

Safety On:
A [REDACTED] Report
Case File 6 of 9

DOCUMENTING AGENT: Ben Cislowski, alias "Homer"

EDITING ANALYST: Grace McCarthy, alias "Herald"

This file requires DELTA GREEN Security Clearance

- Language
- Sexual content

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

[REDACTED] Davis, California [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] gun range office [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Charlie [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] 14:54 [REDACTED]
07/20/2021 [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] fallout [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] invitation [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Charlie is in my desk chair, looking at her phone. It looks like she's been crying for a while, and now she's trying to hide the runny mascara. Wonderful. So now I don't just have a chick who wants to jump me that I have to let down, but she's also emotional and vulnerable? Fuck me. No wait, don't. That's what I'm trying to avoid.

"All right, spill it," I say.

I guess I surprise her because she looks up from her phone and blinks hard. "What? What do you mean?"

"You know what I mean. This whole thing." I sigh, gesturing vaguely toward all of her. "So spill."

She just hands me her phone and goes to get a tissue. She has a new social media app open, showing the profile of someone named Brad. The most recent post is actually a picture that he's tagged in (yes, I know what that means), showing a woman's left hand with a huge rock on her ring finger. It's captioned, "So this happened today." I scroll down. There's some memes of geeky shit I don't get, and then a crapload of pictures of this Brad guy with a blonde chick.

I look up to see Charlie waiting expectantly. "Ah."

"Ah?"

"Ah." I hand the phone back. "What do you want me to say? That's an ex, I take it?"

Charlie nods. "My friend Brittany texted me that I needed to look at his page."

"Right. So uh..." I trail off. I don't know what the fuck to say. "You want to talk about it? Or do you want to shoot your emotions out?"

The noise she makes is weird. It's some kind of half snort, half laugh, half cry, half choke. Wait, that's too many halves, right? I failed high school fractions. But eventually I realize

she's mostly amused at my comment when she wipes her eyes and smiles. "I don't think I can focus enough to shoot right now. And I don't want to risk breaking a rule, and you breaking my wrist."

I grin at that one. "Smart girl. So does that mean talking? Or do you want space? I'm not above letting you off the hook for the rest of the day. That would be breaking your cousin's rules, not mine."

She looks up through tear-stained eyes. "Do you mind talking? I don't really want to burden you with personal things like this, but you're the only one here, and my friends are all working right now."

"I wouldn't have said it if I didn't mean it."

"Right, but most guys don't want to hear relationship horror stories."

She's got me there. I don't really want to hear whatever this is. But I stuck my dick in her now. It. Stuck my dick in *It*. I point at the computer chair and head for the mini-fridge. "Pick your poison."

"I thought we talked about afternoon beers."

"Who said it's beer?" I ask, and hold up two cans. "Red Bull or Red Bull? It's all I've got at the moment." She makes that laugh/choke thing again and takes a can. I down my own in two pulls, then sit down on the desk.

Charlie lets loose in that flood of words of someone who's finally letting it out. She monologues for a good 10-plus minutes, regularly interrupting herself to call herself out on something too emotional or too harsh. But in between all the self-analysis and emotional hang-ups, I think I manage to catch the important bits.

Charlie and Brad were high school sweethearts. So, first off? Gross. You're telling me you're going to hook up with one person and never even kiss someone else to see if you get on with them? How are you going to learn any new tricks or positions? I failed high school chemistry, but even I know you have to experiment a bit before you find some good, well, chemistry.

Anyway, they were both competitive swimmers and both chose Sac State for college so they could be together. Then senior year, insert-something-I-don't-understand-here happened, and they broke up. Then they got back together. Then they broke up. Then they had an emotional night together, swore they'd never do it again, and well, you get the picture. I guess the whole thing had something to do with boundaries or expectations or something that sounds like a different language to me, but ultimately Charlie doesn't blame either of them for what happened. At least that's what she says after before she corrects herself, or else she corrects herself by saying that. Look, don't blame me. I don't speak emotion. I failed that in high school too.

But anyway, that's why Charlie stopped swimming. I guess Brad was still on the team and she couldn't be around him. He refused to leave, and then he started dating this Allison chick, so Charlie bailed. A year later, and here we are. Brad proposes, Brittany sees it on Facebook, and she tells Charlie who gets all emotional about it. Now she's trying to be stoic in my office chair and my ass is falling asleep from sitting on the desk.

I let the silence hang to make sure she's finished before I say anything. "So...what you're saying is that he's not an asshole, but you wish he was an asshole because you want to hate him, but he's not, so you can't, but he's still done asshole things, so it hurts, because you feel guilty, because you miss

him, but you don't? Did I get that? Because if it's any more complicated than that, I'm out."

This time, Charlie lets out a belly laugh. I laugh too, and the laughter grows in that weird uncomfortable way where you can't really stop until the other person does. But it slowly fades until we're both sitting there. "I'm so glad I met you today. I needed someone to listen. Thank you."

She scooches the chair over and hugs me, burying her face in my side. Her skin is warm as she holds onto me, supporting herself with my strength. I awkwardly put an arm around her narrow shoulders and reflexively start rubbing her arm. That makes Charlie give a little whimper of contentment, which of course makes me stiffen in more ways than one. I try to cover it by just sort of patting her back like an idiot, unwilling to do what my body is screaming at me to do.

When she finally lets go of me (Damn? Yay?) and wipes her eyes again, Charlie isn't crying anymore. "I know you said I could leave, but if you don't mind, can I stay the rest of the day? I like being around you."

I smile, hoping she can't tell how sweaty my palms are. I try to act cool. "Sure, I mean if you don't want to take the excuse to ditch. But I'm going to get some practice in on the M4. Want to see how to use a carbine?"

A couple hours, a couple boxes of ammo, and a thankful distraction later, it's time to clock out. "So, what's your plan now?" I ask and immediately regret it. I have got to learn shut my fucking mouth once in a while because something like that is a perfect opportunity for her to cut this flirtation short and make her play. And right now, I'm still aroused from being next to her and shooting guns. I'm not sure I can say no.

Thankfully Charlie just gives a little smile. "Brittany's going to take me clubbing tonight to distract me."

"Davis has clubs?"

"We both live in Sacramento."

"Sacramento has clubs?"

She laughs at that. "Not like San Francisco, but it's a lot closer to get home at night. Is it weird that I want to get out?"

"Not really," I reply. "Live a little, let loose, it's a legit way of dealing with shit."

She looks down. "I don't know. Part of me feels like I should be in my PJs at home eating a tub of ice cream."

"That works too. I tend to prefer tequila over rocky road, but no skin off my tits."

Charlie actually does a little double take at that. "No skin off your tits? Really?"

"What? A guy I knew used to say it."

"It's supposed to be skin off your nose."

"Really?"

"Yes really. You don't even have tits."

I feign shock and grab at my chest. "I don't? What happened to them? Where did my tits go?"

Charlie laughs and rolls her eyes. Then she looks right at me, her green eyes sighting in on me better than any telescopic scope. "In that case, do you want to come too?"

And there it is.

I've been waiting for it, and to be honest I didn't expect the offer to be this subtle. Because this is just an offer to go out after work, right? A little decompression after a high-stress day? We'll have some drinks, maybe dance a little, and as

things get later and the drinks keep flowing, who can predict what will happen?

I can.

I want to go. Goddamn it, do I want to go. I want to take Charlie and then rip this corporate polo shirt off of her, see that lacy pink bra, and then throw it on the floor. I want to tangle my fingers in her hair and taste her skin. I want to do things to her that will make her scream.

I hear the empty can in my hand crinkle as I squeeze it. Don't fuck where you caffeinate.

"Thanks, but I got plans tonight. Korean teenagers aren't going to frag themselves on PUBG."

She smiles. "Well, if you change your mind." Charlie hands me her phone again, this time open to a new contact. I don't have a good excuse not to, so I type in my number and then she texts me to make sure I have hers too. I label it "Coworker."

She gets up on her tiptoes to give me a quick peck on the cheek. Her lips are warm and soft. Then she heads for the door, letting me watch that perfect ass walk away.

As soon as I hear the door close, I faceplant on my desk. Holy shit. I actually did it. I said no to her. And now I have to do something to get my mind off her, or else I'm likely to pull out my phone and let her know I'm on my way.

At 17:10, I head toward the gym aiming to focus on squats. That's always a good one to work out frustration since it takes the whole body and leaves me feeling powerful. I turn on my workout mix, and I hear the opening guitar to Halestorm. I laugh as Lzzy Hale starts singing, "I get off on you getting off on me." For the love of God, seriously? Someone is having a huge laugh at my expense, and it's not making things any easier. I

skip to the next track and hear Breaking Benjamin. That's safer at least.

A full leg workout later, I hit the pool for laps. My quads and calves are Jell-O and aren't going to hold up on the treadmill, and I'm getting to the age where I need to compensate for a couple decades of smoking. But if Mustang taught me one thing, it reminded me just how important cardio is. That hour of creeping under overwatch was fucking exhausting, Then again, the internal bleeding in my kidneys didn't help either.

I finish up with a cold shower and go to my locker. Fortunately, I have a set of clean clothes in here. Unfortunately, it's the stuff I usually wear when I go out. Tight jeans and a button-down shirt that shows off my muscles when I unbutton the neck and roll up the sleeves. I'm not really sure I want to wear this right now, but I smell my polo shirt and get a whiff of Charlie's perfume which immediately undoes the benefits of the cold shower. Hook up clothes it is then.

It's dark when I leave. Seems I killed a good few hours at the gym, and I'm in the Taco Bell drive-thru line at 21:00 when my phone buzzes with a text. It's from "Coworker" and says, "Are you available?"

Well fuck fuck fuckity fuck. And for good measure, fuck.

Are you available? Can we be any more obvious right now? I pay for my chalupas, then park so I can eat and think. Yes, believe it or not, I do that sometimes. I type a reply, think about it, delete it, repeat, repeat a couple more times, and finally hit send.

Coworker: *Are you available?*

Me: *U ok?*

Coworker: *Yes*

Coworker: No

Coworker: Maybe

Me: U with urfreind?

Coworker: She needed to go home. I called her an Uber.

Me: Its only 21:13 u get started early?

Coworker: She did my drinking for me. Now I'm alone.

Me: U safe? Or r their 2 manyguys lurking around?

Coworker: I'm safe. I just want company.

Me: So not enuf guys lurking then?

Coworker: 😭 Not that kind of company. I need someone I can spend time with. You were such a good listener today.

Me: U could com eback 2 campus Im still in davis.

Coworker: I don't think I can drive right now. Brittany didn't have all the drinks 😊

Me: I can manage that were r u?

Coworker: It's a club in Sacramento called Puzzles. Do you know need an address?

Me: Thats why I have google eta40min

I toss the fast food wrapper through the little hole in the back window and into the truck bed, then pull a Monster out of the glove box. It's disgustingly warm, but it's not boiling from the heat like it would have been in Yuma. I suck it down as I head onto 80 East.

I'm a moron. I'm an idiot. I'm a fucking imbecile. And yet I'm already on the freeway.

I turn on my driving playlist and hear my phone's scratchy connection through the tape deck adapter start playing "The Bad Touch" by Bloodhound Gang. It's that song that goes "you and me baby ain't nothing but mammals so let's do it like they do on the Discovery Channel."

I reach for the button to skip songs, then put my hand back on the wheel and let it play. I'm already on the freeway. I'm driving at 90 miles per hour with my eyes wide open, knowing exactly what I'm getting myself into. And once I'm inside her, I'm going to ruin all of this the same way I ruin everything.

I hate myself sometimes.

