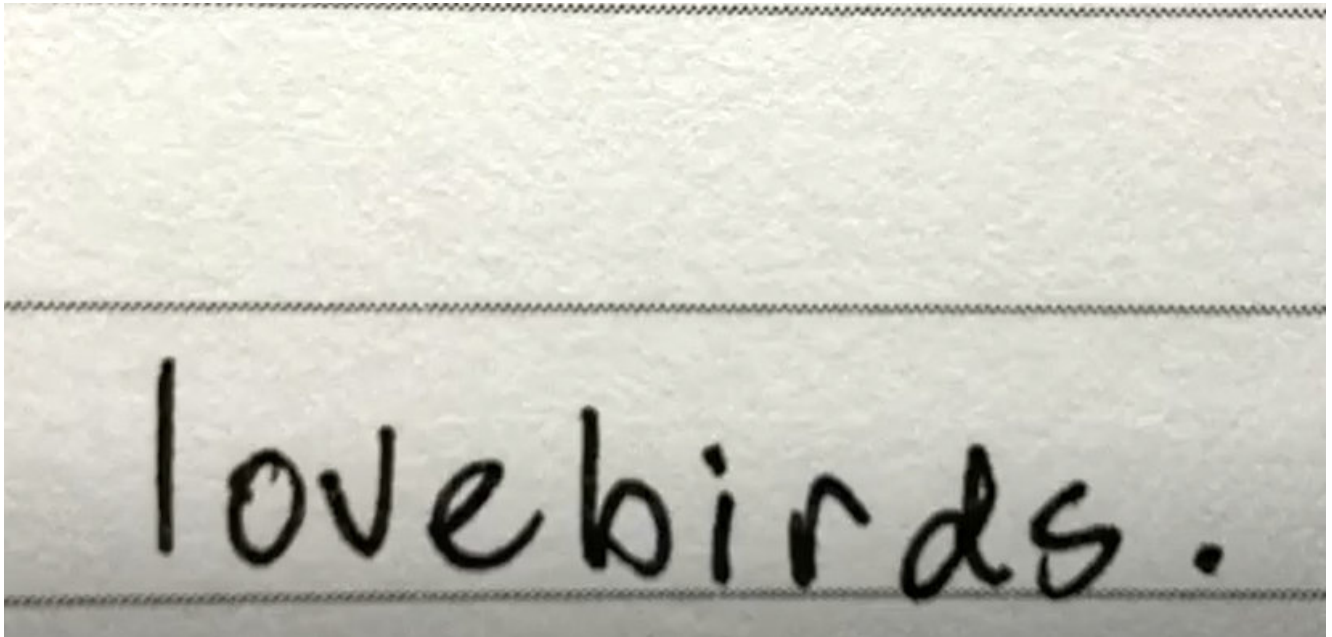


# New Fiction from Kyle Seibel: “Lovebirds”



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.

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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.

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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.

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