

Evaluation:
A [REDACTED] Report
Case File 2 of 12

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This file requires DELTA GREEN Security Clearance

- Language
- Nudity

SUBJECT: USMC GySgt White, Jeremy T.

DATE: July 28, 2015

TIMESTAMP: 14:12

ATTACHED:



Room twelve was outfitted similarly to others in Walter Reed, with a hospital bed, monitors, and IV stands. A TV on one wall showed an in-progress first-person shooter game. No one was visible on the vinyl-covered couch, except for the pair of bare feet sticking out over the armrest.

"So you finally decided to come down from the high castle to play with me?" A male voice demanded. "I could use some fun kicking your sorry ass. I'm sick of playing the campaign these idiots wrote up."

"I'm not here to play games with you," Roberts said, moving around the couch.

"Aw, come on wittle Lance-ey, you scared the big bad Gunny's gonna hurt ya'?"

"You have company."

"Oh, is it time for my conjugal visit already? Who is she?"

From her position at the door, Michelle watched the feet disappear behind the couch, shortly before a pair of boxers went flying at Roberts' face. She picked that moment to step into view. "Hi, I'm Michelle."

The look of shock on Jeremy White's face was priceless. The fact that there was no shame mixed in was telling. In a single movement, he paused the game, dropped the controller, and went from horizontal to vertical, standing at attention in more ways than one.

Michelle noted how he ignored his nudity and wondered what had sparked the change. It couldn't be the fact that she was a woman. She knew there were women who worked in the Basement, so it had to be the fact that she was young, pretty, and most importantly, an unknown. Because in the time it had taken him to stand up, the slovenly bachelor had disappeared, only to be

replaced by a marine that might actually live up to the accolades on his record.

"My apologies ma'am, I didn't realize I actually had a visitor."

Michelle made sure her body language was relaxed as she spoke. "But Roberts said you did. Don't you trust him?"

"Trust but verify, ma'am," White replied. That was a good line, but there was something more to it. It was clear that White didn't trust Roberts, and she wondered if he trusted anyone in the Basement. After what he'd gone through, it would make sense if he didn't. That would need to be unwrapped.

Thinking in those terms gave her an idea, and she intentionally looked up and down White's six-foot, crew-cut frame. Then she let out a little girlish giggle. She saw Roberts look over in confusion as White smiled with only his eyes. Yes, the coquette routine had potential here.

White seemed to realize that no one had called him to attention, and he glanced down at himself. "Permission to put on pants?"

"Permission granted," Michelle replied with another little giggle. White stepped lively toward the plasticized cabinet as Roberts threw her an expression of disgust and betrayal. Leaving his boxers at Roberts' feet, he went straight for the fatigue trousers, leaning on his bed for support. It was perfectly made, and Michelle bet that if she'd had a quarter it would have bounced off the blankets. It was curious that White kept barrack-style fastidiousness while his demeanor was so slovenly. She wondered if Roberts realized which one of those was for show.

White returned a moment later, undershirt tucked into the pants, and sat on the couch to tie his boots. When he finished, he stood again and gestured toward the couch. "Can I offer you a seat?" Without turning, he added "Not you, asswipe, you get to stand."

Michelle took the seat graciously and demurely crossed one leg over the other. Then she patted the seat next to her. "Please, sir, take a seat."

"Ha. I ain't no sir. I work for a living," he said as he sat. The practiced line came out in a rush. "You're not military."

"Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't actually introduce myself. I'm Michelle Park. I'm a civilian contractor from the State Department."

"And what do you need from me?"

"I'm here to evaluate you for discharge."

White's face remained calm, but the light in his eyes was unmistakable. "Discharge? You mean I'm getting out of here?"

"Maybe," Michelle said. "That's what I'm here to figure out."

The corners of White's mouth twitched in an approximation of a smile. "Then what do you need? I already told the brass everything about the shit-fest that got me here. And the shrinks already spent months trying to figure out what makes me tick."

"How did that go?"

"I don't know what they wrote down, but I'll tell you what I told them: Mission, Team, Country. In that order. Oh, and also Caffeine, Alcohol, and Tobacco. Not necessarily in that order."

Michelle barked out a little laugh before she bit her lip and glanced sidelong at White, pretending to hold it back.

The façade landed the way she intended, and White's smile blossomed, but only on one side, lending a cockiness to his white, suburban, traditional attractiveness. "There's other things I like too, but I wouldn't want to talk about it in front of his delicate ears over there. He might blush."

Roberts' growl was audible from across the room, and Michelle giggled. "I think I might know you mean."

"And I can guarantee you I'm good at what I do. I'm a marine."

"Yes you are," Michelle replied, feigning schoolgirl awkwardness. "And I'm sure you do. So um, let's start with the basics, shall we?" She reached into the briefcase. "Gum?"

"Sure," White said with a shrug, and started unwrapping a piece. He balled the wrapper and threw it at Roberts.

Michelle brought out White's file on her clipboard before running a finger down the laundry list of accolades. "Gunnery sergeant, Marine Scout Sniper, two tours in Iraq, Bronze Star, Purple Heart. You have quite a record, Gunny. Sorry, do you mind if I call you Gunny? That's the short version of Gunnery Sergeant, right?"

"It is. And you can call me whatever you want, except late for dinner" White said, in another practiced line. It prompted a nearly inaudible groan from Roberts, while Michelle pretended to chuckle. These witticisms were obviously a flirtation device. But they might also be a defense mechanism to keep his reactions reflexive. She would find out.

"And you were part of an international special operations team to fight the Islamic State? Wow!" Michelle tucked her hair behind one ear, and White's smile got a little bigger. If she

hadn't known better, she'd be worried about how predatory it looked.

"I'd tell you more, but uh, that's classified," White said.

Michelle raised her eyebrows in surprise. "Oh? What part?"

"Um, all of it. It's CJTF stuff."

"CJTF?"

White nodded and started talking with his hands. "Combined Joint Task Force 613. It's an international group through NATO called Team Hammerlock. That much at least is declassified."

Michelle eagerly wrote that down on her clipboard, as if it were news to her. This part of the game was almost too easy.

"What else can you tell me?"

"Not much else except we had missions in Iraq and later Afghanistan." He said both countries' names with hard 'a' sounds, like President Bush had. "And I can tell you the name Spellbind, which is what got me here."

"What about Price?"

At that, White paused, and the grin slowly soured. "Sorry, who?"

"Price," Michelle said, looking up from her clipboard.

"He's the one who recruited you to CJTF-613, isn't he?"

White paused at that and stared into the middle distance, lost in thought. When he replied, each word was deliberate. "I don't know anyone named Price, ma'am."

"Ma'am? Oh, I thought we were on a first name basis, Jeremy."

"Oh right, yeah, sorry," White said, slowly recovering.

She didn't let him catch his breath. "So you don't know anyone named Price. Is that because it's a codename?"

White took a long moment before looking Michelle in the eyes. The realization was visible. "You already know everything about Hammerlock and Spellbind, don't you?"

"I know some things," she said, offering the innocent smile again. "But I'd rather hear it from you."

"Right."

"If you don't want to talk about Price, how about Kingfish? Sorry, I mean General Derlin."

As Michelle said each name, she watched him become visibly less comfortable and more tense. It wasn't the tension of a hunter about to strike as much as it looked like he was locking himself down tight so that he wouldn't strike. From the corner of her eye, Michelle saw Roberts stiffen too, reaching toward the extendable baton at his belt. It was almost funny how neither man understood what was happening. But she was used to that, and she had control of the situation.

"I'm sorry, ma'am—I mean miss—uh, Michelle. I don't know anyone named Kingfish either."

Michelle smiled that innocent little smile again. "And I suppose you don't actually have three Purple Hearts either, do you?"

"You have my record. It says one Purple Heart, doesn't it?"

"You really are good at this game. Has anyone ever told you that before?"

"No, ma'am."

"Michelle." She marked three tallies in the top corner of her clipboard and showed them to him. "See that? I'm going to start keeping track of when you get it wrong." She chuckled and looked back up at him. "Who taught you doublespeak? Is it

standard Spec Ops training? Or was it something you learned in the field?"

White swallowed, even more visibly uncomfortable now, as he looked back and forth between Michelle and Roberts. Again, she pushed before he could find his feet. "So you reported to Kingfish, right? Price was in charge on the ground?"

"Um, yeah. Yes, that's how it worked."

"Where was he from?"

White glanced at the clipboard, but it would have been a rookie move to let him see it. "UK. Both of them."

"Oh that's right," she said, feigning forgetfulness. "So it was a British plan, and then they recruited the other four team members from allied NATO countries. Who were they?"

White looked around nervously and gestured toward Roberts. "I can't say this stuff in front of that guy."

"It's okay, he's been read in," Michelle assured him cheerfully.

"Even then, this is heavy shit. It might give him scary dreams."

Roberts sneered and muttered something under his breath.

"It's okay, Lance Corporal," Michelle said calmly. "Gunny's just joking around, right?"

"Sure, let's go with that," White replied. Michelle noted his body language. He was more relaxed again. Still attentive, but no longer a ball of nerves. So, he defused tension with humor. That wasn't uncommon, but it was interesting nonetheless. She wondered if he was targeting Roberts specifically or whether anyone in his position was fair game. Either way, the lance corporal's presence was working to keep White off guard. He was revealing far more than he thought he was.

"Then let's not go into any details. Who were the others on your team?"

"Are."

"Excuse me?"

"Who are the others, you mean," White said. That was fascinating. It meant he really didn't know what had happened to Hammerlock. That was good to know.

"Of course. Are."

White's expression hardened for an instant, but this time he was better able to control his reaction. "Nomad, Saturn, Alloy, and me. Rooster."

"Benoit from France, Wojciechowski from Poland, Roy from Canada, and you from the US. Plus Stirling from the UK, of course. All working under Derlin." Michelle pretended to write something down on the clipboard again and was pleased to see White strain to try and read it.

"Ma'am, if you--"

"That's four," she said and ticked another tally.

White grunted. "If you already know all this, then why are you asking? Honestly?"

"Because there are things the reports don't say," Michelle said, putting the clipboard on her lap. She saw White look, but she'd been careful to put it face down. "And this isn't about your report or your record. It's about you. If I'm going to evaluate you, I need to get to know you first."

White looked down at his hands, then up at Roberts. "Can we get that asshole out of here, at least?"

"No, I'm sorry. It's security orders that I can't be alone in here."

"Right. Okay. So. What do you want to know?"

Michelle paused, but only for a split second. It had been surprisingly easy to get his guard down. Too easy, in fact. Roberts had put him off guard enough to let her see some things, but there was more going on under the surface of Gunnery Sergeant White than he let on. Making a calculated attack, she used a piece of specialized ammunition.

"How about we start with you telling me about Cody."

She almost smiled as White responded exactly as she'd predicted. He stood suddenly, reeling back like the name had been an open-palmed slap. The game controller went flying off the couch and clattered to the floor, unpausing the game. The sound of electronic gunfire filled the room. The first-person view looking down a rifle went red, then black, finally showing the words "YOU WERE KILLED: CONTINUE?"

Roberts already had his baton out, ready to move, but Michelle didn't flinch. White wouldn't attack her. He was confused and defensive, but he was too smart to attack something that confused him. He wanted intelligence so he could plan the opportune action. He was a sniper. He was deliberate.

"How do you know about Cody?" he finally asked. "Who are you?"

Bingo.

"Michelle Park. I'm from March Technologies, subcontracted by the State Department." She reached into her lab coat's pocket, slowly enough not to startle White, and removed a boring, white government-issue business card. "There, do you believe me now?"

"What's D4ZER?" He read the program name correctly, rhyming it with laser. Either he'd heard of it before, which was

impossible, or he'd picked up how to pronounce internet slang from video games.

"It's the program I work with. Why don't you take a seat so we can actually start this evaluation?"

White sat slowly. His posture this time was neutral, not relaxed as it had been when flirting, nor at attention like when he'd been off-balance. He was intrigued. And that meant that Michelle had him right where she wanted him.

"Evaluation," he said slowly. "This isn't a normal psych workup, is it?"

Michelle smiled, showing her teeth and dropping the mask of innocence for the first time since she'd left the elevator.

"No, Jeremy. It is not."