves at a neighbor while crossing the street with her yard sign, on September 25, 2020 in Leavenworth, Kansas.

A year later, Joana retired. She realized that her community desperately needed change. She reopened the Leavenworth NAACP

chapter. Not long after, she decided to run for the Kansas House of Representatives seat in District 40 because no one in the Democratic party was challenging the incumbent. "I had no idea that campaign would be so vicious." At a voter registration event with Buffalo Soldiers on Fort Leavenworth, a military installation which forbids all political and partisan campaigning under the Hatch Act, a candidate from the Republican party arrived with his campaign team dressed in campaign gear. Someone told him that he would have to leave and come back after he changed. Joana was shocked when the next day, a story circulated on Facebook that the angry Ms. Scholtz had something to do with it. She couldn't believe that he was trying to exploit the angry Black woman narrative to justify his overstepping the rules.



Joana Scholtz wears her "Stand with Joana Scholtz" mask while canvassing on September 23, 2020 in Lansing, Kansas. She speaks for a long time with a swing voter and her husband, a Republican. "How do you feel about second amendment rights?" is the first question asked. The couple agrees to hold on to a yard sign while they research her platform. They will return

the sign if they decide not to put it in their yard.

She realized then that “there was no requirement for truth in campaigning. And when you’re in a district like mine, which is basically white middle class Republican, they’re drinking the Kool-Aid. And it’s really hard to overcome that group think.” As I followed her on the campaign trail, I met her campaign manager, Rebecca Hollister, a college student at Georgetown University who was voted Young Dem of the Year in Leavenworth. Despite the generational difference, they were a perfect match, united in their desire to make positive changes in their community. Joana lost the election by a small margin, but it didn’t stop her from continuing her work to stand up for change on a community level. Speaking about Rebecca, Joana says, “She’s just a hard worker and I felt so bad when we lost. I felt worse for her than for myself because she fought so hard for me.”



L: Joana Scholtz embraces her campaign manager, Rebecca Hollister, after hearing the election night results on November 3, 2020 in Lansing, Kansas.

R: Table centerpiece at Joana Scholtz’s election watch party on November 3, 2020 in Lansing, Kansas.

Joana is now the Chairperson of the Leavenworth Democratic Committee and is working to increase voter registration. “We didn’t register as many people in disenfranchised areas as we would have liked to because a lot of them don’t want to use technology to register, but they don’t want to use paper because you have to write down your license. There’s a greater

amount of suspicion about the government in lower economic areas. And that's just something that you have to just keep going and overcoming and get people to realize that their voices count."



Joana Scholtz calls registered Democrats who have not yet voted up until the polls close at the Leavenworth Democratic Party Headquarters on November 3, 2020 in Leavenworth, Kansas. "My biggest focus with the NAACP right now is getting our youth up and going, but as a chapter, we really want to focus on economic development and economic wellness in our community because people talk about jobs, but if you work all your life and you have no savings at the end of it or you're always in debt and struggling, then you never experience that sense of wellness. And so we want people to understand that, regardless of your income, the goal is to reach a sense of wellness where you're paying your bills and you're putting a little bit aside. And also really starting to look at what jobs are in the community and where there is systemic racism in employment in our community. And being able to have those difficult conversations with people that make them aware of the need to

make changes and then persistently helping them make those changes.”



Joana Scholtz checks her messages on her watch as she gets her hair done before a Zoom fundraiser on September 23, 2020 in Leavenworth, Kansas.

“The other thing is introducing a culturally sensitive curriculum to our school systems. Right now, it’s what’s easy. Like if a teacher has a curriculum for *To Kill a Mockingbird*, they’re perfectly comfortable using that during Black History Month to demonstrate the struggles of Black people not realizing that that particular movie or book is extremely traumatic for Black students who are sitting in the class hearing the word n***er over, over, over, over throughout the book. And the theme of the violence against Black people and the expectation that it has no meaning. You know, it’s more comfortable for that teacher to dust off that curriculum every year and use it, than find something more relevant.” Reflecting back on this past year with the Black Lives Matter movement, the murders of George Floyd and Vanessa Guillen, and the recent storming of the Capitol, she says, “I think the

world is starting to figure it out. They're having to see what's always been there but it's always been kind of behind a thin veil. But that veil of civility has been ripped apart. It's really evident."



L: Joana Scholtz checks herself in her rear view mirror before heading out to go door to door and on September 23, 2020 in Leavenworth, Kansas.

R: Joana Scholtz celebrates the 22nd birthday of her granddaughter Jasmine Moody, with husband Rik Jackson, daughter Jacquanette Moody, and granddaughter's boyfriend Harrison Horton at her home in Leavenworth, Kansas on September 24, 2020. Her son Alex Scholtz and son-in-law Justin Moody join in via Facetime. She says, "you know what kind of life you lead by who's at your table."

A Tale of Two Coups



Forty years ago, I was living in Madrid working on a grant from the Thomas J. Watson Foundation to learn how Spanish theater had changed since Francisco Franco's death. While there I was detained twice—once by the national Civil Guard and a second time by the Madrid police. I hadn't done anything wrong. I was simply singled out, once in a park, once walking

the streets of Madrid, and put in a van for questioning.

When on February 23, 1981, the Civil Guard stormed the Parliament in Madrid with their machine guns, I wasn't all that surprised. The rumblings of an impending coup attempt that had been floating for months, combined with my own experience with Spanish law enforcement—baseless detentions—were ominous signs. At 4:23 in the afternoon, during a meeting of the Spanish Parliament to elect a new prime minister, armed members of the Civil Guard burst through the doors of the Congress of Deputies. The leader of the insurrection, Lieutenant-Colonel Antonio Tejero, stormed to the podium, fired bullets into the ceiling, and ordered everyone to the floor. Adolfo Suárez, the former Prime Minister, refused to obey. Calmly, he crossed his arms and remained seated. It is the greatest single act of courage I have ever known. He was not harmed.

By evening, there were tanks in the streets of Valencia. King Juan Carlos announced that he would address the nation at midnight. I assumed his intention was to urge calm, but some of the young men living in my boarding house said otherwise. Juan Carlos was somewhat of a protégé of Franco, they said. Franco had been dead for only a little over five years. Juan Carlos could just as easily side with the Fascist insurgents as the democratically-elected parliament.

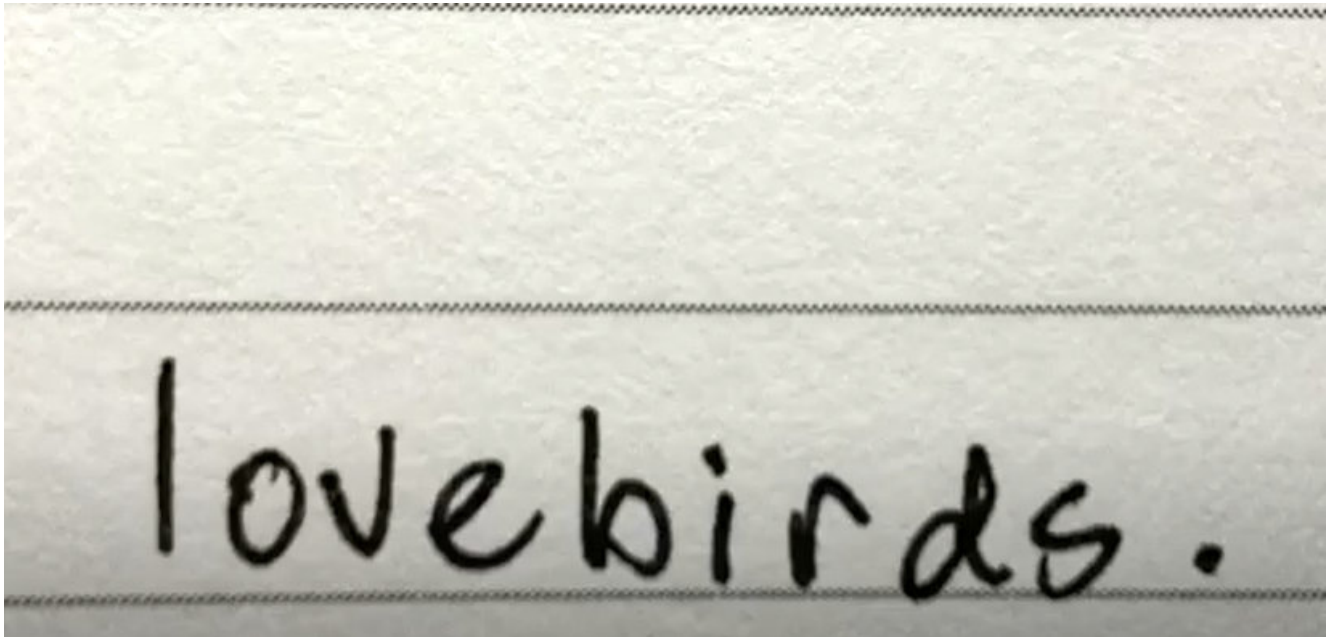
My friends were wrong. When the King appeared on TV in full military regalia, he told the nation, "The Crown, symbol of the nation's permanence and unity, will not tolerate, in any way whatsoever, the actions or behavior of anyone attempting, through use of force, to interrupt the democratic process of the Constitution." Without Juan Carlos' support, the insurgents had no choice but to back down. Although history has suggested that Juan Carlos might not have arrived at his decision by absolute moral clarity, what he said that night stopped a country from returning to a dictatorship from which it had only recently extricated itself.

I thought I had experienced the only coup attempt in my lifetime, but the recent attack on the Capitol Building proved me wrong. The similarities between the two coup attempts are striking: both took place in a divided country with record-high unemployment, both took place during what was supposed to be a peaceful transfer of power, and, sadly, neither was surprising. Unlike what happened in Spain, our national leader did not go on television to save democracy. Instead, he urged his followers on, until they were standing at the podium, ransacking the people's house in an attempt to overturn the people's will.

It would be easy to look at what happened in Spain as a *real* coup attempt. After all, it was the military that tried to usurp power. That's what we're used to seeing in other countries. This would never, we've heard over and over, happen in the United States. Yet if a coup is a sudden action to illegally seize power from a government, I'm hard pressed to see the difference. I'm certainly hard pressed to distinguish between the fear and heartbreak I felt on February 23, 1981 and January 6, 2021.

If you enter the Congress of Deputies today and look at the ceiling, you'll see the bullet holes from the machine guns of the coup attempt. When deciding to repair the building, the Spanish government left that damage intact, always visible to lawmakers, a reminder of how fragile democracy really is. They are scars that will forever hover over that body. As the United States slowly returns to some sense of normality, I hope we choose not to gloss over the damage Trump and his supporters have caused. Like the Spaniards, we need to be reminded of what happened here. We must always see the scars.

New Fiction from Kyle Seibel: “Lovebirds”



So Senior Reyes, the new night shift sup. I see him and the new airman walking around the hangar bay. Just talking. Honestly, I thought they were working and I've got my binder with me so I come up behind them and go, hey Senior, can you sign off my qual? He whips around and goes NOT NOW. I'm thinking I might get my ass chewed, but then I see the airman, I think it's Haley, Airman Haley. I look at her and she's all flushed. Now I'm thinking what did I interrupt? I look back at Senior and he puts together what I'm putting together. Changes his tune. SORRY SHIPMATE, he says. WHAT DID YOU WANT?

Nothing, Senior, I tell him. No worries.

C'MON, he says. C'MON, YOU WANT A SIGNATURE?

Yeah, I go. And he takes my qual book. Signs off a couple sections, looks up at me and signs off a couple more sections. THERE YOU GO, he says. Airman Haley slinks away.

I tell him thanks and Senior just stands in front of me. DON'T MENTION IT, he says. TO ANYONE.

*

Okay, so Senior Reyes. He takes over the maintenance meeting. Guess who he brings to take notes? Fuckin Airman Haley. They go down the list of which bird is up, who's got budget, whatever. End of the meeting and Senior is walking away and Haley takes the big green logbook and whacks it across his butt. I mean like WHOMP. Senior spins around, sees it's her—starts laughing. I shit you not. We're just watching them, the lovebirds. It couldn't have been more obvious if we walked in on them fucking.

The rest of us don't know what to do.

CMC clears his throat. Kinda sweet you ask me, he says.

I'm looking around like what the fuck? Everyone breaks out after the meeting and I catch up to the CMC.

Kinda sweet? I say. What the fuck?

And he goes, okay, what's your problem?

Well, I say, it's against the regulations.

CMC goes, okay, what should I do?

I go, I don't know, I'm not the command master chief.

CMC raises his eyebrows and pokes me in the chest.

Okay, let's say you're me, he says. And here's your shipmate, your brother. Married to the Navy. Just about to retire. Now he meets the kind of girl he should've met twenty years ago and that's his fault? Oh, and she likes him too? You're going to tell him to knock it off?

I guess not, I say.

You guess not, CMC says.

Fuck, I say, shaking my head.

My thoughts exactly, CMC says.

*

Couple months go by and I start dating the corpsman, right? I'm over at her place and I mention Senior Reyes and she goes, OH MAN. She starts to say something before she stops herself. And so now I'm like, you gotta tell me and she says, I'll get it so much trouble. But I keep on her about it and I can tell that she wants to spill it.

She says Haley was part of the maintenance crew that was doing touch and gos on the Vinson a couple of weeks ago and it was Haley's first time on the boat and she thought it was just motion sickness but eventually she went to get a pregnancy test and yep you guessed it.

No shit, I say and she says yes shit. What's gonna happen now, I say.

Well, I think they're gonna keep it, she says.

It, I say.

Her, she says.

Her, I say.

Well, they're hoping, she says.

Hoping, I say.

For a girl, she says.

Back at the squadron, they're not even acting like it's a secret. Haley waits for Senior by his car at the end of the day and they drive off together.



art by Kyle Seibel

They're gonna make it official and everyone thinks good for them. Sure, there's an age gap but consenting adults and all that. One of them will have to transfer. There are protocols to follow. This has happened before. An old story.

*

On the news they call it a microburst. An isolated weather event. They say it comes out of nowhere. They say it took the little fishing boat that Senior and Airman Haley were on and sucked them out to sea.

The funeral makes the front page of the base paper. They invite the whole squadron.

Day after, I'm sitting in my car outside the flightline before work. Just staring at the dashboard. Someone knocks on my window and it's the CMC so I roll down the window. He asks me if I wanna tell him I told him so.

Will it make me feel better? I ask him. Would it have

mattered?

Probably not, he says.

What's the lesson here? I ask him.

CMC says oh, you wanna learn something? Go to college.

I get out of the car and we're walking together to the turnstiles when WHOMP two birds fly into the briefing room window. We watch them drop to the ground. I start going over to where they fell and CMC says what're you doing but I go over to them anyway. I crouch down and can feel him standing behind me. I'm just trying to figure it out, you know? Tiny crushed beaks and twitchy little feet. I need it to make sense. I'm down there for a while and CMC says, c'mon shipmate so I stand up. We're looking at these fuckin birds when the base 1MC starts playing colors. So we turn towards the flag and salute the national fucking anthem and when we look down again I shit you not the birds are gone. They're just gone. And I'm looking at the CMC like what the fuck and he's just looking at me with this little smile.

Kinda sweet, you ask me, he says.

You can watch the author read an illustrated version of this story, below:

New Poetry from Andy Conner:

**“Apples,” “Untouchable,”
“Remanded In Custody”**



YOU MEAN NOTHING / *image by Amalie Flynn*

Apples

'The landmines are just like apples'

Khmer Rouge survivor

Apples can peel your skin

Like it isn't there

But more often than not

The cruellest fruit

Sucks the rusty blade

And leaves threads

Dripping

Threads of skin

Threads of your life

Dripping

Seeds onto barren ground

You mean nothing to the apples

You mean nothing to the apples

You mean nothing

Their anaesthetic minds

Hold no sense of time

No sense of pain

No sense

No sense of what remains

And if you

Are one of the hand-picked

Who escape in a step-right-on-it flash

Give thanks for this windfall

Which leaves survivors

Green

To the core

As they crawl
With the worms
With the worms
And the decay

Praying
To scrump a handout
With no hands
For the crumb
Which may or may not come

As they sit
In their own shit
Begging
On their stumps
For a friendly worm
To turn
Up
And eat it

Untouchable

On my recent trip
to Gujarat

I took
numerous
pretty photographs

of Modhera
Palitana
Dwarka
The White Desert

and other pretty places

but

the image
I can't delete

from my heart

my hard drive

is of a ragged street child
at Vastrapur Lake
who stepped out
from the promenading crowd

raised
his left
index finger
into the stifling
late afternoon

air

and drew
a rectangle
to take
an imaginary selfie

with me

Remanded In Custody

How can you talk
Of an even split
When you're parents
Of three kids

How can you ask
For understanding
When you won't say
What you did

How can you demand
We keep calm
When all you do
Is shout

And scream
It's your own business
When we're what
The fight's about

How can you plead
You need your freedom
When you've built
Our jail

Whose four sad walls
Have heard it all
Every selfish
Last detail

How can you think
We're stupid
'Cos we don't know
What it means

To move on and
Make a new start
When we're not yet
In our teens

If you two
Are so clever
And know what
Life's about

Why must it
Take forever
To sort
Your problems out

You've no thought
For our feelings
Or respect for
What we think

While you resent
That we need feeding
When you don't have
Cash for drink

You complain
We're far too young
To understand
Your trials

Well in this case
It's not the children
Who're acting
Like a child

You both believe
That you're the victim
Of the other's
Poisoned mind

But if your eyes
Can still open
You might see
The only crime's

Neglect of
Your own kids
All three
Ripped apart

By being used
As silent weapons
Against your
Other half

How dare you
Claim us as conscripts
To fight
Your filthy war

When the offence
That we committed
Was only
Being born

You'd never think
You're guilty
But if you'd any
Common sense

You'd see the last thing
Left in common
Is we've all got
No defence

New Fiction: Three Flash Fiction Pieces from William Alton

Three Pieces of Flash Fiction

1. Things That Stood Out

There was a boy in Izard. A brave boy. Everyone knew him. Ricky Dunkle. The Dunkles were quiet people. They lived across from the school in a little blue house. The kind of blue house that made people shake their heads and mutter. Mrs. Dunkle raised sunflowers. They rose tall and spindly. They grew in knots throughout the yard. Mrs. Dunkle loved her sunflowers. She walked amongst them every day, caressing the petals, smelling them. She lifted their faces to her own, kissing their dark centers. Mrs. Dunkle always wore the same

housecoat. A ratty, purple and orange thing. She wore slippers. Even in the yard. Even in the rain. Sometimes, she talked to herself.

Her husband worked out at the water treatment plant. A gnomish man, he stopped at the Squirrel's Hole every night and got the same thing. A burger for Ricky. Fish and Chips for Mrs. Dunkle. Mrs. Dunkle didn't cook. At night, he sat in his backyard with a telescope looking for things in the sky. Stars. Planets. Meteors rushing toward us. They were an off bunch, the Dunkles. People talked. That's what people in Izard did. They talked. But they talked sideways.

Every morning, Ricky walked from his folks' house to work. He owned the Dragons' Stop. A pool hall on the corner opposite the Post Office. The Dragons' Stop was a place for people to go. It was loud and dark and filled with cigarette smoke. Sometimes, on the weekends, they had dances. It was the hangout for high school kids and people who didn't go to the bars. It was also where folks went to get weed and pills.

Ricky wore purple boots and black, satin pants tight as a condom. He wore pink rodeo shirts and a belt buckle the size of a salad plate. He dressed like an Easter egg. Black hair rose in a wave from a wide forehead. Rhinestones glittered from his fingers and collar.



People like Ricky Dunkle didn't fit in places like Izard. In Izard, people liked things simple and quiet. Things that stood out stood out. In Izard, everything had a place. Not Ricky Dunkle. Ricky Dunkle made his own place. He knew people. Men who wore leather and rode Harleys. Men who carried guns and knives and a history of using them. Not that it mattered. Ricky was braver than all of us.

"Look at him," Uncle Mike said. "Asking for trouble."

"He's helpless," Mom said. If I could have, I would have turned to ash. I would have crumbled and disappeared.

"I saw him at the school the other say," Uncle Mike said.

"What're you afraid of?"

“Afraid?”

I went to my room. I closed the door and hid. Silent. Ashamed. They talked through the walls. Their glasses clinked against their teeth. I was the faggot in the corner wishing I had the guts to wear purple boots.

2. Civilized Behavior

In my family, we killed things. We hunted and trapped. Fathers taught sons and sons taught their sons. The women waited at home, preparing for the slaughter. They knew how to cut the carcasses into pleasing pieces. They knew how to wrap the meat in white paper and how to stack it just right in the freezer, oldest on top. In my family, killing was providing. Men provided. Women prepared and preserved. I was not yet ten but Grandpa was determined. “A man,” he said. “A man does what’s necessary.”

It seems spilling blood was necessary.

*

We lived in the crotch of a small valley. All around fields and pastures. Barns and sheds. An old outhouse slumped in the backyard, unused and emptied. Chickens searched for seeds. At the edge of things, a forest rose and scratched at the sky, a mix of oak and hemlock, spruce, pine and fir. Brambles lined the floor. Mast softened it all. The woods were always wet, except in the final weeks of summer when the sun shined hard enough and long enough to pull the moisture from the thick soil.

Grandpa and the uncles carried flashlights and they kept the beams on the ground. A narrow path cut through the meadow. Dew painted the weedy pasture a bit silver in the moonlight. Goody, the milk cow, lay in a patch of tall grass slowly

chewing her cud.

The path ran rough and knotted under ancient limbs. I stumbled but didn't fall. Grandpa was a massive shadow in the dim morning. I was cold and tired. But I was scared too. Grandpa had something in mind and he didn't like questions.

We walked without words. We found the first trap. Empty. And the second. It held a raccoon. Grandpa shot it with his revolver. He skinned the carcass, gutted it and cut its head off. We moved the trap down the trail.

"This," Grandpa said. "This is how we live."

*

I learned young how to cope with violence, or the promise of violence. I was a small kid, scrawny and lean. I was often a target. People seemed to think I wouldn't fight back. "If you're going to fight," Mom said, "fight dirty. If you're going to fight, make sure someone goes to the hospital."

*

Becket Smite was a square headed boy and mean. Tall and thin, his eyes sat too far apart and his lips were thin as worms. His big hands made big fists. Everyone was afraid. I was afraid. He came to me in the lunch line. He came and cut between me and Lotti. Mostly, at school, no one bothered me. I was a Neel. But Becket liked a challenge.

"Are you tough?" he asked.

"What?"

"Do you think you can take me?"

He put his hand in the center of my chest and pinned me to the wall. I told him to stop. My voice was stronger than I felt.

"Or what?"

“Just go away.”

Becket smiled.

“You sound tough,” he said. “Are you tough?”

I grabbed his wrist. He looked at me. This was it. This was how it was going to work. This was a fight I wasn't going to get out of. I swallowed. I swung the lunch tray. The crack was too loud. His nose broke. Becket dropped and howled. Blood. Things got thin and sharp. He held his face. But then got up and it was on. We punched and kicked. I lost track of my fingers. I lost track of everything.

*

Mr. Sawyer lectured us on civilized behavior. He called our folks. Mom came. Tired and bent. Unhappy. Days were her nights. She asked if I was hurt.

“I'm fine.”

“Is he?”

I remembered the crunch of bone and the blood. The whole thing left me sour and tangled. “I hope so.”

“Really?”

“Yeah.”

“Good.”

That's how it worked in my family. Violence and regret. Shame kept just under the skin.

3. Back Then and Back There

There was this girl. Back when I was a kid. Rudeen. Only, no one called her Rudeen. Except her mom. We called her Ding

Ding. Silly but back then and back there, silliness wasn't always silly. Ding Ding lived across the road. Her people's land bordered mine. Somewhere back in time, we were cousins. Generations removed. One of her greats married one of mine.

She was in my class at school. A pretty girl. Blond and small. She painted her nails blue and gold. Boys fluttered about her like crows. They flapped about and brought her shiny things. Bright things. They told her jokes that fell like stones to the floor and rolled about but she smiled because she was a good girl and, back then, back there, good girls smiled when boys told them jokes.

Terry Shaw, with his high and tight haircut and quarterback hands, knew how to talk to her. He knew how to get her to look at him. Terry Shaw sat with her every day at lunch. He lived in town. His dad was a banker or something. They were perfect. I hated him. I was a poor boy in hand me downs and re-soled boots. I was skinny, long haired and shy. I was not like the others. I preferred books to people. I preferred the library to the football field.

We had a deal. Back then and back there, good girls didn't walk alone in public. Ding Ding was a good girl. Her mom talked to my mom. Because I was a good boy and back then, back there, good boys did what their moms said, I walked Ding Ding to and from the bus stop. A mile. Maybe a little more. It was faster to cut through the fields, but there were snakes in the fields and gophers and traps. If you knew what you were doing, the fields were safe but our moms didn't like the fields and back then, back there, we didn't do things our moms didn't like.

But there were rules. We didn't talk. Ding Ding only talked to boys like Terry Shaw. We focused on walking. After school, we had chores and then there was dinner and then there was homework. She walked ahead of me, all pretty and bright in the sunlight. The road stretched on and on. Dirty and rutted. I

counted my steps. One hundred. Two hundred. Three.

At our driveway, I stopped and watched her walk to the twin willows marking hers. She took her time. Ding Ding's home was loud sometimes. Her dad was known for meanness and drink. Saturday nights, he sat in the bar with my grandpa. They told stories and bought each other whiskeys. They stayed up too late and slept through Sunday mornings. She stopped that day, under the willows. She looked at me and nodded. Ding Ding never looked at me. She never nodded. I was a shadow. I followed her around but I didn't mean anything. We weren't friends. I stood there until I heard her screen door slam.

Later, when the sheriff came with the fire trucks and the county ambulance, no one knew what was what. People ran here and there. Mom stood on the porch with Grandma. Grandpa came from across the way in his jeans and sweat stained undershirt, one arm around Ding Ding. She wore a thin, green blanket. "Gas," he said. "Pilot light." Back then and back there, some folks cooked with gas. Sometimes, the pilot light went out. Sometimes, gas filled the house. Sometimes, people died.

The funeral was long and solemn. Mom made me wear a suit and tie. She made me polish my shoes and wear socks. Pastor talked about valleys of death and shepherds. Ding Ding wore a black dress and black sneakers. She sat up front with her grandparents. Stone faced and pale. No tears though. Back then and back there, crying in public just wasn't done. Later, they shook hands and they tried to eat with rest of us. They thanked everyone face to face. I sat with Ding Ding for a bit. There were no words. We were thirteen. Back then and back there, we knew about death. We hunted and we raised our meat. But this was new. This was something all together different.

Her grandma came, a big woman with big hips and too many chins. "Rudeen," she said. "It's time." I blinked up at her. Rudeen? It seemed right. Yesterday, Ding Ding. Today, Rudeen. We knew when to leave things behind.

New Nonfiction from Sarah Haak: “Assimilation”

My

husband has downloaded a sleep cycle app for his phone. Every evening he tucks

the phone into bed with him, under the sheets so it can measure how many times

he moves during the night, and when he enters deep sleep. In the morning, the

app displays a dark graph full of his various sleep-cycle transformations.

Except, since we’ve started sleeping together again after more than a year

spent apart—he in boot camp and then a Special Operations nine-month training

program; me in different places but always waiting—he isn’t sure the app is

calibrating to his cycle alone anymore, and he begins to worry it is including

my movements with his.



Photo by Arthur Debat – Getty Images

Every night the sleep cycle app dictates when we get into bed, and every morning it shows whether we did the right things the day before. Every curve on the graph tells a tale. The little ones in the beginning, tiny dips through an otherwise straight line, tell my husband he waited too long to get into bed. If only we had eaten dinner earlier, or maybe if we had not had chocolate for dessert, he might have made a shorter line, might have descended into sleep, and then deep sleep, faster or better. If only the bed we're sleeping in were bigger so we didn't touch, but the extended-stay hotel where we live awaiting our orders doesn't have any other rooms.

The larger curves are more troubling to him, though—I can tell by the way he studies his phone in the mornings with a frown—the peaks that rise and carry him awake. Those occur between the hours of 1:00 and 3:00 am. During those times, the graph usually shows a vast mountain of consciousness, my husband sometimes cresting ever so slowly upward, and other times shooting straight up into awake. Before he left for

training, when I could feel him restlessly fidget in his sleep, I would reach out and touch his face, or maybe even pull him to me and comb my fingers through his hair. But now his hair is buzzed regulation-short. Now he dreams of gunshots and being chased, and he thrashes and shouts in his sleep and moves away from me when I touch him, curling into himself on the other side of the bed. Now he is full of heat at 2:00 am, so warm I have to peel the blankets back from my skin, which always wakes him. In the mornings, he looks at me earnestly and asks what he can do to help me sleep better.

When the graph shows 95% sleep quality, things are good for the day. When the graph shows 45%, things are not. He decides we need to drink less wine and shut off all screens an hour before bed. No more funny shows to take some of the tension away. We need to exercise before 10:00 am and eat three meals a day. We need routine and consistency. We need to resolve difficulties earlier in the evening or maybe not at all.

New Fiction from Adrian Bonenberger: “Wonder Woman”

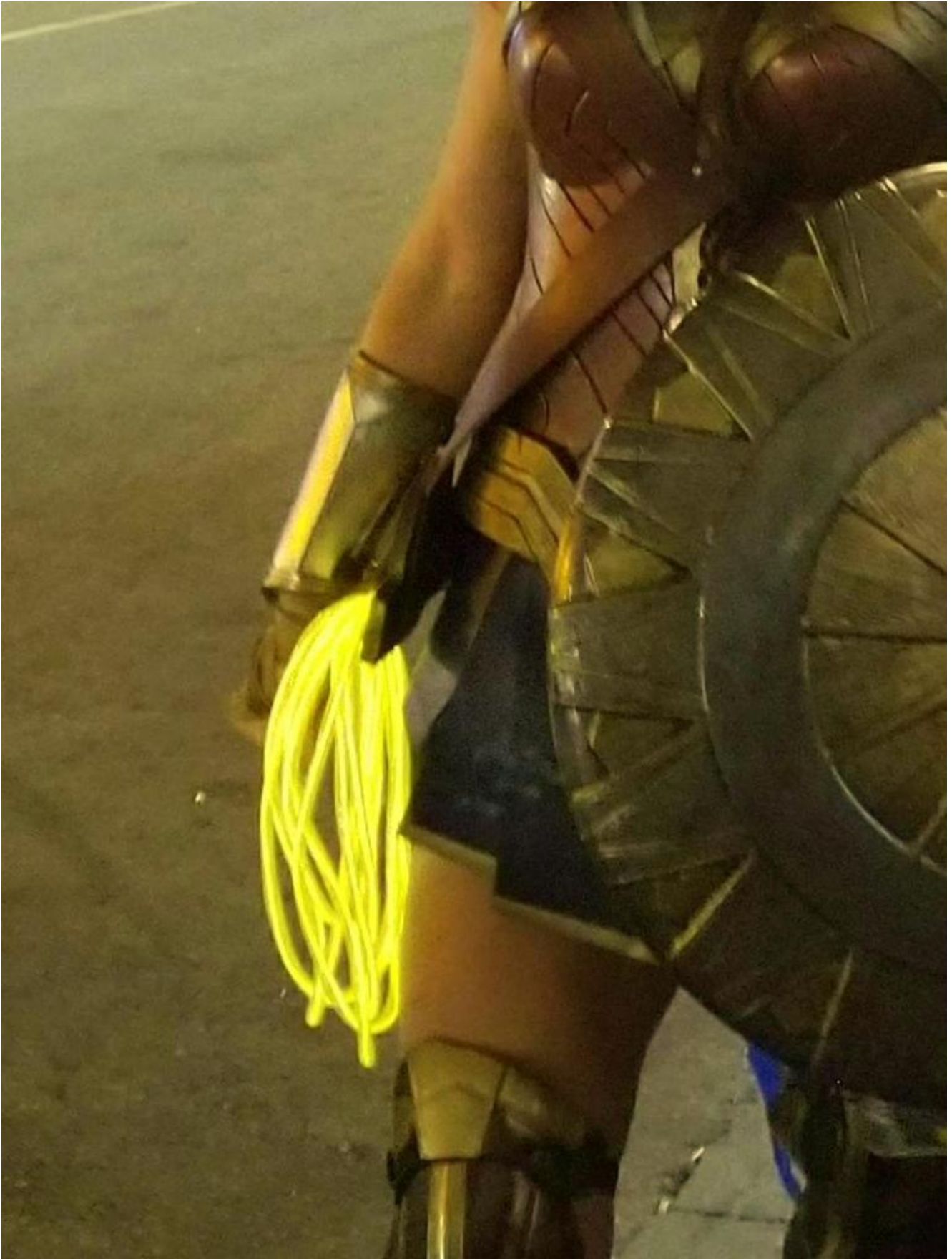
In Atlanta at the Ritz Carlton we stopped at the bar by the lobby on our way upstairs. Fred saw Newt Gingrich who was dressed neat casual wearing loafers (I don't know what a loafer is but that's what he was wearing). His wife, Callista, was in the corner talking on a razor cell phone. Fred got up and introduced himself to Newt, and pulled me over. Newt said he hadn't been in the Army but that his dad served at Fort Benning.

When I turned around, Sam was talking with a tall, statuesque

woman

in a red-white-and-blue bikini. Wonder Woman.

She was not the kind of woman you could ignore, equal parts power and beauty. But Sam, I could tell, wasn't interested.



"I'm gonna put my lasso around you, figure out what you're about,"
Wonder Woman was saying, leaning in towards Sam.

"We uh need to go upstairs to the room, now, right? Sorry Newt Gingrich, my friends and I need to stow our stuff. Yeah, totally we'll see you later," Sam said to Wonder Woman. "Definitely."

Frank said we ought to wear our Class-A's for cocktails. But when he walked in the business lounge in uniform he was the only one.

"What the fuck, guys," he said. Sam and I were wearing khaki slacks and polo shirts. "Way to blue falcon me, now I look like an asshole."

An older man wearing a white cowboy hat and a bolo tie thanked him for his service as Sam grabbed a round of Heinekens. I noticed three women sitting in the corner, looking over at Frank. They were about our age, maybe a little older. We gallantly introduced ourselves. After some pleasant banter and flirtation, I started to make moves.

"We're married," said the tall brunette.

"All three of you?"

"Well, what happens in Atlanta, stays in Atlanta," Sam said. The blond laughed and exchanged some kind of glance with the third woman. They were housewives. I guessed in the South at that moment, it was still possible. To be a housewife and still get to go out on one's own in the city, talk with strange young men. Fred excused himself to change out of his uniform.

Somehow or other we didn't end up meeting back up with the three married women after all. The one I liked had been pregnant, anyway.

Instead we crossed the street and found an upscale steak joint. Fred, who got lost the night before at Fort Benning during training and had to retake his "land navigation" test, almost faceplanted into his mashed potatoes he was so beat. He prepared to excuse himself when a party of Atlanta Hawks cheerleaders sat down across from us at a table for six.

"Could've used your class-A's for this one, buddy," Sam hissed.

Fred tried to rally. I gave him my Red Bull and ordered him a coffee.

"Go outside and smoke a cigarette."

But I knew that look on his face, Fred wasn't coming back. He waved goodbye to us from the door. The cheerleaders laughed and chatted with each other while tables like ours stared. One aging woman at the next table said to another, "they comin' or what?"

"They paid for us, they'll be here," her friend said. She gave me a sardonic smile. "What are you looking at, sugar?"

I was noticing that Wonder Woman had just entered the restaurant. She seemed to be looking for someone.

"Sam, buddy," I said.

"What, you see Newt Gingrich again?"

"No. We gotta leave."

When I got a text from Fred it was nearly 1130pm. I called him back, which I knew he hated, but not as badly as he needed a

boost. "Come out, dude," I yelled over the club's music. Sam was getting drinks, some kind of Irish beer he liked. Sam was Scottish or part Scottish. Irish beer somehow factored into that identity. He'd visited Ireland in college. Maybe he was part Irish, too. But then, he wore a kilt and played the bagpipes. That night he kept craning his long neck, trying to chat up different girls. Whatever energy we had with the married women had fizzled out, all the conversations ran dry. So we lied and told Fred it was worth it. "It's great here," I yelled into the phone.

*

A few years later Fred and Sam came to my wedding. It was Texas hill country, in the middle of summer. The water in the river behind my wife's parents' house was low. The heat was dry but intense. Fred brought this Italian girl I liked, and Sam was with a special needs teacher he'd met near his base. We were all sitting on top of a hill drinking wine, and Sam said "remember our last trip to Atlanta?"

"How could I forget," Fred said. He was getting out of the Army by then, and he'd stopped smoking cigarettes. "The gay pride parade. The cheerleaders. The accident."

"That was the same trip?" I couldn't believe it.

"Don't forget about that other thing," Sam said. The group fell silent just before my fiancée retrieved me for some rehearsal task. None of us wanted to say it. Wonder Woman, the X factor, the uncertain variable.

*

Back in Atlanta, Fred had arrived at the club, and wouldn't you know it, a short blond woman struck up conversation with him almost immediately. She was cute, so Sam and I tried to do

what we could to break them up. Fred wasn't there more than a half hour before she pulled him away and drove off with him in a Mustang GT. He looked so sleepy, holding a whisky in his hand and swaying to the music, like he never fully woke up from his nap. How could any single lady resist.

The next morning when I woke Fred was in bed, too. Sam slept like a rock, and I didn't remember Fred coming in. He'd stripped down to his boxers, a plaid pattern. There was barely enough room in bed for the three of us so I rolled out and showered.

When I finished, Fred was already up pacing back and forth impatiently.

"I'm meeting back up with Penelope," he said.

"Oh, yeah?"

"Yeah I need to take a quick shower. We're grabbing brunch."

Sam rolled over to take up the whole bed, now that it was vacant.

"Will you two shut up already. My head's killing me."

I waved Fred into the bathroom. "I'm done, knock yourself out. Just remember, we need to check out by 1pm."

"Yeah I'll be back by then," Fred said, hurrying into the steam.

Sam and I made our way back up to the business lounge having packed our bags. It was empty, so the two of us took seats with bloody mary's and looked out over the city.

I unfolded a copy of the *Journal-Constitution* and reclined.

“Is that a parade?” Sam said. Sure enough, there was a massive line of and people snaking down a main boulevard several streets to the east of the hotel.

“Gay pride parade,” I said, pointing to the front page story in the newspaper.

“Well, now we know where Fred hurried off to,” Sam said.

“Yeah, why did he bother making up a name, ‘Penelope,’ as though he needed to lie to us.”

Sam laughed and took a drink. The sun was hidden behind a cloud and a shadow fell across the room. It occurred to me that these moments of ours were being measured out as though by a spoon—that one day, we’d all go our separate ways to build families and careers, but here, at this moment, we were all happily engaged in the pursuits that suited us, freed by friendship to enjoy ourselves unconstrained by want or need.

Twenty minutes passed in this manner. Clouds hurried across the sky, and we passed through their shadows below. I read about the baseball season’s progress and what novel scheme the Bush administration had to immiserate us. The World Cup was in full swing, Italy was a contender to win. Sam called his sister and was speaking softly. I couldn’t hear about what.

The door burst open. It was Fred.

"Time to leave, guys."

"What's the rush," I said, looking up.

"Wonder Woman. I saw her in the lobby. She's waiting for us and
now her outfit's purple and gold."

Sam said "I have to go," then hung up. "What do you mean? Also,
were you just at the gay pride parade?"

Fred shook his head impatiently, he didn't have time for crude jokes, and motioned to us to make haste. His backpack was slung over one burly shoulder, which lent his urgency an air of credibility.

"All right," I said, "all right, we're coming."

*

A half hour later we were congratulating ourselves on having escaped Atlanta without further incident. Racing down the highway south toward Fort Benning, what had been a beautiful summer day turned gray, ominous. Before long it was raining.

"Man, this Georgia weather's ridiculous," Sam said. "Can't wait to
get out of here. I'm never coming back."

Fred didn't think it was supposed to rain much. Just enough to make the coming week's training uncomfortable.

I was driving. "The paper said it'd be showers, nothing too bad."

Just then the rain picked up. It was like God turned up the dial
from a one to a ten. It was coming down in buckets.

"What the hell," Fred said in the back seat. "Holy shit! What

the
hell?"

"Look out," Sam said.

The car in front of me had slammed on its brakes. I swerved around it into the fast lane, slowing abruptly as the antilock brakes pumped and my truck fishtailed crazily. Off to the left, a minivan, one of the older models, a Chrysler, had been following too closely and lurched off into the grass median. It skidded to a stop.

We nearly hit the car in front of us but it accelerated just in time, and I avoided the crash.

"Oh my God," Fred said. "Guys."

Behind us, cars smashed into one another. One car flipped into the air, spinning, and I could see the driver turning the wheel as though to influence his vehicle's flight.

"Drive, man, drive," Fred said. Glancing in the rear view mirror I watched as a tractor-trailer fell to its side and slid toward the pile behind us. Then, through the heavy rain, I saw a figure leaping over the wreckage—Wonder Woman!—had she been involved, somehow? Her golden lasso shining, a beacon through the chaos, she caught the car and set it down gently as we drove further into the storm.