

Safety On:
A [REDACTED] Report
Case File 7 of 9

DOCUMENTING AGENT: Ben Cislowski, alias "Homer"

EDITING ANALYST: Grace McCarthy, alias "Herald"

This file requires DELTA GREEN Security Clearance

- Language
- Alcohol
- Sexual content

ABSTRACT: [REDACTED] 21:52 [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] 07/20/2021 [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] Charlie [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] Jeremy White, alias "Rooster" [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] Sacramento, California [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
club and bar [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] seduction.

Puzzles is the stupidest name for a club I've ever heard, but Charlie is here, and now it seems, so am I. There's no line or anything. Sacramento on a Tuesday isn't exactly lunch rush for a club, but there's a bouncer guarding a yellow plastic chain like it's a velvet rope. He checks my ID, we do the mutual I-get-you-tough-guy nod, and he lets me in.

The bar is off on one side, with a dance floor in the middle and seating on the opposite wall. The booths are split into two tiers with a few steps between them. That's a drunk trap if I ever saw one, especially with the bad lighting in here. It feels like the owners have the lights down and strobes high to cover how empty it is. There's a couple dozen patrons, but the dance floor can fit twice that on its own. There isn't even a DJ tonight. The stage is set up but the big speakers are blasting pre-recorded dubstep.

Charlie's at a big round booth. Eight people could fit in here, maybe more if you use laps, but she's on her own in the center of the circle, nursing an empty glass. "These seats taken?" I ask.

She smiles. It's a sad smile, so I try to cheer her up by manspreading at the edge of the booth. "Ah, perfect amount of space. I love it when the club's empty."

She gives me a long look up and down. "Wow, Gunny. You clean up nice."

"It's after five. Call me Jeremy," I say. Then I use the excuse she gave me to check her out. The polo and khakis have thankfully disappeared, and even though she decided to get dressed again, I'm very pleased with what I see.

Charlie's got a loose blouse with baggy sleeves that leave her shoulders exposed. It's made of a shiny dark red material that I immediately want to touch, if only to see if it's really

as close to falling off as it appears. The whole effect has a kind of slutty Shakespeare vibe to it, which is hot enough to make me care about high school English. But while her blouse hints at what's beneath, her skirt is pointing at it with bright red Loony Tune arrows. It's skintight black leather, with barely enough of it painted on to cover the important parts. It shows off an amazing amount of creamy thigh that leads down to taut calf muscles and a pair of bright red, fuck-me stilettos. She's eschewed (how do I know that word? I failed English) the work makeup and gone full fashion model tonight. There's smoky eye and red lipstick, and her dark hair is shiny and straight, hanging just long enough to drape her pale shoulders.

Charlie grins wickedly at my stare. "Like what you see? I know how to clean up too." She doesn't wait for me to figure out whether I can form words in my blood-deprived brain and lifts her empty glass to call someone over. Seems the place is empty enough that they have table service. "Another vodka cran."

"Jaeger and Red Bull. Mixed, not a bomb."

As the waitress leaves, I see Charlie give me a wry look. "Seriously? You're still drinking those at ten o'clock?"

"What? It's my Double-O Seven order." I put on my best (read: terrible) Sean Connery accent. "A Yaygah and Red Bool. Mikshed, no bohms."

Charlie tries not to laugh and barely succeeds. "Wow."

"What?"

"Just wow. First you're pulling out a reference older than you are, and then you make it that bad?"

I put my hand to my chest like a southern belle who's just heard a foul word. "I am hurt. Hurt I say."

"Why, because I told the truth?"

"No, because you didn't humor my ego!" She cracks up, but I don't relent. "It's fragile, you know! Big as a blimp and just as poppable!"

The waitress saves Charlie from any more of my bullshittery, deposits the drinks, and disappears. Charlie picks up her glass, still trying to keep a straight face. "Wow. You are ridiculous. Has anyone ever told you that?"

"Only every time I open my mouth," I reply, then cringe as I get a whiff of her drink. "Vodka cran? Eesh."

"It's better than lunch beer."

"Touchy."

"What?"

"The French sword thing you say when the other guy sticks you."

She rolls her eyes. "Touché."

"Isn't that what I said?"

"No."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

"So sue me. I failed high school French. You've still got cranberry. Besides, I thought you don't drink?"

Charlie smirks. "Only to excess."

"Only to excess?" I repeat. "I like that."

"Hmm," she purrs. "So what's wrong with cranberries? Got a problem with girly drinks?"

"Fuck no!" I snort. "Girly drinks are yummy. And they have more booze in them. I just don't like cranberries."

She raises one eyebrow. "And why would that be? Bad family thanksgiving recipes?"

"Nothing that tragic. I just got over a kidney injury and had to quit caffeine and chug cranberry juice for weeks. It sucked ass. Mostly the lack of caffeine."

Charlie looks down at her drink as though she's reconsidering. Then she holds it up. "Then here's to healing. Kidney and heartbreak."

I clink my glass to hers and take a gulp. The Tuesday bartender has a weak pour. "Does that mean you're over this Brandon loser then?"

She takes a deep breath and lets it out slow. It does great things to that shiny shirt. "Brad. He's a good guy. He's not a loser."

"Lost you, didn't he?" I quip.

"He didn't lose me. We just decided it was better to go our separate ways. It's..."

"Complicated," I finish. "Isn't it always? But let's set honesty to ON, here. You still internet stalk him, so your ways can't be that separate."

"I don't stalk him," she says. She rolls her eyes at me. Funny how often people react to me that way.

"And yet you happened to see his bimbo's wedding ring post within 20 minutes of him posting it."

"He didn't post it, Allison did."

"And that makes it better?"

"And Brittany told me to look."

I look around the huge booth that only has us. "And this imaginary Brittany is the one who's supposed to be here, right?"

"You know she's real."

"As a point of order, I don't. But I'll take your word for it. Either way, you still ended up seeing that post immediately."

Charlie sighs. Amazingly, I don't think it's directed at me. "Wouldn't you want to know if someone who was important to you, no matter how long ago, had something big happen like that?"

I take another swig of Red Bull and its hint of Jaeger flavor. It's like the caffeinated version of one of those sparkling flavor waters. The kind where it tastes like someone said the word strawberry in the next room over and you can't tell if you're imagining the flavor or not. But I'm avoiding the question, and I know it. "I think that question falls in the 'not applicable' category for me."

"What, no exes?" she asks. Somehow her hand lands on mine at the same time and I feel that same electricity surge through my body.

I shrug, trying to hide my reaction. "Of course. I mean, who doesn't? But no one I keep up with. And things with my family are...complicated."

"That sounds like a story," Charlie says.

Ugh. I don't really like talking about my family, but I opened the door on that one. No one to blame but myself. "Maybe it's not that complicated. I came back from my tours and everything went to hell. Civilian life and I don't get along all that well, and they kind of think I'm a fuck up."

Charlie ponders and strokes my hand with her fingertips. "But you're not a fuck up."

I scoff and turn my hand palm up so I can touch hers too. "Yeah, right. You don't know my whole history. If you did, then you'd be out with that dipshit Ross tonight."

She makes a disgusted face. "No way in hell. So tell me." She uses her other hand to pick the cherry out of her drink and

places it between her lips. She slowly sucks it off the toothpick until it disappears.

"You wouldn't like it." I let my voice drop into a lower register and get a husky tone. Charlie and I both know where this is headed. She's been aiming us there all day, and I know she can tell that I'm on board now. But I haven't agreed yet, and I'm not going to be the one who suggests it. If she wants me, she'll have to come (hehe) get it. "Way too much heavy shit and fuckuppery."

"Fuckuppery isn't a word," she interrupts, using the same tone I am. She emphasizes the first syllable as her ankle rubs against my calf. Apparently she's trying to get me to demand it too. Well game on.

"It is now. Lots of fuckuppery," I say, focusing on that first syllable again. "A whole lot of fucking fuckuppery."

"And what did you do with all this...fuckuppery?" Her leg is inching upwards.

I grin, showing teeth. "Why, I used it to my advantage. Fuckuppery can mean that you're a fuck-up, or it can mean that you fuck... uppers?"

Charlie laughs, her voice ascending into her normal pitch. "You fuck uppers? Really?"

"I didn't say every joke is perfect. My perfection shows itself in other ways."

That takes her back into the game, and I know that the rubber band effect only pushed her deeper in. "Oh really."

"Yeah, like watch this. See this button on my shirt? Watch me make it...unbutton!" Without letting go of her with my left hand, I undo the top button on my shirt in one fluid motion with my right. "And tada. Now just imagine what I else I can open up like that."

Charlie beckons me forward with the hand that isn't holding mine and murmurs, "And exactly what kind of things could you open with that?"

"Oh, you know, different things. Lacy pink things. With little bows on them."

"Oh, I see. But you know there's one problem with that."

"And what's that?"

"If you're going to do a magic trick like that with something lacy and pink with little bows, I have to be wearing something like that first." She takes that beckoning finger and puts it on the bare part of my chest. She lets it drift downward, her nail lightly scratching my chest as she moves.

I tilt my head down and brush her hand with my lips. "That's okay. I'm just as good at manipulating other pink buttons."

"And where did you learn something like this? Brazil? Where there's no foliage to hide behind while you do this magic?"

"Oh, you wouldn't want to hear the horror stories I have from there. All the pain and trauma I went through. And you wouldn't believe what happened in Brazil."

"Try me."

I realize that my hands are occupied, so I can't do the motion when I say "aliens."

Charlie tries to keep a sultry face, but it doesn't work. She does manage to keep her voice low though. "Seriously? That's what you're going with right now?"

"Sure. Something unnatural, unexplainable, something so amazing that you can't even understand it. And yet, something you can't...help but be fascinated by. Drawn to. Hypnotized by."

"I think I know something you're fascinated by," Charlie says as she brings one hand down below the table. She places it on her bare thigh. Inner bare thigh.

She's good at this game. But not as good as I am. I just smile without speaking, knowing that I have her exactly where I want her and where I want her is close enough that she's nearly on my lap. Her hand is on mine, guiding me up that inner thigh, exploring the hem of her skirt. "Can I tell you something?"

"Anything," I answer.

Charlie leans forward, pressing her chest against mine. The fabric of her shirt is thin, and the touch informs me that not only is she not wearing a bra, but that both her nipples are pierced. "I need you to take me home."

"Why? Did your friend leave with the car?" I taunt. I know what she means, but she's going to have to do better than that.

She leans closer, her face beside mine. As she whispers, I feel her breath against my ear, and I can't help but shudder. "No more games. Now shut the fuck up and take me home."

I win.