

Safety On:
A [REDACTED] Report
Case File 5 of 9

DOCUMENTING AGENT: Ben Cislowski, alias "Homer"

EDITING ANALYST: Grace McCarthy, alias "Herald"

This file requires DELTA GREEN Security Clearance

- Language
- Tobacco
- Sexual content
- Reference to sexual assault

ABSTRACT: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Davis, California. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Jeremy White, alias "Rooster" [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] 14:19 [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Charlie

[REDACTED] Breckenridge gun range [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] 07/20/2021 [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] reports [REDACTED]

"Isn't that supposed to be my job now?" Charlie asks as I type.

I shake my head. "Regular busywork bullshit is one thing, but I have to write up this whole mess and get it all documented before that asshole starts telling his lies."

"What do you think he's going to do?"

I raise an eyebrow at her. "What would you do if a guy you didn't respect beat you up and humiliated you?"

"If it happened to me, I'd probably be documented as a rape/homicide." That gets me to look up. Her arms are crossed over her tits, one hip and one eyebrow cocked as if to dare me to disagree.

"You're not wrong," I say. That's a little mannerism I picked up from Glasses that lets me avoid saying the other person was right. "But I still have to explain what happened and write up a citation ASAP."

"I can help you with that," she insists.

"Do you know military-speak?"

"Do you know corporate-speak? Or how to type better than a fifth grader?"

I look down at my extended pointer fingers doing their hunt-and-peck routine. "What's wrong with how I type?"

"What's wrong is that we'll be here all night unless you let me help. Now scooch." Charlie pulls my rolling chair backward and kneels down between my legs. Fingers on the keyboard, she looks over her shoulder at me, which incidentally extends the lines in her neck in an intoxicating way. "Now you talk, I'll type."

Apparently, business classes teach you how to actually type. There's a thing called the home row where your fingers are supposed to stay? And the keyboard is designed to slow you down?

I don't get it at all, but Charlie's long, slender, fingers fucking dance over the keys, which gives me decidedly inappropriate thoughts. So, I do whatever I can to stay absolutely still. Because on top of the images in my brain, Charlie's ponytail sweeps across one of my thighs every time she turns her head. My khakis are starting to feel uncomfortably snug.

We bash out the report in record time. I send it up the food chain at 14:39, and now all I can do is wait. Well, there are other things I could do, but nothing I'm allowing myself right now.

Charlie pivots to face me, then puts her hands on my knees to help her stand up. She stretches her arms upwards, extending her torso right in front of my...face? Let's say face. If I had any doubts before, I know for sure that Charlie is playing with me now. There is no way in hell that she just did that accidentally.

I push off with my feet to roll the chair toward the mini-fridge and try to shove my thoughts in a different direction. Football. Footballs have cheerleaders. I bet Charlie was a cheerleader in high school. She would have worn that little skirt...nope. Something worse. Afghanistan. Yeah, that's pretty bad. Mushroom aliens. Fish-fucking mermaids. The president in a speedo. The combination of all of the above does the trick.

I take out my afternoon energy drink and turn the chair to face her now that it's safe. "I appreciate the help. But this is all just CYA anyway."

"CYA?"

"Cover Your Ass," I explain. "They won't do anything to the fucker. But I have to make sure my story gets out so that

whatever bullshit slap on the wrist they dish out comes down on him instead of me. But at least your cousin usually backs me.”

“My cousin?”

“Yeah, Josh pretty much lets me do what I want. I get good numbers.” I roll my neck back and forth, popping it loudly, then take a swig of the Red Bull. “This is a business, after all, and the bottom line is the almighty dollar. It’s why we get all the losers”

Charlie seems to think about that for a moment. “Because they want the adventure without the discipline.”

“Bullseye,” I say, making a shooting motion with my fingers. “This is the only place that’s going to take a guy like Ross. He’s cocky and dumb, but he’s also big, probably good in a fight, and he’ll do the job.”

Charlie nods. “But not everyone. Patel looked like he knew what he was doing. And you’re not a loser.”

“We’re not exactly A-1 candidates anymore either,” I say, carefully ignoring the compliment. “We’re both older, both injured. You saw his limp, right? It’s the only way for guys like us to keep doing what we’re good at.”

She smiles and comes over to my chair, leaning forward with one hand on each armrest. There’s no way she doesn’t realize the view she’s giving me. Hell, she’s barely even hiding it this time. “Everyone has to be good at something,” she says.

“Sure,” I reply lamely. I tell myself her eyes are up there. Not, not there. Up, idiot. Oh hey, I hadn’t noticed that her eyes are green. Green is a great match for that pink lacy bra. Green damn it! Green! “Yeah, lots of things. Just not too many that get a decent job. Killing mostly.”

“I bet you’re good at other things too.” She smirks and lets the comment hang. Then her phone buzzes. She stands, pulls

it out of her back pocket (must be a nice place to live) and looks at it quizzically. "Do you mind if I take a minute?" she asks.

"Fuck, take an hour. You helped me finish that report in half the time it would have taken me."

"A quarter."

"A quarter. And the rest of today's schedule is clear. Take your time."

Charlie exits the office, leaving the door partially open. I try not to enjoy the view on her way out.

Well shit.

I've got to deal with this and do her quickly. It. Do it quickly. Not her. Damn. Charlie's hot. She's my type. And she's obviously into me, even I haven't even laid on the full come-hither. If I keep stalling the way I am, she's going to eventually make a move. And that's going to make things complicated because she's supposed to be my subordinate. If we do fuck, then it will lead to all kinds of horseshit I don't want to deal with here at work. Remember the whole, "don't fuck where you caffeinate" thing? This is a good gig I've got going here, and I don't really want to screw that up. I mean, I get paid to shoot things and yell at people.

And apparently mentor hot college grads.

Goddamn it. There's a reason I go for the girls I do. The normal chicks I pick up have a fun night with me because I'm the dangerous bad boy type. Some war stories, hints about how hurt I am, and a tear about how "we lost a lot of good men that day" go a hell of a way. I hint that I just need someone to comfort me, and the deal is sealed. But ultimately, they don't want to see me again anymore than I want to see them. And that's a good thing. It keeps things simple.

I fuck, I ignore my issues, I leave, I move on.

They fuck, they get some rebellion, they work on their daddy issues, they move on.

Anything more than that is more than I want. I don't want a girlfriend. Or an SO, or whatever it is I'm supposed to call it these days. Can you imagine me shacking up with someone? I'm not the type that goes to farmer's markets and brunch on the weekends. Fuck ups like me don't get happy endings like that. We get happy endings at strip joints, and we pay in cash.

It's so obvious. What part of this doesn't Charlie get? How doesn't she understand that she's out of my league? She's the kind of chick that went to the honors student awards in high school. I'm the guy who didn't even know that was a thing because I was too busy smoking between classes.

The idea of smoking is brilliant. I need a smoke. I open the bottom drawer of my desk and push the bottle of tequila out of the way before I find what I'm looking for: my last pack of the unfiltered beauties I picked up in Brazil. They're more like little cigars than cigarettes with a sweet-ass tobacco wrapper. I tear off the plastic and pull one out, then press it between my lips. Just the smell is wonderful. I throw a box of matches in my pocket (never use a gas lighter for a cigar) and head outside, reminding myself what a good idea it was to quit that douche-y vaping shit.

I was right. It's a hot one today, but it's Davis-in-July hot, not Yuma-in-June hot and that means that my sweat isn't boiling off me the second I step outside. It means I can't light the cig by touching it to the concrete, so I strike a match the way you're supposed to and take a drag. Rich, spicy flavor floods my lungs and I hold it for a moment before slowly letting it escape through my lips. I close my eyes and try to calm down.

The nicotine helps. I've been laying off the cigarettes a bit lately since I'm almost out of this good stuff, but this is worth it today. They tell me that the stuff you roll yourself is good. It can't be as good as this, but maybe I should try some of that once these are gone.

I nod to myself as I come up with a plan. My watch says it's 14:46. I can finish my smoke, take a walk around the building, then head inside. There's only a couple more hours left to show Charlie the ropes, and then we can...

Not we. I. Then I can go do something on my own. Without her. By myself.

I've been by myself for a long time, and I'm good at it. But sometimes I think it would help if I could actually tell someone what's going on. I don't have a shrink anymore since I stopped showing up to my VA appointments. Besides, I don't need someone inside my head to try and twist my words around. I just need someone to vent to. The problem is that I don't have anyone like that. People like me don't have friends. The last time I had friends, they died in a fucking desert. They burned up in a humvee or bled out while I dragged them through a firefight. Or they never walked out of that cave in Afghanistan.

I'm definitely not talking to Jenna either. My sister is the only person who actually gets how fucked up I am. She might actually think I'm worse. But who does that leave? I scroll down the list of contacts in my phone. Most of them are something like "Cute CrossFit Girl-X" the X meaning not to pick up or reply to a text. But when I get to Q and R, I see five familiar contacts.

"Q-Medicine Woman" hates my guts. I managed to keep Quinn alive, but she just didn't get that you don't fuck around or second-guess yourself when there's a sniper gunning for you. It

was the right call, I'm sure of it. But she's a shrink, so even without all that, she'd probably just tell me that I need to have "healthier coping mechanisms" and twist whatever I say to make my look bad.

"R-Doc" doesn't like me much either. He thought the same thing about that sniper and the aftermath got ugly. But when it came to getting his daughter back, River trusted me. Sometimes I think he might actually appreciate me a bit. But how do you ask someone with a wife, kid, and white fucking picket fence about how to turn down a chick that wants to jump your bones? Especially when his daughter isn't much younger and has trauma like mine now?

"R-Cappy" might get it. I make fun of the Chair Force, but it's still the military, so there's an obvious similarity. Rory has seen things, and not just the creepy shit that gets you into Delta Green. But then again, he's also an officer. And he's got a boyfriend. At least I think it's his boyfriend. He never actually said it out loud, but I sure got the feeling that's what was going on. Good for him, but that just means it's someone else with another healthy fucking relationship. Oh yeah, and the dog. Cute dog.

"R-Glasses" is the last one. My finger actually hovers over the call button for a second, because she's the closest thing I have to a friend I could actually talk to. Rowan thinks too much, but she understands people. And after the Shaver Lake clusterfuck, there's some kind of trust there too. I thought she was another clueless LT out of school. But she gets the risks and knows how to make the decision. And she stayed to watch after she made it. But she's going through too much shit over her own now after Shrimp Farm. It would be unfair to lay this bullshit on her plate. Plus, she's a chick.

I put my phone away. It's 14:52 and I don't have anyone I can even text to avoid work. Fuck my life.

I flick the butt away, then walk over and put it out with my shoe. California's in a drought. Well, it's always in a drought, but with global warming (yes, it's real), it's worse than ever this year, and Davis is in the middle of fire danger central. I head back inside.

And immediately wonder what the fuck I walked in on.

